

## HOP-DY-NAA

Fragments collected by Prof. John Rhÿs,  
University of Oxford, in 1890 during his visits  
to the Isle of Man 1886-1893.

### 1. Introduction

Manx Gaelic *Hop-dy-Naa*, the name given to the last day of the Celtic year (31 October) on which children are wont to go from house to house chanting a rhyme and thereby earning sweets (nowadays money), does not appear to have any Celtic etymology. The phrase *Hop-dy-Naa* forms a vocable chorus to the rhyme chanted, which seems to have given its name to the event, formally *Sauin* (Gaelic *Samhain* 'end of summer'), *Oie Houney* /öi: 'hounə/ (Gaelic *Oidhche Shamhna*) 'the night of Souney / *Samhna*, Eng. 'Hollantide' / 'Hallowe'en'. Many customs are associated with this event.

According to Kelly's *Dictionary* (1866 (1805)) (s.v. *Baal-Sauin*),

[...]. On this night [i.e. Hollantide] [...] "the women knead their dough to make cakes to the Queen of Heaven" [...]. Much ceremony is observed in making this cake, which is sacred to love [...] and is called the "soddag valloo" or dumb cake. Every woman is obliged to assist in mixing the ingredients, kneading the dough and baking the cake on glowing embers; and when sufficiently baked they divide it, eat it up, and retire to their beds backwards without speaking, from which silence the cake derives its name, and in the course of the night expect to see the images of the men who are destined to be their husbands [...] (Kelly's *Dictionary* s.v. *Baal-Sauin*).

Moore (1891: 125), in quoting the above in his *Folklore of the Isle of Man*, adds that the ingredients included "flour, eggs and egg-shells, soot, &c." For further details see Moore (1891: 122-125), Clague (1911: 23-31), Paton 52/1 (1941): 52-58), Gilchrist (1924-26: 174-177).

Clague (1911: 31) has the following to say about this tradition:

On Hollantide Eve boys went into gardens and fields, and pulled cabbage and cabbage stalks, and then went about beating the doors.

Young girls and young boys gathered together to make spree, and they used to try different ways of finding out fortunes. When they had tried all the ways (methods) they knew, the girls went to bake the dumb cake. Nobody was to speak one word, and every one was to help in making the dough. It was baked on the ashes, or on the bake stone (griddle). When it was baked, it was broken up, and each girl had a piece of it. She went to bed walking backwards, and she would see a sign of her lover in a dream.

When they did not bake the dumb cake, they ate a salt herring, in the same way, and it would do quite as well (Clague 1911: 31).

### 2. Texts

Rhÿs collected fragmentary versions from the following informants in 1890:

1. William Killip, Clyeen, Michael. Chant *Hop dy Naa* (Rhÿs *Diary* (Notebook 6): 95).

"He [Killip] had a good deal of knowledge of the old superstitions and he remembers as a boy going with other boys on the Eve of Læ Houna with big sticks with cabbages on the tops of them (turnips also are used in the same way) and beating at peoples' doors repeating the rhyme

[nɔ:x əi sɔuna, hɔp ðə nɛ:, hɔp ðə nɛ:  
mɛ:rax lɛ: sɔuna, tra lə lɛ:, tra lə lɛ:]

[Noght Oie Souney, Hop-dy-Naa (x2)  
mairagh Laa Souney, tra lal laa (x2)]

['tonight is *Oie Houney*, Hop dy Naa, Hop dy Naa / tomorrow is *Laa Souney*, tra lal laa'].

But nobody can explain to me "Hop ðy nē". After repeating it they used to run away, but not before much annoying some people against whom they had a grudge: it goes on still it seems" (Rhÿs *Diary* 95).

2. John Kermode, Surby, Rushen, & Richard Qualtrough, Port Erin, Rushen. Chant *Hop dy Naa* (Rhÿs *Diary* 104-105).

"Mr. Kermode and a Mr. Qualtragh who came in told me about the Hollantide practices; boys go about gathering gifts anything they can get - in the North it was sometimes potatoes - and here especially herrings: they sell them and get a toffee spree. What they sing sounds thus:

[nɔ:x əi houna, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:  
famən nə ɡɔuna, tral lal lɛ:, tral lal lɛ:  
kjalax nə kiarkən, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:] &c.

[Noght Oie Houney, Hop Tu Naa  
famman ny gouney, tra lal laa  
kellagh ny kiarkyn, Hop Tu Naa].

['tonight is Oie Houney... / tail of the heifer.../ cock or hens...'].

But there is more though they could not recollect it" (Rhÿs 6/105).

3. William Corrin, Cronk y Doonee, Rushen. Chant *Hop dy Naa* (Rhÿs *Diary* 113).

"Our informant was Billy Corrin better known as Billy Jin so called from his mother Jane. He pronounced a few words for us, but there was nothing peculiar in his pronunciation, and he gave us a more sensible form of the Hollantide rhyme than 'famyn y gowna 'the heifer's tale [sic], namely:

[nɔ:x ɔi houna, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i  
ʃivər nə ɡɔuna, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i  
kən ɡo:n marmad, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i  
ɡo:n spo:dax brɛk, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i, hɔp ðʒu nɛ:i]  
(WCn).

[Noght Oie Houney, Hop Tu Naa  
shibbyr ny gouney, Hop Tu Laa  
cre'n gouin marmayd, Hop Tu Naa  
gouin spottagh breck, Hop Tu Naa].

['tonight is Oie Houney... / supper of / for the heifer... /what heifer shall we kill... / a speckled spotted heifer...'].

There is, however, more of the same sort but he does not recollect but it is clear that " yonder lumps of boys" were bent on something more serious than gathering halfpennies or herrings ?did they at one time use to sacrifice a heifer on November Eve and feast on it" (Rhÿs *Diary* 113).

4. "Paaie Vooar" (Mrs. Margaret Taylor), Surby, Rushen. Chant *Hop dy Naa* (Rhÿs Diary 116-118).

"On the oi Howna [öi 'hõuna] the girls swept the ashes carefully into the open fireplace and flattened it down level: then in the morning they looked for a footstep in it, and if it pointed towards the door it meant a burial and if the contrary it meant a wedding - that is what she said, and it is more probable than 'a birth' as I was told in the North. I cross examined severely as to the time but she had no hesitation: it is Hollantide and I believe her quite right for her whole thought is devoted to that sort of thing. That was also the time for eating the salt herring so as to dream of the sweet-heart: the girl remembers doing it but she saw nobody, but she was readily persuaded that she had not done rightly as the roasting and the eating (bones and all) must be done without saying a single word and she ought to have walked backwards to bed. It was then also they made the "soddag valloo" or dumb cake, so called because they must not talk while making and eating it. There was the time too when the girls went with their mouth full of water and hands full of salt to the next door to listen for a man's name, which would be that of the future husband too - old Pëi corrected me by saying that it must be the second neighbour's door not the next one. Anyhow it was at Hollantide. She gave me the following version of the rhyme so far as she could remember it:

[nø:x öi hõuna	hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:
fıðə nə gõuna ("weaver" she said)	" "
kən go:n marməd	" "
ən yõ:n væg vræk	" "
kən keru verməd sə fõt dʒe:	" "
ən keru væg dʒerə	" " ]

Then I lost the thread of the yarn and it began again with

[he:st mi er ən jëuri 'I tasted of the boiling(?)'	hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:
skold mi mə hen'ə 'I scalded my tongue'	" "
ræi mi ðəðən ʃıvært 'I ran to the well'	" "
" " ]	

There is a string more which I have heard in English somewhere.

[Fair copy:

nø:x öi hõuna , hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	Noght Oie Houney, Hop dy Naa
fıðə nə gõuna, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	fıdder ny gouney, Hop dy Naa
kən go:n marməd, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	cre'n gouin marmayd, Hop dy Naa
ən yõ:n væg vræk, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	yn ghounin veg vreck, Hop dy Naa'.
kən keru verməd sə fõt dʒe:, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	cre'n kerroo vermayd sy phot jeh, HdNaa
ən keru væg dʒerə, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	yn kerroo veg jerrey, Hop dy Naa
he:st mi er ən jëuri, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	haste mee er yn gheuree, Hop dy Naa
skold mi mə hen'ə, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	scauld mee my hengey, Hop dy Naa
ræi mi ðəðən ʃıvært, hõp ðə nə:, hõp ðə nə:	roie mee dys yn çhibbyrt, Hop dy Naa.

'tonight is Oie Houney... / weaver of the heifer... / what heifer shall we kill.../ the little speckled heifer... / what quarter shall we put in the pot... / the wee end quarter... / I tasted the broth... / I scalded my tongue... / I ran to the well...'].

Another *Öi Howna* superstition practised by the girls was to place on the floors basins with mould meal, clean water, dirty water, a piece of net &c. Then the girl with her eyes banded tried her luck at the basins, if she put her hand in the clean water basin her husband was to be a good looking one, if in the mould, he was to be a farmer, if in the meal, he was to be a miller, and so on a fisherman, shoemaker, carpenter &c." (Rhÿs *Diary* 116-118).

For a fuller version of this chant see Moore (1896: 68-69).

### 3. References

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