STEVE ROUD

The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

A hair-pin falling out of the hair is a sign, say the maids, that 'some one' wants to speak to you.
Shropshire Burne (1883)

Judging by the paucity of references, a relatively shortlived superstition.

Somerset [1923] Opie & Tatem, 186. **Lincolnshire** Rudkin (1936) 19. **Shropshire** Burne (1883) 270. **Yorkshire** [1956] Opie & Tatem, 186.

hairy arms

A number of miscellaneous beliefs or sayings about personal appearance existed in the nineteenth century, which were concerned, for example, with TEETH that were wide apart, EYEBROWS meeting, and the like. One example maintained that those with hairy arms were destined to be wealthy:

Ladies with overmuch down, gentlemen with overmuch hair upon their arms and hands, carry about them nature's own guarantee that they are born to be rich some day.
Unlocated *Chambers's Jnl* (1873)

The meaning remained remarkably constant from version to version, except the one quoted by Sternberg which insisted that 'Hairy persons always go to heaven'.

Midland England N&Q 1S:1 (1850) 451. **Warwickshire** Langford (1875) 14. **Northamptonshire** Sternberg (1851) 171. **Staffordshire** Hackwood (1924) 149. **Lancashire** Harland & Wilkinson (1873) 225. **England** Addy (1895) 101. **Hebrides** *Folk-Lore* 6 (1895) 396. **Unlocated** Hone, *Year Book* (1832) 126–8; *Chambers's Jnl* (1873) 810.

Hallowe'en (31 October)

Hallowe'en is probably the most misrepresented and misunderstood festival in the traditional calendar. The widespread notion that the day (or rather the night) is a pre-Christian pagan celebration of the dead is not historically correct, but is now so well-entrenched as to be immovable. Certainly, the festival on the 1 November, called *Samhain*, was by far the most important of the four quarter days in the medieval Irish calendar, with tribal gatherings and feasts, and a sense that this was the time of year when the physical and supernatural worlds were closest and magical things could happen. But however strong the early evidence is in Ireland, in Wales it was 1 May and New Year which took precedence, in Scotland there is hardly any mention of 1 November until much later, and in Anglo-Saxon England even fewer mentions. Even without the latter, Samhain's importance has been extrapolated from the Irish evidence and thus overemphasized for the rest of the British Isles:

It must be concluded, therefore, that the medieval records furnish no evidence that 1 November was a major pan-Celtic festival, and none of religious ceremonies, even where it was observed.
Hutton (1996) 362

On the other hand, it was a very important time of year in the Catholic church. Hallowe'en is the Eve of All Hallows or All Saints (1 November) which, along with All Souls (2 November), constitute Hallowtide. These festivals were confirmed at these dates from about AD 800 to 1000, but later gradually coalesced around the night of 31 October/1 November, and All Souls took the highest profile. The key element was that this was the time for commemoration of the departed faithful, and in particular the day when prayers could be said and bells could be rung, to get souls out of purgatory and into heaven. The connection between the dead and this time of year was thus a Christian invention. The reforming Protestant churches abolished these notions, but they continued in Catholic areas and in the popular mind and tradition.

Nevertheless, when folklore records began to be recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the overwhelming features of Hallowe'en were divination (usually LOVE DIVINATION) and games. Few of these are reported as happening solely at this season, but those concerned with seasonal plants – apples, nuts, cabbages – are more in evidence than at other times.

Beyond the modern obsession with witches' hats and brooms, our view of the traditional Hallowe'en is heavily influenced by the catalogue of divinations so entertainingly provided by Robert Burns in his Hallowe'en (1786) poem (*see below*), and his basic accuracy is confirmed by other sources. A generation later, Hugh Miller (1835) set out to complete the picture by describing the games, tricks, and practical jokes which also took place on the night. Kevin Danaher's description of the night in Ireland paints a very similar picture, as do other Irish authorities:

Fortune-telling has a place in all Hallowe'en parties, and the fortunes are usually concerned with love and marriage. Girls used to veil mirrors and hope to see the face of a future husband when the veil was removed at midnight. Young men pulled cabbage-stalks, kale-runts. And from their size and the amount of earth which adhered to them they foretold whether their future wives would be tall or short, rich or poor. I saw this done

'Hallowe'en' (Robert

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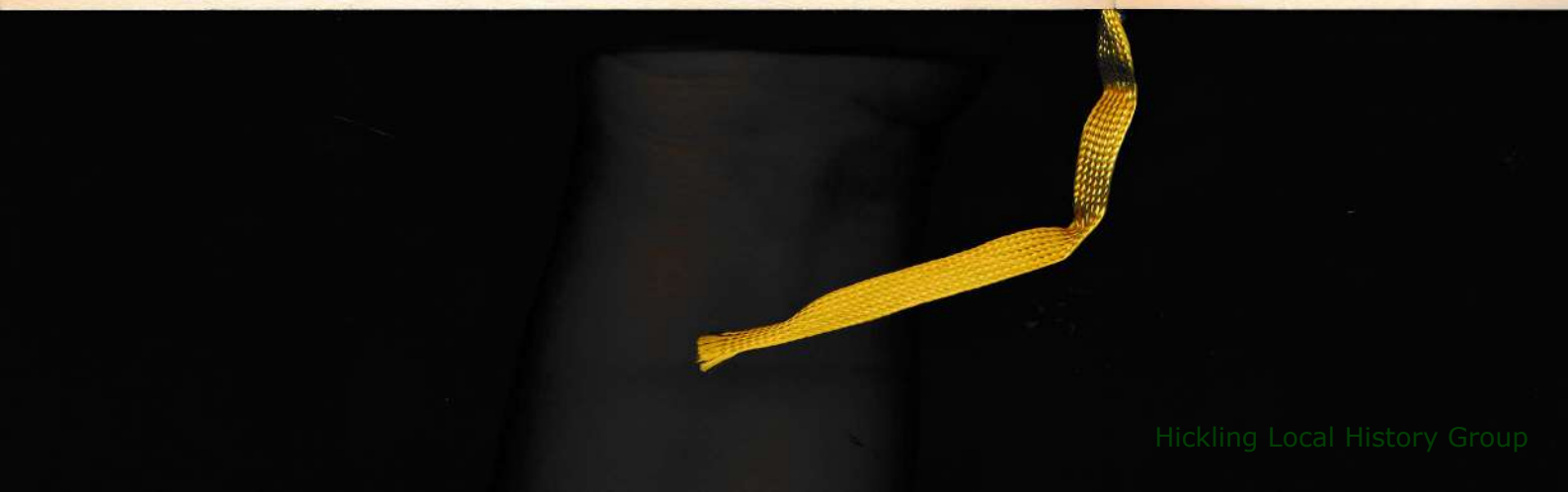
1 *Upon that night, when fairies light*
On Cassilis Downans dance,
Or owre the lays, in splendid blaze,
On sprightly coursers prance;
Or for Colean the rout is taen,
Beneath the moon's pale beams;
There, up the Cove, to stray and rove,
Amang the rocks and streams
To sport that night:

2 *Amang the bonie winding banks,*
Where Doon rins, wimplin, clear;
Where Bruce ance ruled the martial ra
An' shook his Carrick spear;
Some merry, friendly, country-folks
Together did convene,
To burn their nits, an' pou their stocks,
An' haud their Hallowe'en
Fu' blithe that night.

3 *The lassies feat an' cleanly neat,*
Mair braw than when they're fine;
Their faces blythe fu' sweetly kythe
Hearts leal, an' warm, an' kin':
The lads sae trig, wi' wooer-babs
Weel-knotted on their garten;
Some unco blate, an' some wi' gabs
Gar lasses' hearts gang startin
Whyles fast at night.

4* *Then, first an' foremost, thro' the ka*
Their stocks maun a' be sought ance;
They steek their een, an' grape an' wal
For muckle anes, an' straught anes.
Poor hav'rel Will fell aff the drift,
An' wandered thro' the bow-kail,
An' pow't, for want o' better shift,
A runt, was like a sow-tail,
Sae bow't that night.



'Hallowe'en' (Robert Burns)

Robert Burns' poem 'Hallowe'en' was first published in 1786 in his collection *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. It rapidly became the major source of information about eighteenth-century Hallowe'en customs in Scotland, and it influenced not only scholars and later writers but it also served as a model for anyone interested in keeping an 'old time' festival themselves.

The testimony of poets and novelists cannot always be relied on, nor taken literally when describing such matters – their business is primarily artistic rather than documentary. But a few, such as Robert Burns, Walter Scott, and Thomas Hardy, have a high reputation among historians and folklorists and can be trusted, as far as we know, to paint a true and accurate figure. Stanzas marked * have notes by Burns explaining the action (*see below*).

1 *Upon that night, when fairies light*
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Poor hav'rel Will fell aff the drift,
An' wandered thro' the bow-kail,
An' pow't, for want o' better shift,
A runt, was like a sow-tail,
Sae bow't that night.

5 *Then, straught or crooked, yird or nane*
They roar an' cry an' throu'ther;
The vera wee-things, toddlin, rin
Wi' stocks out-owre their shouther:
An' gif the custock's sweet or sour,
Wi' joctelegs they taste them;
Syne coziely, aboon the door,
Wi' cannie care, they've plac'd them
To lie that night.

6* *The lasses staw frae 'mang them a',*
To pou their stalks o' corn;
But Rab slips out, an' jinks about,
Behint the muckle thorn:
He grippet Nelly hard an' fast;
Loud skirl'd a' the lasses;
But her tap-pickle maist was lost,
Whan kiutlin in the fause-house
Wi' him that night.

7* *The auld guid-wife's weel-hoordet nits*
Are round an' round divided,
An' monie lads' an' lasses' fates
Are there that night decided:
Some kindle couthie, side by side,
An' burn thegether trimly;
Some start awa wi' saucy pride,
An' jump out-owre the chimlie
Fu' high that night.

8 *Jean slips in twa, wi' tentie e'e;*
Wha 'twas, she wadna tell;
But this is Jock, and this is me,
She says in to hersel:
He bleez'd owre her, an' she owre him,
As they wad never mair part;
Till fuff! he started up the lum,
And Jean had e'en a sair heart
To see't that night.

9 *Poor Willie, wi' his bow-kail runt,*
Was burnt wi' primsie Mallie;
An' Mary, nae doubt, took the drunt,
To be compar'd to Willie:
Mall's nit lap out, wi' pridefu' fling,
An' her ain fit, it burnt it;
While Willie lap, an' swoor by jing,
'Twas just the way he wanted
To be that night.

10 *Nell had the fause-house in her min',*
She pits herself an' Rob in;
In loving bleeze they sweetly join,
Till white in ase they're sobbin;
Nell's heart was dancin at the view;
She whisper'd Rob to leuk for't:
Rob, stownlins, prie'd her bonie mou,
Fu' cozie in the neuk for't,
Unseen that night.

11* But Merran sat behint their backs,
Her thoughts on Andrew Bell;
She lea'es them gashing at their cracks,
An' slips out by herself:
She thro' the yard the nearest taks,
An' to the kiln she goes then,
An' darklins grapit for the bauks,
And in the blue-clue throws then,
Right fear't that night.

12 An' ay she win't, an' ay she awat –
I wat she made nae jaukin;
Till something held within the pat,
Guid Lord! But she was quakin!
But whether 'twas the Deil himself,
Or whether 'twas a bauk-en',
Or whether it was Andrew Bell,
She did na wait on talkin
To spier that night.

13* Wee Jenny to her graunie says,
'Will ye go wi' me, graunie?
I'll eat the apple at the glass,
I gat frae uncle Johnie';
She fuff't her pipe wi' sic a lunt,
In wrath she was sae vap'rin,
She notic't na an aizle brunt
Her braw, new, worset apron
Out thro' that night.

14 'Ye little skelpie-limmer's-face!
I daur ye try sic sportin,
An seek the Foul Thief onie place,
For him to spae your fortune:
Nae doubt but ye may get a sight!
Great cause ye hae to fear it;
For monie a ane has gotten a fright,
An' liv'd an' died deleeret,
On sic a night.

15 'Ae hairst afore the Sherra-moor,
I mind't as weel's yestreen –
I was a gilpey then, I'm sure
I was na past fifteen:
The simmer had been cauld an' wat,
An' stuff was unco green;
An' ay a rantin kirn we gat,
An' just on Halloween
It fell that night.

16* 'Our stibble-rig was Rab M'Graen,
A clever, sturdy fallow;
His sin gat Eppie Sim wi' wean,
That lived in Achmacalla;
He gat hemp-seed, I mind it weel,
An' he made unco light o't;
But monie a day was by himsel,
He was sae sairly frighted
That vera night'.

17 Then up gat fechtin Jamie Fleck,
An' he swoor by his conscience,
That he could saw hemp-seed a peck;
For it was a' but nonsense:
The auld guidman raught down the pock,
An' out a handfu' gied him;
Syne bad him slip frae 'mang the folk,
Sometime when nae ane see'd him,
An' try't that night.

18 He marches thro' amang the stacks,
Tho' he was something sturtin;
The graip he for a harrow taks,
And haurls at his curpin;
And ev'ry now and then, he says,
'Hemp-seed I saw thee,
An' her that is to be my lass
Come after me, an' draw thee
As fast this night'.

19 He whistl'd up Lord Lenox' March,
To keep his courage cheery;
Altho' his hair began to arch,
He was sae fley'd an' eerie;
Till presently he hears a squeak,
An' then a grane an' gruntle;
He by his shouther gae a keek,
An' tumbl'd wi' a wintle
Out-owre that night.

20 He roar'd a horrid murder-shout,
In dreadfu' desperation!
An' young an' auld come rennin out,
An' hear the sad narration:
He swoor 'twas hilchin Jean McCraw,
Or crouchie Merran Humphie –
Till stop! She trotted thro' them a';
An' what was it but grumphie
Asteer that night?

21* Meg fain wad to the barn gaen,
To winn three wechts o' naething;
But for to meet the Deil her lane,
She pat but little faith in;
She gies the herd a pickle nits,
An' twa red-cheekit apples,
To watch while for the barn she sets,
Inhopes to see Tam Kipples
That vera night,

22 She turns the key wi' cannie thraw,
An' owre the threshold ventures;
But first on Sawnie gies a ca'
Syne bauldly in she enters:
A ratton rattle'd up the wa',
An' she cry'd, L—d preserve her!
An' ran thro' midden-hole an' a',
An' pray'd wi' zeal and fervour
Fu' fast that night.

23* They hoy't out Will, wi' sair advic
They hecht him some fine braw ane;
It chanc'd the stack he faddom't thrice
Was timmer-propt for thrawin:
He taks a swirlie, auld moss-oak
For some black gruesome carlin;
An' loot a winze, an' drew a stroke,
Till skin in blypes cam haurlin
Aff's nieves that night.

24* A wanton widow Leezie was,
As cantie as a kittlin;
But och! that night, amang the shaws,
She gat a fearfu' settlin!
She thro' the whins, an' by the cairn,
An' owre the hill gaed scrievin;
Whare three lairds' lands met at a bu
To dip her left sark-sleeve in
Was bent that night.

25 Whyles owre a lin the burnie plays,
As thro' the glen it wimpl't;
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays,
Whyles in a wiel ir dimpl't;
Whyles glitter'd to the nightly rays,
Wi' bickerin, dancin dazzle;
Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
Below the spreading hazel
Unseen that night.

26 Amang the brachens, on the brae,
Between her an' the moon,
The Deil, or else an outler quey,
Gat up an' gae a croon:
Poor Leezie's heart maist lap the hool;
Near lav'rock-height she jumpit,
But mist a fit, an' in the pool
Out-owre the lugs she plumpit
Wi' a plunge that night.

27* In order, on the clean hearth-stan
The luggies three are ranged;
And ev'ry time great is taen
To see them duly changed:
Auld uncle John, wha wedlock's joys
Sin Mar's-year did desire,
Because he gat the toom dish thrice,
He heav'd them on the fire
In wrath that night.

28 Wi' merry sangs, an' friendly crack
I wat they did na weary;
An unco tales, an' funnie jokes –
Their sports were cheap an' cheery;
Till butter'd sow'ns, wi' fragrant lunt,
Set a' their gabs a-steerin;
Syne, wi' a social glass o' strunt,
They parted aff careerin
Fu' blythe that night.

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[Only those of Burns' notes which appertain to the divinations are given here.]

[Hallowe'en] is thought to be a night when witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings are all abroad on their baneful, midnight errands; particularly those aerial people, the fairies, are said, on that night, to hold a grand anniversary.

Stanza 4 'Their stocks maun a' be sought ance'
The Wrst ceremony of Hallowe'en is, pulling each a 'stock' or plant of kail. They must go out, hand in hand, with eyes shut, and pull the Wrst they meet with: its being big or little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their spells – the husband or wife. If any 'yird' or earth, stick to the root, that is 'tocher' or fortune; and the taste of the 'custoc', that is, the heart of the stem, is indicative of the natural temper and disposition. Lastly, the stems, or to give them their ordinary appellation, the 'runts' are placed somewhere above the head of the door; and the Christian names of people whom chance brings into the house are, according to the priority of placing the 'runts', the names in question.

Stanza 6 'To pou their stalks o' corn'
They go to the barnyard, and pull each, at three several times, a stalk of oats. If the third stalk wants the 'tap-pickle', that is, the grain at the top of the stalk, the party in question will come to the marriage bed anything but a maid.

Stanza 7 'The auld guid-wife's weel-hoordet nits'
Burning the nuts is a favourite charm. They name the lad and lass to each particular nut, as they lay them in the Wre; and according as they burn quietly together, or start from beside each other, the course and issue of the courtship will be.

Stanza 11 'And in the blue-clue throws then'
Whoever would, with success, try this spell, must strictly observe these directions: Steal out, all alone, to the kiln, and, darkling, throw into the 'pot' a clue of blue yarn; wind it in a new clue oV the old one; and, towards the latter end, something will hold the thread: demand 'Wha hauds?', i.e. 'who holds?' and answer will be returned from the kiln-pot, by naming the Christian name and surname of your future spouse [*see* LOVE DIVINATION: BALL OF THREAD].

Stanza 13 'I'll eat the apple at the glass'
Take a candle, and go alone to a looking-glass; eat an apple before it, and some traditions say you should comb your hair all the time; the face

of your conjugal companion, to be, will be seen in the glass, as if peeping over your shoulder [*see* APPLES: MIRROR DIVINATION].

Stanza 16 'He gat hemp-seed, I mind it weel'
Steal out, unperceived, and sow a handful of hemp-seed, harrowing it with anything you can conveniently draw after you. Repeat, now and then, 'Hemp-seed I sow thee, hemp-seed I sow thee; and him (or her) that is to be my true love, come after me a pou thee'. Look over your left shoulder, and you will see the appearance of the person invoked, in the attitude of pulling hemp. Some traditions say, 'Come after me and shaw thee', that is, show theyself; in case, it simply appears. Others omit the harrowing, and say, 'Come after me and harrow thee' [*see* HEMP SEED DIVINATION].

Stanza 21 'To winn three wechts o' naething'
This charm must likewise be performed unperceived and alone. You go to the barn, and open both doors, taking them oV the hinges, if possible: for there is danger that the being about to appear, may shut the doors, and do you some mischief. Then take that instrument used in winnowing the corn, which in our country dialect we call a 'wecht' and go through all the attitudes of letting down corn against the wind . . . repeat it three times, and the third time, an apparition will pass through the barn, in at the windy door, and out at the other, having both the Wgure in question, and the appearance of retinue, marking the employment or station in life.

Stanza 23 'It chanc'd the stack he faddom't thrice'
Take an opportunity of going (unnoticed) to a 'bear-stack' and fathom it three times round. The last fathom of the last time, you will catch in your arms the appearance of your future conjugal yoke-fellow.

Stanza 24 'Whare three lairds' lands met at a burn'
You go out, one or more (for this is a social spell) to a south-running spring, or rivulet, where 'three lairds' lands meet', and dip your left shirt-sleeve. Go to bed in sight of a Wre, and hang your wet sleeve before it to dry. Lie awake, and, some time near midnight, an apparition, having the exact Wgure of the grand object in question, will come and turn the sleeve, as if to dry the other side of it [*compare* LOVE DIVINATION: WASHING SHIFT].

Stanza 27 'The luggies three are ranged'
Take three dishes, put clean water in one, foul water in another, and leave the third empty; blindfold a person, and lead him to the hearth where the dishes are ranged; he (or she) dips the left hand; if by chance in the clean water, the future (husband or) wife will come to the bar of matrimony a maid; if in the foul a widow; if in the empty dish it foretells, with equal certainty, no marriage at all. It is repeated three times, and every time the arrangement of the dishes is altered [*see* THREE DISHES DIVINATION].

at a Hallowe'en party a few years ago. The burning of nuts is still practised. Couples place nuts in pairs on the hearth and from their behaviour they draw conclusions about their own future love-life. Bowls of water, one clean and one dirty, and an empty bowl, tell whether the future partner will be rich or poor, or if there will be no future partner. The young people are in turn blindfolded and led to the bowls. The one they touch indicates their fate.

N. Ireland Foster (1951)

In England, the festival remained far less prominent in the traditional calendar, although the closer one gets to Scotland the higher its profile. It was one of several nights in the year when LOVE DIVINATION procedures were thought particularly effective:

[On Hallowe'en] *The following story is true. A young girl hired at a farm in the Hesket district was persuaded to try 'evening the weights', i.e. to go at midnight into a barn where the doors faced east and west, and to make a true or swinging balance on a weighing machine. Upon her return, she was asked by her mistress (who had been instrumental in her trying the charm), if she 'saw owt'.*

'Nobbut t' maister,' was the lassie's reply, 'He come in a yeh door and out at t'udder'. 'Be gud ta my bairns, then,' said her mistress. Not long afterwards the mistress died, and the master eventually married the girl, who kept her promise and treated her step-children the same as her own.

Cumberland *Folk-Lore* (1929)

The divination could also be aimed at predictions other than love:

There was in some places another weird ceremony in going round the church at midnight, and look in through the keyhole in order to see the spectral forms, or to hear a spirit calling the names of all those who were to die in the neighbourhood during the year; that is during the coming twelve months from that da

PORCH WATCHING]. Mid-Wales

See also ANIMALS KNEELING.

Selected references only: England Wright (1940) 107–20. **Cumberland** *Folk-Lore* (192 Owen (1987) 133–5. **Mid-Wales** Davies (191 **Scotland** Miller (1835/1994) 60–72; Banks 3 108–75. **Ireland** Danaher (1972) 200–27. N. Foster (1951) 27. **General** Hutton (1991) 176 (1996) 360–85; Opie (1959) 268–76.

Hand of Glory

The Hand of Glory was known in va across Europe from at least the M onwards. It was the severed hand of (or other executed criminal) wh prepared with appropriate occult rites dients, could be used for various purposes. In some European traditi sion of the hand bestowed invisibility powers, but in the British stories it usually used to induce sleep while th away with people's goods. The anointed with fat (often gruesomely and the fingers lighted like candles tively, the hand was simply made candle. Once the candle, or fingers everyone in the house (except the burg fall into an enchanted sleep.

The history of the Hand of Glory is complicated by the free use of c material by many authorities, and th repetition, often inaccurately copied tributed, of a limited number of stori the versions given by William Hend *below*) has not been so frequently re the others, and can be given in full t flavour of them all:

One dark night, when all was shut came a tap at the door of a lone i middle of a barren moor. The door w and there stood without, shivering an a poor beggar, his rags soaked with ra hands white with cold. He asked pite lodging, and it was cheerfully granted was not a spare bed in the house, bu lie on the mat before the kitchen welcome. So this was settled, and ev the house went to bed except the cook, the back kitchen could see into the l through a pane of glass let into the watched the beggar and saw him, as was left alone, draw himself up from

coming twelve months from that date [compare PORCH WATCHING]. Mid-Wales Davies (1911)

See also ANIMALS KNEELING.

Selected references only: England Wright & Lones 3 (1940) 107–20. Cumberland *Folk-Lore* (1929) 285. Wales Owen (1987) 133–5. Mid-Wales Davies (1911) 77. Scotland Miller (1835/1994) 60–72; Banks 3 (1941) 108–75. Ireland Danaher (1972) 200–27. N. Ireland Foster (1951) 27. General Hutton (1991) 176–83; Hutton (1996) 360–85; Opie (1959) 268–76.

Hand of Glory

The Hand of Glory was known in various forms across Europe from at least the Middle Ages onwards. It was the severed hand of a murderer (or other executed criminal) which, once prepared with appropriate occult rites and ingredients, could be used for various nefarious purposes. In some European traditions possession of the hand bestowed invisibility and other powers, but in the British stories it was more usually used to induce sleep while thieves made away with people's goods. The hand was anointed with fat (often gruesomely human fat) and the fingers lighted like candles or, alternatively, the hand was simply made to hold a candle. Once the candle, or fingers, were lit, everyone in the house (except the burglar) would fall into an enchanted sleep.

The history of the Hand of Glory in Britain is complicated by the free use of continental material by many authorities, and the constant repetition, often inaccurately copied and unattributed, of a limited number of stories. One of the versions given by William Henderson (*see below*) has not been so frequently reprinted as the others, and can be given in full to give the flavour of them all:

A number of descriptions exist of how the Hand of Glory functioned. This comes from a French publication, Petit Albert.

One dark night, when all was shut up, there came a tap at the door of a lone inn in the middle of a barren moor. The door was opened, and there stood without, shivering and shaking, a poor beggar, his rags soaked with rain, and his hands white with cold. He asked piteously for a lodging, and it was cheerfully granted him: there was not a spare bed in the house, but he could lie on the mat before the kitchen-fire, and welcome. So this was settled, and everyone in the house went to bed except the cook, who from the back kitchen could see into the large room through a pane of glass let into the door. She watched the beggar and saw him, as soon as he was left alone, draw himself up from the floor, seat himself at the table, extract from his pocket a brown withered human hand, and set it upright in the candlestick. He then anointed the fingers, and applying a match to them, they began to flame. Filled with horror, the cook rushed up the backstairs, and endeavoured to arouse her master and the men of the house. But all was in vain – they slept a charmed sleep; so in despair she hastened down again, and placed herself at her post of observation. She saw the fingers of the hand flaming, but the thumb remained unlighted, because one inmate of the house was awake. The beggar was busy collecting the valuables around him into a large sack, and having taken all he cared for in the large room, he entered another. On this, the woman ran in, and seizing the light tried to extinguish the flames. But this was not so easy. She blew at them, but they burnt on as before. She poured the dregs of a beer-jug over them, but they burned up the brighter. As a last resource, she caught up a jug of milk, and dashed it over the