

The MEN Behind the LORE

By MACEDWARD LEACH

The folklorist is a prosaic character alongside an archaeologist or ethnologist. Even a handful of arrowheads is likely to arouse more interest than a broadside ballad. What can a folklorist offer to rival a lost Mayan city? The Grateful Dead story can be collected in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia in a detailed and dramatic form, more coherent and appealing than the *Book of Tobit* which tells the same story; yet, it is the latter which, because of its temporal and spacial distance, is the better known. The far away and long ago culture carries a dramatic and romantic aura. But the product of the folklorist is nevertheless as much a product of the human spirit as that of the more romantic field workers. A folklorist is concerned largely with survivals—survivals of literature, custom, superstition, folkways; all of this has close ties with living culture. The fact that it is closer to the culture of modern man should make it really more interesting and important.

This material comes to the notebooks of the folklorists by way of the folk themselves, that is, through the people who made the songs and tales, fashioned the mores, and preserved these in tradition. The archaeologist is far removed from the people who produced the shards that he pieces together. The folklorist, however, deals in people as well as products. His task is two-fold. But he does not make a sociological study of a whole community; his concern is rather with those specialists in every folk culture who have the major responsibility of that culture. It is popularly believed that the folk are all highly articulate and talented, that they, for example, all possess great repertoires of folksongs, which they constantly sing, that they are skilled musicians, playing dulcimers, fiddles, and guitars, and that

between times they paint primitives. The fact is that it is the individual in a folk society (as it is in the more sophisticated one) who makes and sings the songs, plays the instruments, paints the pictures. It is these innately gifted individuals who keep songs and stories alive, who work on them, and pass them down in tradition to succeeding generations. Most of the folk are audience. All collectors of folklore know that the bulk and best of their collections will come from these individual specialists in traditional lore.

It is important that we know of these specialists, for it is such as these who have made and have kept alive our culture, and all culture, even from the very beginning. They are behind the Iliad as well as Robin Hood and John Henry. It is the folklorist who can observe them and study them at first hand. Go to any folk community and ask for stories and songs and you will be directed to such a one.

Angus "The Ridge" MacDonald was the 'bard' of Lake Katrine in upper Nova Scotia. He had a great store of songs of all variety only exceeded by his rich stock of stories. He was a great fiddler and piper. Three generations centered their culture in him, as they listened to his songs and thrilled to his stories. Many of these stories were very old, pan-Celtic tales of the Glens, tales of Brian Boru, of Balor of the Evil Eye, and of the people of the *sidh*, the little people.

I asked him once if he believed in the "little people." "The fairies are long gone," he said, "I'm sure they never cared for this new country; the old paths are not here for them to walk. Long ago I used to see one. It would be in the winter and I'd be coming home in the night after a fiddling and there'd be this little man in green—

all green. And he'd be running by the sleigh and he'd always guide the horses over the ice where the lake was frozen. And then came the time when Hugh MacAskill took a whip to him. And the same night Hugh's horses, his sleigh, and himself went through the ice and nothing was ever found of them after. And the little man was never seen again. I made a song of that story." That evening after a dozen or so neighbors had wandered into the kitchen, as they did most evenings, Angus, at my request, sang his song, a song that has now spread over Cape Breton, though it has lost all connection with Angus.

Angus "The Ridge," like the scopos of the old English, did little manual labor. It was as if he were excused from this so that he could the better make his unique contribution. "There are times when I look out across the lake at me friend Robbie MacIsaac and he may be sawing wood or digging in the ground—working, working like a beast of burden—and I feel so sorry for him that I puts on me kilts and I take me pipes and I march up and down along this side of the lake, playing the old tunes of the glens. It's sweet music coming over the water and it eases his burden."

All his life Angus "The Ridge" eased the burden of the people, bringing beauty, romance, and drama to humdrum living. But he was more than an artist; he had a great knowledge of families and events; constantly, he was appealed to as the authority on relationships, on events of long ago, even on boundary lines whose markers had long disappeared. Both scop and gleeman he was and the folk culture was enriched in his hands.

Tom Cornelly was another such. Him I first met in 1945 when he was ninety-one—an active, wiry little man, meticulously dressed. He had spent his life sailing over the waters of the world. He was a shanty-man, one who could sing and lead the shanty singing, as the men hauled on the halyards or walked the capstan; and in the forecabin he kept up spirits with his forebitter songs and his yarns. He had spent sixty-seven years at sea. "I saw the up and down of every ocean." He had rounded the Horn seven times, had made five trips to the Arctic; he had spent a three-year whaling voyage in the South Seas; he was with Peary on his expedition to the North Pole. He had sailed in square riggers, clippers, brigantines, and barks, and full-rigged ships. Now, on shore, he'd sit of an evening in his son's kitchen, still singing, fiddling, and yarning, the center of their culture, he the articulate one. The last time I sat there in the kitchen listening to

him sing his favorite song, "Rolling Home," I came to realize the hundreds of lives he had made meaningful and enriched, first during those long voyages and now, as he would say, "on the stocks."

In a more primitive society the keeper of the folk culture is not only a singer of songs and teller of stories but is something of a priest and shaman as well. The John Crow mountains of Jamaica are inaccessible and beautiful. A scattering of people live in tiny shifting settlements. These people are mostly Ashanti, the handsome, proud negroid people brought here by the Spaniards before the English took the island. Though they tried hard enough, the English never succeeded in bringing these people into slavery.

Today, throughout the mountains, one man is held in deepest awe, reverence, respect, and perhaps fear. I shall not call him by his real name, since he practices an art now declared illegal by the government of Jamaica and hunted down by the police. Andrew Miles is an *obeah* man. He is versed in the science of witchcraft and of duppyism (cult of the dead). He possesses the skills and techniques of these cults. But Mr. Miles is no ordinary witch doctor; such a person is usually an old man living in an isolated cabin, drawing his authority from the superstitious tales that have accumulated about him, laying his spells by use of graveyard dirt, head bones of toads, and the like. Mr. Miles is not of this genre; years ago in Africa he would have been a priest-king. Today, he commands deference from all. In a discussion, his voice is heard first; his powers are thought to be of a much higher order than those of the ordinary *obeah* man. He can speak in the "unknown tongues" and he knows many songs in them. This language is generally regarded to be the ancient language of Africa and to hold occult and deep truths, the key to the ancient wisdom of those who consorted with the gods. Knowing this "language" confers on Mr. Miles something of the authority that Latin imparts to a present-day priest.

Mr. Miles dominates even the social gatherings. Evenings and Sundays the men gather in someone's "yard"; talk starts, high talk, "signifying" talk. Usually, it grows out of some recent event. One afternoon, for example, just after a boy had died under mysterious circumstances, the talk was all about that. Some one said, "That, duppy business." [That is, the boy had been killed by a duppy, the spirit of a dead person.] Mr. Miles nodded, "That is de truf. It is

like this boy a Ginger Piece" (a village in the Blue Mountains). "Yu know, A [I] always take care of de daid folks. A washes dem and dresses dem and puts dem in de box and dey looks like dey speak wi you. Dere was dis boy name Norman a [at] Ginger Piece and him have four bruder. And dey beat him cause he no do very well. De oldest bruder him no like him at all and one day him mash him up and de boy get him back bruk and him stay in bed long time and den him dead. Dey come fe [for] me and A fix him nice in de box. When A stretch him out, him bruder come and him say, 'You gi me a science fe keep him duppy away.' A say, 'You read Psalm number 29, while A fix him up and him wi be all right.' Him say, 'Dat not strong 'nuf medicine. Him want me gi him *obeah* medicine. A tell him again, 'Read number 29 Psalm.' Him no do it; him go. When A get de boy ready A put him in and den A put calico glove on him han.' Dem fightin' glove. And him bury [he is buried].

"On de nine night de bruder him didn't go. Him stay away and drink rum. By and by him and Henry Charles dem start go some place and dem walk along de road. Henry Charles him see someting. Him say, 'Who dat?' De bruder him look and him say, 'A Norman, him a go fe kill me.' And him run and run but de duppy jus slide along after him and de duppy have on de calico glove, Henry Charles say. And Henry Charles hear a ye-ell and den him hear BAM, BAM, BAM. De nex day dem find de bruder all mash up dere on de road."

Reflected here is a frame of reference very alien to the sophisticated person of the twentieth century: the belief in the *obeah* man, the belief in the Bible as a book with magic powers, the feeling that the science of the *obeah* man is more powerful, the entrenched belief that the dead can return, that they can interfere in the lives of the living—all of these spell the irrational and unthinking world of the past, but still in the John Crow mountains the world of the present.

In connection with his role as caretaker of the dead (a priestly function, not that of an undertaker), Mr. Miles told me of a woman who arranged to have *obeah* planted on her husband to get rid of him so that she could have another man. "And by and by him dead [he died]. A come, A fix him up. They all expell from de room and den A put on him he blue suit and de white ves and de red tie and A comb up de hair and A set him up in de big chair and cross him laig and den A light a cigar an put it in him mouf.

He look pleas an no more daid. A open up de do' and call de ooman fe come. Him [she] look and him [she] tink it de duppy an him ye-ell and mek a fit and den him run a yard [she ran into the yard] and him tell people how she plant de *obeah* on de man and him dead [he died] an now he duppy come fe her. By and by she cart off a crazy house [she was taken to the hospital for insane]." Of course, every one who heard this story that day believed that Mr. Miles had really assisted in a duppy vengeance.

Mr. Miles is one of the few persons in Jamaica who knows the whole ritual and songs of the *cumina* dance, a very old African dance. The one I witnessed took place under the crest of Mt. Ida beyond Peterfield. We arrived at the savannah-like clearing in the woods about ten o'clock in the evening. Some eighty men and women had gathered. Most were sitting or squatting on the ground; there was laughing, talking, singing, calling back and forth. A small fire burned up straight and clear beside a circle of hard-packed earth some six feet in diameter.

When Mr. Miles appeared all fell silent. The two drummers came up to him; he talked to them in a low voice. Then they sat on a log near the dance circle and placed the drums between their knees. The smaller drum, the tenor, was made of the bole of a trumpet tree; the larger, thirty by twelve inches, of mahogany. The heads were made of goat skins, laced to the sides; small pegs twisted in the lacings kept the head at the proper degree of tautness. Both drums were played by being struck with the open hands.

Mr. Miles poured rum and gave to the drummers, then to the three men, naked to the waist and barefoot, who were to dance, then to some of those standing close by who were to sing. The drinking was not social but ceremonial. After all had drunk, Mr. Miles poured half a glass on each drumhead, and a glassful on the hard-packed earth of the dance floor.

The three men took their places; the drums began to talk. Mr. Miles started the high-pitched chant-like song; the dance began with sudden spasmodic jerks. During the whole dance the dancers scarcely lifted their feet from the ground. The movement was a half-twist, side shift, never a shuffle. There was much body movement with jerking of the head; arms were now and then extended but never above the shoulders. Imperceptibly the tempo increased. The group sat motionless and silent; the barbaric chanting and insistent drumming filled the little clearing and

echoed back from the forest. To an outsider the scene was awful. The moon, heavy and full, flooded down, unifying all in a single eerie pattern.

After an hour the dance had become hypnotic; everyone was swaying, intent, eyes on the dancers. They seemed unaware of one another and of the audience. More rum was passed around; the dancers drank as they danced. Another half hour passed; someone reached a white cock up to Mr. Miles; he grasped it, stepped among the dancers, bit through its throat, and spattered the dancers and the ground with the gushing blood. The rhythm increased.

Some time later one of the dancers dropped out and then, a quarter of an hour after, the second one. (They were, I was told, the 'supporting' dancers.) Now all focused on the one dancer left; the chanting stopped abruptly, though the drumming increased in rhythm and pitch; all the focus was on the single dancer moving in frenzied motion, his sweating body glistening in the moonlight. He fell to the ground jerking spasmodically, but still responding to the drums. On his back, he pushed himself up with hands and feet behind him in a most grotesque position, never breaking rhythm. He gradually stood upright, but seemed in a kind of cataleptic trance, his movements as automatic and regular as a mechanical figure, spring wound. Suddenly Mr. Miles stepped to him and threw his arms tightly around him, but even in this embrace he continued to jerk and twist to the drums. His eyes stared glassily and unseeing. Then someone handed Mr. Miles a glowing splinter from the fire. He touched it several times to the back of the dancer's neck. He seemed not to notice. The drumming and now again the chanting became orgiastic. Suddenly Mr. Miles slapped the dancer sharply first on one cheek and then on the other. He stopped abruptly and at once the drums were silent. He looked dazedly around and then with recognition and comprehension as if he were coming out of a trance. Then he sat down on the drummer's log. The tension broken, all began talking, laughing; the rum bottles went around. The dance was over. I looked at my watch; it had lasted two hours and ten minutes.

Angus "The Ridge" MacDonald, Tom Cornelly, Andrew Miles, it is such as these who are the tradition bearers and tradition moulders. It is such living data that the folklorist collects along with the stories and the songs, for here he finds the clue that will guide him in the labyrinthian complexities of folk culture. 2

EXPEDITION NEWS

THE AIN SHEMS COLLECTION

From 1928 to 1933, the late Dr. Elihu Grant, who was then Professor of Biblical Literature at Haverford College, conducted excavations for the College at Ain Shems in western Judaea. This is presumably the site of the Biblical Shemesh, scene of Samson's exploits. There Dr. Grant found a classical succession of settlements, destroyed and rebuilt in accordance with many of the alarums and excursions recorded in the Bible. Beneath the cities of the Hebrew Monarchy lay the town taken by the Israelites from the Philistines and so on back at least to the time of the Patriarchs. Because disaster so often struck suddenly, the expedition found an immense wealth of pottery and other everyday objects where they were left when their owners fled or were led off captive. It also uncovered a number of magnificent tomb groups of the Patriarchal Period.

Because the material from Ain Shems is of a time not well represented at Beisan which had been excavated by the University Museum, Dr. Grant presented a small collection from Ain Shems to the Museum in 1934. We have now purchased the entire collection from Haverford College. With this acquisition, the University Museum has the best assemblage of archaeological materials from the Holy Land in the United States, ranging in date from Natufian of about 10,000 B.C. to Crusader times. It comprises four major collections—Beisan, Ain Shems, prehistoric flints from the Wadi en Natuf on Mt. Carmel excavated by the American School of Prehistoric Research, and the results of Dr. James B. Pritchard's current excavations at el-Jib.

Haverford College has also turned over to the University Museum the photographic negatives of the Ain Shems excavations and a number of copies of *Ain Shems IV*, the definitive report of the excavations, and of the preliminary report, *Beth Shemesh*.

THE LIBYAN EXPEDITION

The excavations at the Roman city of Leptis Magna near Tripoli were resumed in May, again under the direction of Theresa Howard Carter. Last season the expedition discovered the corner of a Punic wall in a small sondage beneath the foundations of a Roman wall. During the winter, Signor Russo, the technical director at Leptis Magna, had further explored these Punic walls by tunnelling under the overlying Roman pavement. So that the Punic construction might be the better studied, the expedition obtained permission from the Department of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Libya to break through this concrete pavement. This area was cleared to virgin soil and the length of the wall found to be about twenty-five meters. Fortunately there was no Roman construction over the adjoining wall, which was traced for a distance of thirty-five meters and that area also completely cleared. Trenches were dug in the walled-in area and another corner found, thus providing the limits of the foundations of the largest Phoenician building so far known. Trenches parallel to the long side of the

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