BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANDREWS, A. C.
1949. The Bean and Indo-European Totemism. *American Anthropologist* (Menasha, Wisc.), 51, pp. 274-292.

BOYD, W. C.
1949. Note on Andrews' Bean and Indo-European Totemism. *American Anthropologist* (Menasha, Wisc.), 51, p. 679.

BRIGGS, K. M.
1957. The English Fairies. *Folklore* (London), 68, pp. 270-387.

CHASE, R. (ed.)
1943. *The Jack Tales. Houghton, Mifflin, and Company*. Cambridge, Mass.

CLARK, J. G. D.
1952. *Prehistoric Europe. The Economic Basis*. Stanford.

CHESTER, P.
1960. Letters to the Editor. *Folklore* (London), 71, pp. 205-206.

DAVIES, P.
1961. Favism. *Postgraduate Medical Journal* (London), 37, pp. 477-480.

DYER, T. F. THISELTON
1894. *The Folklore of Plants*. New York.

GILES, E.
1962. Favism, Sex-Linkage, and the Indo-European Kinship System. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* (Albuquerque, N.M.), 18, pp. 286-290.

HELBAEK, H.
1963. Late Cypriote Vegetable Diet of Apliki. *Opuscula Atheniensia* (Lund), 4, pp. 171-186.

SINISCALCO, M. L., B. LATTE BERNINI and A. G. MOTULSKY
1961. Favism and Thalassemia in Sardinia and their Relationship to Malaria. *Nature* (London), 190, pp. 1179-1180.

SKINNER, CH. M.
1911. *Myths, and Legends of Flowers, Trees, Fruits, and Plants in All Ages and in All Climes*. Philadelphia.

STEWART F. SANDERSON

Sheep-washing in the North of England

THE PRACTICE OF WASHING SHEEP in rivers or ponds in order to remove the winter's accumulation of twigs, mud and grit before shearing is one of many which have virtually disappeared from the British farming scene in the twentieth century. In the mid-1930's Professor Sigurd Erixon, in the course of what he affectionately used to refer to as "my great tour of England", witnessed one of the last of the traditional North-country "tubbings", as they were called — occasions of co-operative seasonal work and social festivity which were at one time common throughout the country from the Sussex Downs to the hill-farms of Scotland. Unfortunately, prodigious though his energy and scholarly output were, Erixon found no time to publish on this topic himself. But he always found time to encourage the younger scholars whom he befriended; and these notes for his memorial volume are accordingly offered by one of them with gratitude and affection, though only as a marginal comment on the more central themes of European ethnological research to which he devoted the major part of his attention.

In 1965 a sheep-washing was organised by some sheep-farmers in the village of Thornton Rust, near Aysgarth in Wensleydale (Yorkshire North Riding), in order that a photographic record (both ciné and stills) and sound recordings could be made for the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies in the University of Leeds. The principal farmers concerned had taken part as young men in the last sheep-washing at Thornton Rust in 1935; and although the authenticity of the record is open to the criticism that attaches to all "revivals" of traditional customs, they themselves are satisfied that all was done in the proper way. The spontaneous development of the occasion into one of general social festivity in the village — a feature mentioned by earlier writers — and the observance of another traditional practice to be mentioned hereafter '*scauping*' seem to corroborate this.

The tubbing was carried out on the southern edge of the village, where a road leading up to the fell pastures crosses a small stream, the Outgang Beck, by a ford only three or four inches deep in a normal summer. Just below the ford on a steep bank stands a stone sheep pen, entered from the roadside and with an exit overlooking the beck and some three feet in height above water level. The course of the beck is restricted by two upright stone slabs, one jutting out from the lower end of the pen and the other from the opposite bank. A barn door was placed across the gap between them and tamped with sacks and earth divots in order to dam the outfall of the beck. As the water level rose, a pool about three feet deep and fifteen to twenty across was formed below the pen.

Two men stationed themselves in the pen to pass the sheep one by one to a third man at the exit. He in turn lowered each sheep into the pool where the sheep-washer had taken up his position about six feet away. The sheep-washer thoroughly immersed each sheep, worked both hands vigorously through its fleece, and then released it to swim towards the ford. Here two other men with dogs gathered the washed sheep on the road. For the sheep-washer the work is physically very hard, and cold even in the month of June: he undoubtedly earned the customary glass of whisky and hot food brought by his wife when he emerged after two or three hours in the water.

It was observed that the sheep-washer examined each sheep's head carefully and usually performed some kind of operation on it with his thumbs. This on enquiry

proved to be *scauping*, i.e. the practice of cracking or breaking the frontal bone by applying pressure or a sharp knock where the bone is thin or porous. An informant explained that a lamb or young sheep "would not thrive" unless this were done: the purpose was to break a water-blister under the skull, which otherwise would press on the sheep's brain and eventually kill it. Others said it was to get rid of some kind of maggot in the sheep's brain. There is a condition of bone porosity called "double scalp" which is well-known to veterinary authorities, who differ however in attributing it either to mineral deficiency or to changes associated with infestation by a larval form of tape-worm found in fluid-filled cysts inside the skull[1]. The belief that *scauping* will "make the sheep thrive" is apparently widely held in the north of England and the south of Scotland.

It was interesting to note, too, how the whole village gradually became involved in the sheep-washing as a social occasion. When school was over the children came up and sat along the walls of the pen, chattering, laughing and shouting while their mothers came along to gossip. The scene recalled that of a typical Cumberland tubbing described in a letter to the editor of the *Table Book:*

> Several farmers wash their sheep at the same place; and, by that means, greatly assist each other. ... Imagine to yourself several hundred sheep scattered about in various directions; some of them enclosed in pens by the water-side; four or five men in the water rolling those about that are thrown in to them; the dames and pretty maidens supplying the "mountain dew" very plentifully to the people assembled, particularly those that have got themselves well ducked; the boys pushing each other into the river, splashing the men, and raising tremendous shouts[2].

The antiquity of the practice of sheep-washing, though undisputed, is difficult to establish; but the very full instructions "For Washinge of Sheepe" given by the 17th century Yorkshire farmer Henry Best[3] make it clear that there has been little change in the details of traditional practice between his day and ours. The 18th century poet, John Dyer, also describes a recognisable scene in his lengthy and (not unsurprisingly) little-read didactic poem on sheep and the wool trade, *The Fleece* (1757):

> "... First, howe'er,
> Drive to the double fold, upon the brim
> Of a clear view, gently drive the flock,
> And plunge them one by one into the flood:
> Plunged in the flood, not long the struggler sinks,
> With his white flakes, that glisten thro' the tide;
> The sturdy rustic, in the middle wave,
> Awaits to seize him rising; one arm bears
> His lifted head above the limpid stream,

1. For a discussion of the subject see M. L. Ryder, Sheep "Scauping". *Folk Life*, 5 (1967), pp. 100-102.
2. William Hone, *The Table Book of Daily Recreation and Information*, London, 1827-1828. My edition n.d. (?1850), pp. 694-695.
3. C. B. Robinson (ed.), *Rural Economy in Yorkshire in 1641, being the Farming Account Books of Henry Best*. Surtees Society, 33 (1857), pp. 17-20.

> While the full clammy fleece the other laves
> Around, laborious, with repeated toil;
> And then resigns him to the sunny bank,
> Where, bleating loud, he shakes his dripping locks."

while James Thompson (1700-1748), a better poet, gives a livelier and more pictorial account in *The Seasons*. Henry Best made the point that "a faire and hotte day" should always be chosen in the interests of the washers, who started work around 9 a.m. and were provided "aboute noone, or when we thinke they have neare hande halfe done," with hot possets of milk, ale, grated white bread, pepper and nutmeg. A later authority recommends placing a loaded cask in the stream, with a plank leading to it, so that the sheep-washer may remain dry[4].

In Best's day sheep were counted six score to the hundred, and each man was expected to wash one hundred, for which he would be paid 3 d. a score "yett if yow have in your keepinge 26 score, yow neede not provide above fower washers, for one goode washer will well and easily wash six score or sixe score and tenne in a day".

Commenting on the decline of the sheep-washing as early as 1909, a contributor to the *Morning Post* saw the principal cause as being the fall in the international price of wool. The difference in price between a washed and an unwashed clip was about 30 per cent. Whereas "in the halycon days of pastoral farming it was a poor year in which the sheep farmer could not gather his rent from the backs of his flock" if he sold at the top of the market, the differential became comparatively insignificant in terms of his total income "when the great foreign and colonial flock-masters began to reckon their flocks by tens of thousands" and the price of wool was in consequence reduced. This economic change affected the pattern not only of the farmers' seasonal tasks, but also of the social festivities of traditional sheep-farming communities.

4. Thomas Brown, *The Complete Modern Farmer; A Compendium of Veterinary Science and Practice*, Edinburgh 32, 904. pp. 576-577.