

William Henderson's Folk-Lore and Thomas Wilkie's "Old Rites": A comparative approach

J. B. SMITH

A perusal of the narratives from Lothian and the Borders in Westwood and Kingshill's *The Lore of Scotland* (pp. 209-289) reveals eight that are carefully paraphrased from William Henderson's *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* of 1866. For much of his study, including the aforesaid eight stories, Henderson (1813–1910) was indebted to an essay by Thomas Wilkie on Border folklore, to which little more than lip-service has been paid since Henderson used the manuscript previous to its publication in a Berwickshire journal in 1916, whereas much of the material he culled and adapted from it has been quoted or paraphrased again and again. As Henderson says, the contents of Wilkie's manuscript "were not arranged, there was a good deal of repetition, and the style was diffuse and wordy" (p. ix). True as this may be, we cannot simply pass over Wilkie's work without taking a close look at it and at what Henderson made of it.

First, though, a few words need to be said about Wilkie, his life and work. My authorities are Watson (161-163), and, previous to that, Ferguson in his Introductory Note of December 1916 to Wilkie's text, which was published as "Old Rites, Ceremonies and Customs of the Inhabitants of the Southern Counties of Scotland", a title that will in this essay be abbreviated to "Old Rites".

Thomas Wilkie was born c1789, the second son of the village blacksmith in the village of Bowden, to the south of the Eildon Hills and Melrose. He enjoyed a good education, and through the influence of Sir Walter Scott became a ship's surgeon with the East India Company, sailing for India in 1815. Contrary to what Henderson says, he did not die there (p. ix), but settled back at Innerleithen in the Borders about 1821, where he built up a thriving medical practice. Before that date he had already been helping Dr Jamieson with his *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, providing vernacular expressions current in the Borders, his efforts being acknowledged by Jamieson in his *Supplement* of 1825.

Wilkie was an enthusiastic antiquarian, a collector of old ballads, songs and traditions of the Border Country, many of which he communicated to Sir Walter Scott. Wilkie's manuscript collections, consisting of three small quarto volumes, came at some point after his death in 1838 into the possession of a Dr. Hardy, who valued them greatly, and in the early 1860s or before made an annotated transcript of the volume "Old Rites". At some point this must have come into the possession of William Henderson, who cites it again and again, but with varying accuracy, in his *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*. Wilkie's "Old Rites" was eventually published in *History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club*, vol. XXIII (1919), 50-146. Unfortunately, all three manuscript volumes were lost, but "Old Rites", which will originally have been put together by Wilkie not later than 1830, survives as published in the 1916-1918 *Berwickshire Naturalists' Club* version, which was lightly edited by Dr. Hardy.

It is quite clear that Wilkie's "Old Rites" as eventually published in 1919 is a valuable document, representing notes originally made by him in the early nineteenth century and harking back to narratives and beliefs still current in the late eighteenth. When Henderson drew on Wilkie's notes for his *Folk-Lore* of 1866, he "improved" them for a variety of reasons, and it is this "improved" text that tends to survive in later works on folklore, which claim to be quoting the Wilkie manuscript while in fact reproducing Henderson's revisions. The trend continues, as we have seen as recently as 2011 in Westwood and Kingshill's *The Lore of Scotland*, which paraphrases eight Border narratives that Henderson adapted from Wilkie. We begin with a table presenting details of these narratives with the titles Wilkie originally gave them. There follow references for Henderson's adaptations and Westwood and Kingshill's paraphrases. This arrangement should facilitate comparisons of the texts concerned, as I have tried to show in my ensuing remarks.

A. Wilkie, 59-60, "Phantom Shroud or Funeral" = Henderson, p. 29 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 279-280, "St Boswells, Roxburghshire".

B. Wilkie, 97-98, "The Miller and the Fairies (?)" = Henderson, pp. 158-159 = Westwood and Kingshill, p. 247, "Holydean, Roxburghshire". [The question mark is Wilkie's.]

C. Wilkie, 102-103, "The Witch of Yarrowford" = Henderson, pp. 154-156 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 288-289, "Yarrowford, Selkirkshire".

D. Wilkie, 112-113, "The Tailors and the Milk" = Henderson, pp. 159-161 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 232-233, "Deloraine, Buccleuch, Selkirkshire".

E. Wilkie, 115-116, "Old Lady of Littledean Tower" = Henderson, pp. 171-172 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 257-259, "Littledean Tower, Roxburghshire".

F. Wilkie, 116-117, "The Apparition of the Two Sisters at the Bow-Brig Syke" = Henderson, pp. 272-273 = Westwood and Kingshill, p. 220, "Bow-Brig Syke, Maxton, Roxburghshire".

G. Wilkie, 117, "The Laird of Littledean and the Witches" = Henderson, pp. 165-166 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 257-258, "Littledean Tower, Roxburghshire".

H. Wilkie, 117-118, "The Man Attempted to be Carried Off by Witches or Fairies" = Henderson, p. 159 = Westwood and Kingshill, pp. 220-221, "Bowden, Roxburghshire".

One thing that emerges from scrutiny of the items referred to in the table is that Henderson can turn Wilkie's indirect standard English speech into direct dialect speech. In D, Wilkie has: "Young snip ['tailor's apprentice'] said ... he would procure him that [a basinful of milk]." In Henderson this becomes, " 'Is that a? ' said the apprentice; 'ye'se get that.' " Compare Westwood and Kingshill: "The apprentice said he could deal with that." Again, in E on p. 116, Wilkie gives us: "The old lady then said that she was the apparition that haunted the house and that she had hid a large sum of money below the undermost step of the principal stair of the Tower, which she [the servant-girl] must next day go and dig up and give to the laird." This becomes in Henderson, p. 271: "The old lady ... confessed herself frankly to be the apparition that haunted the house. 'My gold wud na let me rest,' said she,

‘but I’ll tell ye where it lies; ’tis ’neath the lowest step o’ the Tower stairs. Take the Laird there, an’ tell him what I now tell ye; then dig up the treasure, and put it in his hands.’ ” Arguably the changes here, including slight additions, improve the narrative flow. Additions, though, can get out of hand, as in the gratuitous insert that begins: “The laird, being blessed with a goodly family of sturdy lads and smiling maidens, found no difficulty in disposing of his share.” Despite their generally very light touch, Westwood and Kingshill refrain from rendering this sentence in their paraphrase.

What appears to be an addition by Henderson occurs right at the end of C, where the younger apprentice, after his debilitating experience with witches, regains his health by eating butter made from the milk of cows fed in kirk-yards, “a sovereign remedy for consumption brought on through being witch-ridden”. This is not to be found in Wilkie’s text, but immediately before his own version of the story, Wilkie has an item (p. 101) headed “Butter from Cows Fed in Churchyard”. Here we are told that butter from cows fed on the grass of churchyards is esteemed by the superstitious as “an excellent remedy in all diseases, but particularly in the disease of consumption from being witch-ridden.” Wilkie continues: “In the village of Yarrowford, tradition mentions a very curious case of this kind, cured by the butter procured from the cows fed in the churchyard of Traquaire.” Traquair is a few miles to the north of Yarrow, and just to the south of Innerleithen.

It is fairly common for Henderson, despite his predilection for dialect direct speech noted above, to ignore or even misunderstand a dialectal or colloquial expression. In D, Wilkie in jocular vein twice refers to a tailor’s apprentice as “young snip”, which in Henderson simply becomes “the lad” or “the apprentice”, while the apprentice’s “partners of the goose” becomes the less colourful “the other lads”. In B, Wilkie tells us that the miller “threw himself down upon some straw in the kill barn, near the bauks upon which the corn was spread out to dry.” A *bauk* is a beam, and the reference is to a lattice-work of beams supporting a bed of straw upon which the grain was strewed for drying. Henderson ignores *bauks*, giving us: “He threw himself down upon some straw in the kiln barn.” Later, a confused noise makes the miller “pull aside some straw from the bauks of the kill”, which Henderson renders, “He pulled aside some straw from the *banks* [my italics] of the kiln.” In Westwood and Kingshill this sentence is omitted.

In G, Wilkie tells us that a witch is “taken and drowned in the *wiel* by the young men of the village [of Maxton]” (p. 117). *Wiel* is a Scots word for a deep place or whirlpool in a river, in this instance the Tweed, close to which Littledean lies in the parish of Maxton. Admittedly there was a St. Cuthbert’s Well close by, but the fact remains that a *wiel* and a well are not the same, a fact that Henderson overlooks when he tells us that the woman is “drowned for witchcraft ... in the well” (p. 166). Westwood and Kingshill follow suit (p. 263).

Wiel and variants thereof are common in proper names referring to deep places in rivers, such as the Wheel o’ Clackriach in Angus and Bool’s Weal at Warkworth in the Coquet. Such topographical matters remind us of Wilkie’s Cow-Lug E’en, a certain night of the year getting its name from the alleged appearance of spirits with ears resembling those of a cow, something Wilkie had never heard of except in his own village of Bowden and near-

by Gattonside (p. 110). Here Wilkie was surely on home ground, and in no need of Henderson's "correction" of Gattonside to Gateside (p. 226). Certainly there are places called Gateside, but, unlike Gattonside, none of them is close to Bowden.

Similar "improvements" are not hard to find. If at a wake the dead person appeared to frown, this seems to have been very inauspicious. Wilkie refers to the belief under "The Saining of a Corpse", where he has a verse in the fifth line of which the corpse is bidden: "Sleep sound and frown nane" (p. 54). Henderson keeps Wilkie's references to frowning except in this line of the verse, which is altered to "Sleep sound and wake [rather than frown] nane" (p. 36). In the second line, incidentally, Henderson has "dishies toom for 'loffie' ", in which the word he puts in quotation marks is glossed "praise". In fact it is connected to *luif* for "palm of the hand", as Henderson must have realised when he referred immediately afterwards to the funeral rite called *dishaloof*, his version of which, with solecisms such as *wake* for "frown" and the gloss "praise" for *loffie*, were adopted by Opie and Tatem under "Dishes, three: divination" (p. 120).

Consider also Wilkie's information on superstitions concerning stillborn babies and others dying before baptism. He quotes "old verses" beginning "Wae be to the babie, that never saw the sun," which in Henderson unaccountably becomes "Love to the babie ...," while his fourth and last verse runs "He shall tremble and die like the elf-shot eye," representing Wilkie's "witch-shot kye ['cows']". Henderson goes on to tell us of the fatal illnesses such as *grave-merels* afflicting those who step on the graves of unbaptised babes, diseases that a witch could cure by making the patient wear a specially prepared *sack*. This *sack* in fact represents Wilkie's *sark* or "shirt". He tells us that this must be made from lint grown in a field dunged from a farmyard heap that has not been removed for forty years and is full of *bramlin*. Wilkie's "farmyard heap" becomes Henderson's "farmyard keep", and the *bramlin*, a species of speckled or striped worm, are not mentioned by Henderson. A further omission is Wilkie's reference to the "honest weaver", one of those who prepare the *sark*. Likewise omitted is Wilkie's reference to "the lowly beds of those poor unfortunates who have died of venereal infection, from brutal mothers" (Wilkie, pp. 66-67). Such sensitive information tends to be ignored by Henderson (pp. 4-5).

The "old verses" scattered through Wilkie's text present a considerable linguistic challenge, and it cannot but cross one's mind that, with his penchant for the macabre, he put some of them together himself, drawing on a fund of traditional expressions he had collected or otherwise come across. Note for instance his item entitled "Thruppin' " (pp. 111-112) and the verses thereunder. *To thrump* means to squeeze or push as in a crowd, and *thrumping* seems to suggest to Wilkie some sort of supernatural force pushing mortals towards their fate. Henderson describes the verses as obscure, and he does little to clarify the obscurities, for instance transmogrifying *foumart*, "polecat", into "foremost", and *the three sterns light*, in which the *sterns* are presumably the stars of Orion's belt, into "the three stones light". Moreover, where Wilkie has "the toweries hard are *thumpin'* " (p. 112), Henderson (pp. 226-227) has *thrumpin'*, thus inappropriately anticipating the same word at the end of the next-but-one line. On a more positive note, Wilkie's *toweries* turn out to be the same spirits that he has on p. 101 under "Powrie or Dunter", where "powrie" (inherited by Briggs, 1977, p. 115),

needs to be corrected to “Towrie”. A *towrie*, from *tour* alias *tower*, is a spirit supposed to haunt ruined towers, while a *dunter* is a spirit that knocks, thumps or *dunts*, foretoking when especially loud a death or accident in a family (SND).

Henderson (p. 218) reproduces the information given by Wilkie under “Powrie or Dunter” (p. 101), but in addition cites popular tradition to the effect that the foundation stones of old Border castles were “bathed with human blood by their builders the Picts; no wonder then that they were haunted in some way or another.”

In Wilkie’s “Old Rites” the spectre called Wag-at-the-wa’ is the subject of a detailed description (pp. 61-64), Henderson’s rendering of which (pp. 218-220) shows tendencies similar to those already discussed. Wilkie’s “grizzly-headed old man with yell-cap eyes of a fiery colour” becomes simply a “grisly [sic] old man”, whose “long arms covered with yellow hair” go unmentioned, as do the long ears, one of them with a hole in which the spectre keeps his very large and presumably detachable hooked tooth. (A *yill-cap* or *yill-cup* was a vessel of horn or wood from which ale was drunk. *Yell-cap eyes* were “saucer” eyes.) Wag-at-the-wa’s stockings are made of *Fairnilee woo’*, wool from Fairnilee near Galashiels. The nearest we get to this in the adaptation is red coat and blue breeches made of “familie woo’ ”, the quotation marks being Henderson’s. Henderson remains silent when it comes to the spirit’s habit of laughing heartily at “any story relating to that class of impotent men called by gossips fumlbers”. Also ignored are Wag-at-the-wa’s “side arms”, “a folding jocktheleg and a bull’s pisle”, the former being a clasp knife, with which he “cut what he could not break”, while the pizzle or penis was used for punishing “all those who gave him the slightest disturbance”.

Grotesque as he is, Wag-at-the wa’ is not to be outdone by a species of brownie called Killmoulis (Wilkie, pp. 98-99; Henderson, pp. 214-215), who haunts mills, where he resides in the *killogie* or drying area of the kiln. The most striking thing about him is that he lacks a mouth, as indicated by his name, which represents *kill*, a variant of *kiln*, plus *mouthless*, this reminding us of his more northerly counterpart, the *kill-carle*, who is toothless (SND). Instead of a mouth, Killmoulis has immensely large nostrils, from which issues much grizzly hair. Into these huge organs of smell he puts all the victuals given him by the miller and his family. Henderson does mention the spectre’s “enormous nose”, and his lack of a mouth is at least touched on in the rhyme quoted from Wilkie and beginning: “Auld Killmoulis wanting the mow [“mouth”],/Come to me now, come to me now!” Such words are reminiscent of the sort of formula that village lads uttered as a “dare” in dark places, half hoping, half fearing that a bogy would appear. Compare the words of schoolboys challenging the ghost of Sir George Mackenzie, “Bloody Mackenzie”, to come forth from the “haunted mausoleum” at Greyfriars in Edinburgh: “Bluidy Mackingie, come oot if ye dar’!” (Westwood and Kingshill, p. 246).

Elf-stones now claim our attention. These sharp arrowhead-shaped prehistoric stone artefacts were allegedly shot by elves at cows a-field, with the result that milk became rancid or *eeny*, that is, full of “eyes”, and hence unfit for making into butter. The wound inflicted by the stone was not always visible until the cow had been rubbed all over with the blue bonnet of a chief or very old man. How precisely the wound that then appeared was to be cured,

neither Wilkie nor Henderson tells us, but the first step seems to have been to obtain an elf-stone of the type described. According to Wilkie, these stones were said to be procured by the elves from “the old fairies”, who had previously used them as breast-pins at the fairy court. Further, “the old fairies” were believed to have them from the mermaids. So far, Henderson follows Wilkie, except in changing the first “the old fairies” into “old fairies”, which could mean “elderly individual fairies” rather than “the old generation of fairies as a whole” that Wilkie’s formulation perhaps implies. However that may be, what Wilkie says next is omitted by Henderson. It is that the mermaids did not present the stones to “the old fairies” before picking out “a certain number of the eyes of those whom they [presumably the mermaids] had stolen, or deluded into their emeral [sic] caves.” Whether or not we here have relics of a once coherent tradition, we again see Henderson (pp. 148-149) shying away from more forthright and “physical” aspects of Wilkie’s text (p. 82).

We now turn to a tradition that Wilkie entitles “The Devil Wishes to be a Tradesman” (pp. 91-93), whereas Henderson prefers “The Devil Trying All Callings” (pp. 242-243). The gist of this is that the Devil wishes to learn different trades, but in doing so is always set tasks he is unable to perform. First he would be a weaver, then a mower, a blacksmith, a farrier, a carpenter, and finally a shoemaker and cobbler, but each apprenticeship is attended by disaster. He therefore gives up all attempts to learn an honest trade, and becomes a strolling musician and poet, but also leader of a band of rascals, as a result of which he and they are banished to the bottomless pit. The Devil’s dubious career is summed up by the blacksmith in a judgement that is predictably omitted in Henderson’s version of the text: “Deil haet [“nothing”] he could do but blow the bellows and piss among the coals, in the coal hole.”

Another, pivotal, part of Wilkie’s text that is omitted by Henderson refers to the Devil’s activity as a mower. This activity is summed up by Wilkie in a single sentence that for all its brevity provides us with a valuable clue to this rather puzzling story. The sentence runs: “He [the Devil] began mowing and left off because his partner would not play whety whety.” What does this mean?

What we have here is a fragment of Tale Type AT 1090, “Mowing Contest”, in which the Devil and a man, sometimes a smith, engage in a mowing contest. The man cheats by secretly putting rods of iron among the grass the Devil is to mow. The Devil takes the rods to be the hard stems of docks or another plant that are slowing him down (Uther, 2, p. 34; Ranke, p. 720). In a Northamptonshire variant, Sternberg’s “The Bogie’s’ Field” (Briggs, 1991, B1, p. 26), the Devil asks for a *wiffle-waffle*, a break during which the scythes of both parties are whetted (cf. *EDD*, 6, p. 488), but is told it is too late, and he accepts defeat. In a Radnorshire variant, the Devil repeatedly has to stop to *whittle-whattle*, that is, to sharpen his scythe, while his rival is able to keep on mowing, and wins quite easily (Briggs, 1991, B1, 66). It is clear that Wilkie’s *whety whety* corresponds to the Northamptonshire *wiffle-waffle* and the Radnorshire *whittle-whattle*, and that *to play whety whety* is to take a break for scythe-whetting in a mowing contest.

There are further points of contact between Wilkie’s text and other representatives of AT 1090 not so far mentioned. In a Cornish version of the story, Margaret Courtenay’s “The Devil’s Whetstone”, the Devil’s opponent is a smith and farrier, an expert in the management

of sick cattle, and a dentist. He is also a champion mower who successfully competes with the Devil (Briggs, 1991, B1, pp. 92-93). It is clear that he unites these callings in one person, whereas in Wilkie, smith, mower, farrier and so on are separate persons, each trying futilely to instruct the Devil in the relevant trade.

In Wilkie's narrative, the Devil, it will be remembered, becomes a musician and poet, and leader of a band of rascals, consigned to the bottomless pit. Can we find any counterpart to this motif in other variants? The answer seems to be yes, for in a Lindsey version of AT 1090 called "The Farmer and the Boggart", the Devil, or Boggart as he here becomes, in the end "comes back no more ... but awms ['loiters'] about t'delves ['ditches'], an skears loane foaks o' noights; an' if thou leaves thy dinner or thy tools about it, oftentimes he meks off wi' 'em" (Briggs, 1991, B1, pp. 28-29). Here we have Wilkie's final motif in another guise. Perhaps in either case we could speak of "The Devil/Boggart lacks a calling".

It is easy enough to find further examples of Henderson's approach to Wilkie's text. In Wilkie's item entitled "Funerals" (p. 58) we read that, when the coffin is laid in the grave, for anyone to hear at a considerable distance the *mools* or soil falling on the coffin, and to inform *you* [my italics] of the circumstance, this means that one of *your* [my italics] family will die very soon afterwards. In Henderson's version (p. 280) it is the person who himself actually hears at some distance the sound of the *mools* falling who will suffer a bereavement in his family. It is Henderson's version that is adopted by Opie and Tatem (p. 92). As Opie and Tatem give no further variants of this superstition we lack any evidence as to whether it is Wilkie or Henderson who is "correct".

Another example is to be found under Wilkie's heading "Plain-Soles" (p. 78): "To meet with a person having plain-soles or large flat feet, on a Monday morning, was always reckoned a very unlucky omen, if you were on the outset of a journey; *but especially if the person you met spoke first.*" Here my italics indicate the part of the text omitted by Henderson (p. 87). On their pp. 166-167 Opie and Tatem follow Henderson in omitting this. In fact, on pp. 78-79 Wilkie has more to say about the implications of having the first or last word with an "uncanny" being: "If you should chance to speak to a witch, fairy, brownie, spectre, wreath ['wraith'], or any of the spawn of hell, take care to speak the last word, at parting, or you will die very soon after (pp. 78-79). Of this list of supernatural beings Henderson on p. 143 retains only "witch" and is followed in this by Opie and Tatem (p. 368).

In their *Dictionary of Superstitions* (p. 198) Opie and Tatem have, as their first item under the heading "Herring Membrane: Divination", a quotation from Mactaggart's *Gallovidian Encyclopedia* of 1824, the gist of which is that young girls throw herring *soam*, "the fat of herrings", against a wall. If it adheres in an upright manner, their husband-to-be will be upright also, and so on. In fact Wilkie has a relatively lengthy piece on this method of divination, which seems to have escaped Henderson. Wilkie's heading is "Air-Bladder or Soam of Fishes", and under it he tells us how the young person seeking information in affairs of the heart takes a herring's air-bladder (rather than, *pace* Mactaggart, just the "fat") by one end "and throws it against the wall near by the fire-place commonly called the hood, and if it sticks there they will be lucky in all their love undertakings and *vice versa* unlucky." Wilkie continues: "I am informed that the ancient place where the soam was thrown against was the

girdle (a flat piece of cast iron on which bread is roasted) which for the most part in cottages hung in the lower part of the lum (vent).” (The glosses in round brackets are Hardy’s.) For *soam*, see *SND sound*ⁿ⁴ and *soom*ⁿ².

This item is of interest not only as an early documentation roughly contemporary with Mactaggart’s, but also because of what Wilkie proceeds to tell us about its history: “The throw of the soam was practised by a number of the Low country peasants who took up arms for the restoration of the family of Steward [sic] and all who cast this air-bag were as unfortunate in making it adhere to the girdle, as they were in their rightful, but unfortunate undertaking” (Wilkie, p. 79).

In his next item, “Uses of the Girdle” (pp. 79-80), Wilkie is no less interesting. He tells us that in times of danger the girdle, alias griddle, a flat metal plate normally used for roasting bread, was rung like a gong to summon to arms the inhabitants of villages beset by foes. Thus when Sir Ralph Evers and Sir Brian Latoun sacked the villages of Teviotdale, the inhabitants brought themselves together by ringing the girdle. Wilkie also tells us, with rather less historical precision, of the tradition that “the night so many of the Danes were destroyed” the women roused the people to arms by ringing upon girdles, to avenge themselves for the ravishment they had sustained, each woman killing her ravisher in cold blood. “The evening ever after was called ‘Ring-girle e’en’, and was kept as a night of mirth and festivity annually.” Returning to his own times, Wilkie tells us that the sound produced by the ringing of the *girle* or girdle was a signal for the women to assemble to punish, by ducking them in the village well, those men who struck their wives. In Galashiels and other places in Selkirk and Roxburghshire the girdle had been rung for this purpose “twice or thrice within these last twelve years”. Here a degree of historical accuracy is in fact possible, since, under “Ducking and Riding the Stang” (p. 80) a brief note in square brackets tells us: “Mr Wilkie went to India in 1815”.

We now consider another item that was well documented in the Wilkie manuscript, but was for whatever reason omitted by Henderson in his *Folk-Lore*, then to be overlooked by other folklorists. Wilkie’s heading is “Ordeal of Touching the Murdered Body”, under which we find an account (pp. 74-75) the gist of which is that a person had murdered his father-in-law for his money, by driving a nail into his head while he lay in his bed. Happening to be at the funeral of an acquaintance, who was to share the grave of the murdered father-in-law, the murderer saw all the bystanders pointing to a skull that had been freshly dug from the grave, and had a nail driven through it. All those present except for the murderer touched it to show their innocence. One of the attendants, who suspected him, ordered him to come forward and likewise to touch the skull. This he did, and to everyone’s astonishment the blood streamed out afresh. The murderer confessed, and suffered accordingly.

Henderson does indeed (pp. 40-41) mention this ancient tradition, referring to James I’s *Daemonologie* of 1597, where we read on p. 136 that, should a person be secretly murdered, the corpse will if subsequently handled by the murderer “gush out of blood, as if the Blood were crying to Heaven for revenge”. Henderson also tells us that the bleeding of a corpse was urged as evidence of guilt in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh as late as 1688. What Henderson does not refer to is Wilkie’s example discussed above. This

consequently remains unmentioned by Opie and Tatem under their heading “Murder: corpse bleeds” (p. 270). As a result there is a gap from 1787 to 1858 in their record of the belief.

Unrepresented in Henderson, Wilkie’s “Divination from the Harrows” (p. 101) now calls for our attention. This runs: “In the spring, the first harrows you see employed observe whether they are going from or coming towards you, or crossing the field in the direction you are walking. If they cross the field, you will have good success in all your undertakings and abundance of bread to eat all the ensuing season. If they are coming towards you, you will have sufficiency of bread and good fortune all that season; and if going from you, a very scanty allowance of bread, and bad luck the whole of the year.” A search for counterparts leads us to Opie and Tatem (p. 158), where we find an example dated 1879 from western Scotland, and one dated 1899 from Tynron, Dumfries. These are virtually the same as Wilkie’s example, except that, as indicated by the heading “First Plough in Spring: coming towards one”, the agricultural implement is a plough and not a harrow. Wilkie, whose example can be dated c1830, thus provides a useful earlier addition to the evidence already to hand.

Much the same framework underlies beliefs of the type “First Animals in Spring: facing observer” (Opie and Tatem, pp. 156-157), corresponding to items under Roud’s heading “First Animal Seen; head or tail”, and references there (Roud, p. 190). Henderson is not represented. The first example given by Opie and Tatem is dated 1826. Wilkie’s “Divination from the First Lamb” (p. 91) is hardly younger than this, and fits comfortably into the framework: “The first lamb you see in the season you must take notice, whether the head of the animal or its tail is towards you. If it is the head, then you will have a good chance to live more on butcher meat than on milk; but if it is the tail, you will be obliged to live on milk and vegetables and have little or no butcher meat all that season. If the side of the lamb is toward you, you will have both milk and butcher meat in abundance all that season.”

What has just been said alerts us to the fact that items scattered across Wilkie’s text can, if brought together, complement and cast light on one another. This is especially so where Wilkie is difficult and obscure, as in his piece entitled “Divining by a Willow Rod or Sword” (pp. 104-105; cf. Henderson, pp. 80-81). The second part of Wilkie’s narrative, concerning events said to have happened on New Year’s Eve and Day, runs as follows: “A story is told of a young woman, who found a sword lying by her bedside, on the first morning of the year, which she imagined had been used the preceding evening by some of the diviners, or wife-hunters: she took and locked it into her chest, never mentioning the circumstance. ... This young woman was afterwards married to one of a neighbouring gentleman’s servants, to whom she had a child.” On one occasion she asks her husband to retrieve from her chest an item of dress for the child. “The moment the husband had opened the chest, he beheld the sword which he had lost, and instantly cried out: ‘This is my sword which has troubled me so much,’ and in a moment transfixed himself with it, to the utter astonishment of [his] wife.”

A rather similar story is told by Wilkie under his heading “Divination by Pails of Water – Holly Leaves”, a practice he appears not to associate with any particular time of

year, whereas Henderson has it taking place on New Year's and Midsummer Eve (p. 95; cf. Henderson, pp. 77-78). Wearing three leaves of green holly on her breast, the supplicant arranges three pails of water on her bedroom floor. After sleeping a little, she is roused by strange and frightening noises, then to be visited by an apparition of her spouse-to-be, who, if he is very partial to her, rearranges the pails. Tradition had it that a lover thus invoked once let fall a rope with a noose at one end, "which next morning the young woman took up and laid into her press. She was soon after married to a person resembling this spectre, who, two weeks after marriage hung himself in a fit of inebriety with the same rope which his wife picked up."

There are places where Wilkie himself facilitates comparisons, as in his relatively lengthy piece entitled "Hallowe'en Ceremonies" (pp. 105-106), which begins with the statement that the Roxburghshire rites are much the same as those practised in western counties of Scotland. He proceeds to transcribe relevant notes from Burns's "Hallowe'en", but does include some sentences on aspects of the Roxburghshire rites that appear, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to be peculiar to that county. For instance, once the Roxburghshire boys and girls have collected cabbage stalks and, one assumes, used them for divination, they dash them against the village cross or any large stone, until not one remains. If any are to be found next morning, they are reckoned unfit for consumption, as the fairies are imagined to have ridden them as horses the previous evening, "which is the reason for dashing them to pieces against the cross".

There follows Wilkie's account of boisterous Hallowe'en customs not lacking in counterparts elsewhere. "A [cabbage] stock may", he says, "be thrown against any person who comes in the way, and the only retaliation is to return the charge. It is common also to throw down the lums (vents) of disreputable people, who are noxious to all such amusements of young people, the largest cabbage stocks they can find, and dead cats; also to fasten their doors, and to besmear their windows with mud." Compare at this point an editorial note ending in a remark on how, at Penmanshiel in Berwickshire, large cabbages were at Hallowe'en thrown down "the huge old lums of people we did not like" (Wilkie, p. 106, footnote).

Finally, we note Wilkie's "What Maids are not to Eat" (p. 103): "Young maids should beware of eating the black spot of a sow's jadie (stomach), the black spot of a black sheep's brain, and sausters (puddings) made of the blood taken from an elfshot cow's tail; as shortly after a transgression of this rule, they will remain anything but maidens." I have found no obvious counterparts to such beliefs except in Jamieson's *Supplement* of 1825, under *jaudie*, a Roxburghshire expression for the stomach of a hog: "The black spot, with which this stomach is marked, is carefully avoided by both sexes who are conscious that they have lost their virtue. The thief is afraid to touch it; the glutton also, though ever so hungry." Note, however, Burns on Hallowe'en as quoted by Wilkie (p. 106), where we read that on that eve young women steal out unseen, and go to the barn-yard, where they thrice pull out a stalk of oats. "If the third stalk wants the top-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."

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Independent Researcher, Chester
johnbersmith@gmail.com