Forgotten Folk-Tales of the English Counties, by Ruth L. Tongue.
212 pp. Index.


It has been a long-standing English habit to compile books of folklore by reprinting and re-reprinting items from earlier collections. This is a custom which has not been followed by Ruth Tongue in assembling Forgotten Folk-Tales of the English Counties. The 106 tales comprising this collection were pieced together by Miss Tongue from half-burnt fragments of notes saved from the 1966 fire that destroyed the greater part of her folklore collections and other rescued items. As Katherine Briggs points out in her introduction, "...this is far from the professional tale-collector's method yet the matter is very like the material that a collector may find, and count himself fortunate in finding."

The 106 selections presented here are from thirty-nine counties, with the greatest number of items coming from Somerset where Miss Tongue has done the majority of her collecting. The narrators were gypsies, farm-laborers, old people, members of Women's Institutes, Civil Service workers, school-children, grooms, soldiers and clergymen. Many of the tales were written down verbatim from the tellers, others were taken from local newspaper accounts, several were sent by correspondents, and others were reconstructed from scattered notes. They are presented here in three parts of six sections each, under such headings as "Dragon Lore," "Uncanny Folk," "Witches and Saints," "Ghosts and Evil Spirits," "Legends and Folk-Tales," and "Rhozzums" (short humorous tales, often about local characters). Forgotten Folk-Tales is the rubric given to the whole collection because, as Miss Tongue explains, "many of them had been sent to me before and between the two World Wars, and some had been put by unopened in extra busy theatre work, and were indeed forgotten." Nevertheless, the dialect complexities of the tales presented here show that the stories were never completely out of mind.

These "forgotten tales" are enjoyable and are dramatically effective. Therefore, the book should appeal to that ubiquitous character known as the general reader, the audience for whom it seems to be primarily intended. Most of the scholarly apparatus with which folktale scholars equip their collections is missing. There are, for example, no type and motif numbers given for the tales. Granted, the majority of narratives are legends and therefore probably not represented in the Type Index. Yet some discernible types, such as 400* The Swan Maid, 2025 The Fleeing Pancake, and 901 Taming Of The Shrew, are present here and should be noted. There are an even greater quantity of motifs including F993 Sunken bell sounds, M341 Death prophesied, C631 Tabu: breaking the sabbath, and N85.3 Old woman helper. A number of other motifs are strewn throughout the narratives. An equally important omission is the lack of information about informants. Many of them are identified only as "a member of Kilmerston Women's Institute" or as "Guides and Rangers" or as "a scouter" or as "a soldier on leave."

True, some personal names are given, but of what real value is such identification to a researcher three thousand miles away. Perhaps more complete
information was contained in the material lost in the fire.

These weaknesses, however, do not outweigh the volume's virtues. Most of the tales have the ring of oral tradition, even though they are often remembered or reconstructed items rather than exact transcriptions. Moreover, the book provides interesting reading. But, undoubtedly, the greatest asset of Forgotten Folk-Tales of the English Counties is that it shows what harvests await the trained folklorist. Hopefully this sampling will stimulate more good folklore collecting in England.

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Reviewed by John M. Vlach.

Oral Literature in Africa will very soon become one of the most footnoted works in studies of African folklore. Ruth Finnegan, already responsible for a very important study of Limba story telling, has assembled a vast amount of bibliography to give an accounting of the kinds of folklore practiced in Africa. Africanists have long awaited a compendium of this sort by which to gauge their individual efforts and now Miss Finnegan has produced a thorough and insightful study ranging over the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. She has singled out panegyric, elegiac, and religious poetry, lyric, topical and political songs, children's songs and rhymes, prose narratives, proverbs, riddles, oratory, drum language, and drama for individual discussion with examples from over 150 tribal groups. Like any area study the presentation of material unfairly emphasizes some groups and ignores others which are worthy of the folklorist's attentions. However, this deficiency is the fault of the available data and Miss Finnegan cannot be criticized.

Oral Literature is also an important work for the student of folklore whose interests are theoretical rather than African. Though Miss Finnegan claims not to be interested in the establishment of any theoretical position, it is the opinion of this reader that she does make some statements with important theoretical implications. In her three-chapter Introduction she makes three major points: (1) that oral art can be studied as literature, (2) that a stylistic consideration of folklore is necessary, and (3) that the context of the oral form has great significance. Having stated these premises, Miss Finnegan concludes that "oral literature is only a type of literature, a type characterized by particular features to do with performance, transmission, and social context with the various implications these have for study"(page 25). Ruth Finnegan thus takes the stand in defense of a stylistic theory of folklore which encompasses technique, tradition, and culture. It is interesting that she has arrived at conclusions similar