The MEN
Behind the ALORE

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 spatial distance, is the better known. The for 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 of the past which has clung on to the 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 as well as products. His task is twofold. 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 repertories 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 as such as these who have made and have kept alive our culture, and all culture, even from the very beginning. They are behind the Ilad as well as Robin Hood and John Henry. They are the folklorist who can observe them and study them at first hand. Go to any folk community and ask for songs and stories 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 fifer. 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, part of the tales of the Glenes, tales of Brian Boru, of Baler of the Evil Eye, and of the people of the sixth, 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 whim 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 now spread over Cape Breton, though it has lost all connection with Angus.

Angus "The Ridge," like the scops of the old English, did little manual labor. It was as if he were excommunicated so that he could 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 garden, working like a beast of burden—and I feel so sorry for him that I puts on me kiltts 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 folk, bringing beauty, romance, and drama to humdrum living. But he was more than an artist; he had a great knowledge of families and events; he, constantly, he appealed to us as the authority on relationships, on events of long ago, even on boundary lines whose markers had long disappeared. Both scot and glenman he was and the way he picked this in his hands.

Tom Connelly was another such. Him I first met in 1945 when he was ninety-one—an active, virile man, meticulously dressed. He had spent his life sailing over the waters of the world. He was a ship's doctor, a mate, a officer. He had sailed in square riggers, clippers, brigantines, and bars, and full-rigged ships. Now, on shore, he's 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 druid as well. The John Crow mountains of Jamaica are inaccessible and beautiful. A gathering of people live in tiny shifting settlements. These people are mostly Asant, the handsome, proud negro 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 present Senate 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 (collt of the dead). He possesses the skills and techniques of the culture. But Mr. Miles is no ordinary witch doctor; such a person is usually an old man living in an isolated cabin, drawn by his authority from the superstitious tales that have accumulated about him, laying his spells by use of graveyurd 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 power thought to be of a much higher order than 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 consort 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 the circumstances of 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's de truf. It is
like this boy a Ginger Piece" (a village in the Blue Mountains). "Yu know, [I] always try to care of de deid folks. A washes dem and dresses dem and puts dem in de box and dey look like dey was dixie boys. That was dis boy name Norman a [at] Ginger Piece and him have four bruder. And dey best him cause he no do very well. De older one he like him at all and one day him mash him up and de boy get him back and him stay in bed long time and den him die. Dey come for [to] me and A fix him nice. And he die. He just out and die. And Bruder come and him say, "Yu gi me science fe keep him duppy away." A say, "You read Psalm number 91, why fix him up and he wi be all right." Him say, "Dat not strong 'nu medicine. Him want me gi him obeah medicine." A tell him again, "Read number 29 Psalm." Him no say no; got ready and 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 something. Jinn? 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. Him say, "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 magical powers, the feeling that the science of the obeah man is more powerful, the intrenched 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 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 die [dead]. A come and fetch him. He balal [escaped from the 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 leg and den A light a cigar an put it in him mouf.

He look pleaz an no more dain. A open up de door and call de ooman fe come. Him [he] look and him [she] tink it de duppy him ye-ell and mek a fit and den him run a yard [she ran into the yard] and him tell people here him dead. But a open 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 of these stories from 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. Isa beyond Petroleum. I arrived at a 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 laughter, 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, a kind of wiseface trance drum, was made of the bore of a trumpet tree; the larger, thirty by twelve inches, of mahogany. The heads were made of goat skins, faced to the sides; small, circular incisions keep 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 linked to the waist and barefoot, who were to dance, 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 to play his 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 a sense of anger and 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 bandages and autumnal 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 pinned to the scene, intent on the dancers. They seemed unaware of one another and of the audience. More rum was passed around; the dancing continued. It lasted about another half hour passed; someone reached a white cock egg 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' who were 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 glistering 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 posture, never breaking rhythm. He gradually stood up, turned around, and then continued 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 silenced. He turned away, 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 and 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 Connely, Andrew Miles, it is such as these who are the guardians of their people and the custodians of the traditions.

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EXPERDIRECTION NEWS

THE AIEN SHEMS COLLECTION

From 1928 to 1933, the late Dr. Elihu Grant, who was then Professor of Literature at Haverford College, conducted excavations for the College at Ain Shems in Syria. It is presumably the site of the Biblical Shechem, scene of Samson's exploits. There Dr. Grant found a classical city that had been destroyed and rebuilt in accordance with many of the almanars and excurses in the Bible. Both the cities of the Hebrews and Assyrians are known to have been occupied back at least to the time of the Patriarchs, because disaster so often struck suddenly, the excavation 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, the Institute 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 Natuall from about 10,000 B.C. to Crusader times. It comprises the oldest pieces from Beisan, Ain Shems, prehistoric flints from the Wadi en Nafud and Semana, and documents from the American School of Prehistoric Research, and the results of Dr. James B. Pritchard's current excavations at el-Jih.

Haverford College has also turned over to the University a magnificent regalia 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, Beit Shemesh.

THE LIBYAN EXCAVATIONS

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 we discussed the corner of a Punic wall in a small sondage beneath the foundations of the modern town. Professor 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 better studied, the expeditions will be tunnelling 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 wall-in area and another corner found, thus proving the limits of the foundations of the largest Phoenician building so far known. Trenches parallel to the long side of the