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To cite this article: Paul Cowdell (2024) Some Unpublished Correspondence between William Forsell Kirby and William Alexander Clouston, *Folklore*, 135:2, 182-200, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.2024.2320036](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2024.2320036)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2024.2320036>



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Published online: 14 Jun 2024.



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Abstract

While neither William Forsell Kirby (1844–1912) nor William Alexander Clouston (1843–96) is entirely unfamiliar, both have been rather eclipsed in our knowledge of the early history of British folklore studies. A cache of letters from Clouston to Kirby allows us some new insight into the work of these active and significant folklore scholars and into the wider network of British and international folklorists. The letters also shed further light on the relatively undocumented life of Clouston, who died young and single.

Introduction

Folklore's emergence and consolidation as an intellectual discipline was played out in public, giving later folklorists some advantages when reflecting on our disciplinary history. Definitions and interpretations were explicitly articulated and argued in publications of collectanea as well as in analyses of tales and of other previously published material. Some partial intellectual history can be traced just through the journals and monographs of the period when folklore was arguing itself into existence, and that picture has been expanded with available archival material like the minute books of The Folklore Society (The FLS). On this basis, useful broad-sweep historical surveys have been written, with Richard Dorson's history and historical anthology still being the landmark publications for British folkloristics (Dorson 1968a, 1968b).

Such works, however, operate within certain limits, no matter how effective and important they remain. In order to shape their argument, they synthesize and streamline the available material. They remain partial, in both senses. Dorson was making a wider claim for the historical significance of the pioneering British folklorists and the end of their 'yeasty ferment' of theoretical dispute (Dorson 1968b, 469) with the implication that this required that the baton be taken up elsewhere.

To this end, he shaped his narrative around some constructions that have long seemed more convenient than accurate, most notably his putative ‘Great Team’. Our understanding of our disciplinary history remains always open to augmentation or reconsideration, not least because the archival record available to historians inevitably contains gaps. The appearance of new archival material is therefore always welcome, particularly where it relates to figures either omitted from or relatively unexplored in earlier histories.

A series of unpublished letters from William Alexander Clouston (5 October 1843–23 October 1896) to William Forsell Kirby (18 January 1844–20 November 1912) thus deserves notice. The letters are mentioned and briefly discussed in a biography of Kirby by his great-granddaughter, Ursula Kirby Brett (Brett 2020, 186–89). She focuses chiefly on what the letters tell us of Kirby’s commercial publication, centring on his translation of the *Kalevala* and the use made of his writing by Sir Richard and (particularly) Lady Isabel Burton. The letters, however, offer a wider view of the thinking of folklorists in the early years of the discipline in Britain, and this article seeks to supplement Brett’s account by commenting on that aspect of their content.¹

Clouston and Kirby

Both men were active in folklore research and in the activities of The FLS through its early years—Kirby centrally so, although his is perhaps the less familiar name now—but neither features prominently in histories of it. Neither has an entry in the invaluable *Dictionary of English Folklore* (Simpson and Roud 2000). Dorson does not mention Kirby at all, but clearly found Clouston interesting, including him among the ‘six giants’ he lastingly but misleadingly dubbed ‘the Great Team’ (Dorson 1968a, 202). Simultaneously, however, he recognized difficulties in incorporating Clouston into this team that was not a team, describing him as operating ‘off in the distance’ (Dorson 1968a, 265). In his anthology of British folklore writings, Dorson included only the other five—Edward Clodd, George Laurence Gomme, Edwin Sidney Hartland, Andrew Lang, and Alfred Nutt—in the sections dedicated to his Great Team (Dorson 1968b, 217–468). However, he wrote, ‘Under the stimulating leadership of the Great Team, The Folk-Lore Society attracted a number of brilliant scholars to its company’, and included Clouston among these subsequent ‘Society Folklorists’ (Dorson 1968b, 469–76). By 1976, Whittaker notes, Clouston had ‘definitely been relegated’ from the Great Team by Dorson (Whittaker 2004, 360 n.1).² The slight inconsistency reflects not only Dorson’s rhetorical manoeuvres, but also contemporary attitudes towards Clouston. Clouston’s peers saw him as a regrettably marginalized figure—he died young and unmarried—although he was more prolific than this might suggest (Whittaker [2004] is an invaluable biographical and bibliographical summary). Clouston was popular and intellectually generous, and peers associated his failure to achieve the success and recognition his scholarship merited with personal difficulties involving ill health and financial insecurity. An uncredited obituary in *Folklore* (written by Hartland) cemented the image: ‘Unfortunately, life to him was throughout more or less of a struggle, in which he secured but few of the rewards

that wait on worldly success' ([Hartland] 1897; for Hartland's authorship see Whittaker 2004, 360 n.2).

Dorson's enthusiasm restored Clouston's status as a scholar, but paucity of biographical detail leaves him still somewhat elusive. He participated in The FLS's intellectual life, but lived some way from the heart of its activities and social life in London. He was less integrated in the daily life of The FLS than were the rest of Dorson's 'Great Team', further underscoring the arbitrariness of Dorson's historical schemata, although the Kirby correspondence shows how he did remain in contact and discussion with its leading members. He was not entirely an outsider, but not being at the centre of things has perhaps compounded feelings that he published less than he should have (or in fact did), as well as a corresponding lack of clarity around some aspects of his thinking (Dorson 1968a, 257–65; 1968b, 470–76). Clouston was an assiduous tale scholar, who applied his wide reading to pursuing the routes of transmission of stories from Asia to Europe. He looked to 'present the genealogies of certain narratives' (Dorson 1968a, 260) rather than outline broader classificatory theories, although the direction of his efforts pointed towards diffusionism against evolutionist theories. He also extended the scope of folklore research into new areas with his work on jests and, through his extensive reading of narrative, romances from the east, largely through material germane to tales in the *Thousand and One Nights*.

Kirby, by contrast, was a prolific polymath whose important but less extensive contribution to folklore has slipped a little from view. A pioneer of English-language studies of Finnish and Estonian epic, he was the first person to produce an English translation of the *Kalevala* direct from the original rather than via intermediary translation, although this goes unmentioned in Dorson's passing references to that poem (Dorson 1968a, 380). An entomologist by profession, Kirby is now best known for his publications on Lepidoptera³ and folklore writings occupy only a small part of his prodigious output, but he was a solid and constant presence within The FLS and its Council for twenty-seven years. Observation of his death was rather muted, as his passing was overshadowed by the death the same month of Andrew Lang. Notwithstanding its extensive, deserved, and necessary focus on Lang, however, The FLS did recognize Kirby. President William Crooke moved a motion recognizing his loyal membership, his attendance at Council meetings, and his valuable contributions to the field ('Minutes of Meetings' 1913). His fame as a folklorist has declined latterly, thanks in part to the increased availability of English-language publications by Baltic scholars in the area he did so much to popularize, as well as to more recent translations of the *Kalevala*, although his is still in print (Kirby 1985). For many years, however, The FLS saluted him whenever Baltic epic was mentioned, writing on the *Kalevala*'s centenary that it was 'proud to remember that the English translator ... Mr W. F. Kirby, belonged to its Council' (Anon 1935). Ursula Brett Dommett has written two books on her great-grandfather that include reference to his folklore work, a poetic sketch (Brett 2017), and a fuller biography covering the full breadth of his career and interests (Brett 2020). The latter includes a bibliography of 250 items penned by Kirby, giving some indication of his breadth of interests and usefully identifying the non-entomological works with italicized dates (Brett 2020, 323–40).

These self-published volumes have not yet attracted the attention of folklorists and folklore historians.

The Letters

The cache of thirty letters from Clouston to Kirby between 1887 and 1895, therefore, adds interesting and useful detail to our knowledge of the discipline's early years. The letters are in a family archive held by Ursula Dommett, who discusses them briefly in her biography (Brett 2020, 186–89).⁴ I am grateful for her generosity in sharing transcripts and scans of the letters, and for discussing them. Only one letter (27 February 1895) dates outside the period 1887–91. As that letter indicates previous recent communication, this seems more likely to indicate a gap in the record than any social breach, although relations may also have declined or come under strain. The correspondence, varying in length from one paragraph to several pages, and concentrated on 1888, is a partial record of an acquaintance lasting from 1887 to Clouston's death in 1896.

The archive contains no copies of outgoing correspondence, but the incoming letters offer some insights into Clouston's thinking, demonstrating why he was so liked by his peers. They also provide glimpses of his deeper reflections on folklore, allowing us at least to complicate Whittaker's assertion that Clouston 'did not theorise about folklore nor take part in the controversy over the nature, origin and diffusion of folktales' (Whittaker 2004, 348). This is itself a slight overstatement of Hartland's assessment that Clouston 'did not enquire into the origin and meaning of the narratives; his concern was with their travels' ([Hartland] 1897). Public records provide a little information about Clouston's family background. He was the fourth of five children, having three sisters and a brother. With Clouston and, it seems, two of his sisters, remaining unmarried, such records provide little substantial biographical detail; so any insight into Clouston's personality and intellectual trajectory offered by the letters is to be welcomed. This extends to Clouston's confirmation of his birth date. In 1887 he wrote sourly: 'This is my 44th birthday—yea, verily, on the 5th October 1843, was I ushered into this scurvy world—why, I'm sure I don't know' (original emphases).

Even without the replies, these letters also shed invaluable light on Kirby's work on Finnish and Estonian tales. They indicate, as Brett notes, that Kirby 'had not ignored modern scholarship ... as his critics supposed' (Brett 2020, 186), and add another layer of detail to what we know of the public dispute about translations of Finnish epic poetry into English. Aside from such direct light on folkloristic thinking, the letters also indicate some more personal interactions and opinions. Some seemingly trivial details reveal a great deal generally about the social and professional life of that generation of folklorists, which in turn aids our understanding of the development of our discipline.

The earliest letter, 12 January 1887, appears to be the first contact between the men, with its appended comment in different ink that 'Mr Ed[ward] Clodd kindly gave me y[ou]r address'. Clouston was writing from 233 Cambridge Street, Glasgow, while Kirby was resident in Chiswick, West London (Brett 2017, 24). Clouston's

Glasgow residence may have contributed to impressions of him as somehow outside the intimacy of London circles, but the correspondence points to interactions with those circles. Kirby clearly provided a useful point of contact with London, but the reference to Clodd indicates that Clouston was not utterly isolated otherwise. In 1887 Clouston wrote that he had not been in London ‘for 15 or 16 years’, although he had lived there for six years prior to that. Even relocation within the capital, however, could disrupt direct personal contact. Kirby was turned towards the *Kalevala* in 1882–83 by Clodd, with whom he had much in common and who then lived close by. They had been planning a joint adaptation or translation of the epic, but this was curtailed when Kirby’s employer, the British Museum (Natural History), moved from central London (Russell Square) to South Kensington. Kirby and family were forced to follow it west, which, according to Kirby’s son, ‘interfered so much with the proposed collaboration between himself and Clodd, that the latter withdrew from the scheme’ (quoted in Brett 2020, 152).

At the time of the first letter, Clouston was still preparing folklore notes for Sir Richard Burton’s edition of *The Arabian Nights*, although Burton had already sought Kirby’s collaboration on this in 1885 (Brett 2020, 165). Burton finally recruited Kirby to replace Clouston in providing supplementary material. Lady Isabel Burton wrote to Kirby on 9 December 1887 that ‘I want you to do the notes for my husband’s 4th and 5th Supplementals because I prefer your style to Mr Clouston’s which is too rambling and I want them *succinct* and *concentrated*’ (original emphases). Kirby’s reply three days later—to Richard, not Isabel—expressed concern that Burton put this to Clouston ‘in such a light that he will not feel slighted in any way, for I should be sorry to offend him or hurt his feelings’ (Brett 2020, 187). Clouston’s letters to Kirby reveal bafflement at Burton, but are notably without acrimony for the man drafted in to replace him. When Kirby’s appendix to the tenth and final volume of Burton’s edition of the *Thousand and One Nights* was published (Kirby 1886), Clouston, whose work it referenced, wrote to congratulate Kirby on his ‘very able & interesting essay’. In light of Clouston’s pursuit of individual tale genealogies, noted earlier, it is worth acknowledging Brett’s suggestion that Kirby’s bibliographic work here is modelled on Linnean entomological taxonomies (Brett 2020, 173–74).

Clouston keenly followed references to his own work. His next letter (27 February 1887) wondered about the authorship of a *Daily News* leader on ‘International Jokes, apparently suggested by some pages of the introduction to my “Popular Tales”’ (the reference is to Clouston 1887), which he described as ‘An able article from the writer’s point of view—Mr Andrew Lang, I wonder?’ Given some of his remarks about Lang, discussed in the following, it is important to note Clouston’s respect for him, describing, for example, Lang’s introduction to Perrault’s *Fairy Tales* as ‘excellent’. Clouston’s frequent speculation about possible authorship of anonymous reviews indicates wide familiarity with contemporary scholars: ‘I do believe I have to thank Mr Clodd for his all-too favourable notice of my new book in “Knowledge”. At all events, it is his style.’⁵ Such comments reveal not just erudition, but also the anxieties of a precarious freelancer. Early in 1888 he offered Kirby advice on publishing deals, cautioning against the ‘bad plan’ of selling copyright up front which

he had been forced to adopt from expediency—although, as Ursula Dommett observes, Kirby ‘probably knew his way around the publishing world better than Clouston [having] spent the first six years of his working life employed by publishers and booksellers, Williams and Norgate’ (pers. commun., 23 November 2020: see Brett 2020, 24–25). The financial precariousness recognized by his contemporaries lurks throughout the correspondence.

Tale Analogues and Comparison

The first letter outlines what would form the main content of their future correspondence (and the main interest for folklore historians), namely reflections on analogues of stories in the collections of interest to them both. Clouston’s praise for Kirby bears directly on his reflections on folkloristics: ‘I doubt if there is another man in this country who could have done the task half so well—it couldn’t be done at all on the continent, I suspect’. This was no flattery or nationalist boasting, but a claim based on his overview of international scholarship and methodology. Clouston was equally pleased to be recognized in turn, as when Paulus Cassel sent him a copy of his book *Mischle Sindbad, Secundus Syntipas*. Cassel, a German Jewish convert to Christianity, wrote extensively on Jewish and biblical history. His *Mischle Sindbad*, a study of a German adaptation of Arabic Sinbad tales which examined Jewish contributions to medieval folklore, included the prefatory comment that the author hoped later ‘to make fuller use’ of Clouston’s *Book of Sindibad*. Kirby also expressed to an international scholar a reluctance to succumb to jingoism, reportedly telling Kaarle Krohn in 1912 that God stands above nationalism (Brett 2017, 36). This was not just a religious position. Kirby’s wife was German, and the gathering war clouds caused his family particular anxiety (Brett 2020, 273–77).

Clouston’s letter set a pattern. He filled gaps that Kirby had recognized, identified some he had not, and doggedly pursued individual case studies. When Kirby could not identify the first appearance of the story of the miser Casem and his slippers, Clouston declared, ‘I can inform you’. This was not showing off, but collaboratively participating in research. Clouston pointed Kirby to the story’s appearance in Denis Dominique Cardonne’s 1770 *Mélanges de Littérature Orientale*, adding ‘where [Cardonne] took it from you will find probably in his book; I haven’t a copy beside me’. He suggests a tale collection not included by Kirby, and corrects a description of Terrick Hamilton’s 1820 edition of *Antar: A Bedoueen Romance* from the copy before him. Clouston may on occasion have taken for granted the extent of such collaboration, problematically reproducing Kirby’s ‘Keg of Butter’ story in *Notes & Queries* without prior permission, which was ‘naughty of him’ (Dommett, pers. commun., 6 June 2022).

This was not one-way traffic. Writing of the story ‘Tuhfet El Culoub’, published in the 1824–40 Breslau edition of the *Thousand and One Nights*, Kirby claimed it had ‘points of resemblance’ (Kirby 1886, 491) with both the tale of the ‘Labourer & Flying Chair’ in Jonathan Scott’s selection from the *Arabian Nights* (Scott 1800) and a Persian story. Clouston sought clarification, saying he had ‘failed to discover any’ of these

suggested resemblances, and also suggesting an earlier source in the *Panchatantra*. That Kirby took the comments as they were intended and responded in kind is shown by a letter six weeks later suggesting Clouston had received at least two replies enclosing material and plugging him into a network of other scholars in the interim. Clouston's second letter (27 February 1887) opens, 'I was much pleased to hear from you again, & not to keep Mr. Ellis' letter too long, I now send it back herewith'. 'Ellis' seems to be A. G. Ellis, Honorary Librarian of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, described in Kirby's 'Contributions' as 'My friend ... an Oriental scholar' (Kirby 1886, 470). His letter contained details of Cardonne's source for the story discussed in Clouston's opening letter.

Erotica and the Risqué

The second letter introduces another aspect of Clouston's writing that, given the association with Burton, is striking. He mentions Ellis's desire for an English translation of the classic of Arab erotica, the *Perfumed Garden*. Clouston, who was not securely enough employed to feel financially comfortable, was aware of the cost of the edition Ellis mentioned (having been lent a copy by the translator), and recommended waiting 'till Burton (or a friend) issues a fresh translation'. (This suggestion would gain some poignancy after Burton's death, as we shall see.) Clouston then moved onto the volume's contents. Unlike the *Kama Sutra* and the *Ananga Raga*, he wrote, it is 'full of racy stories which are not related in an offensive way', contrasting it with a Persian abridgement of the *Ananga Ranga* known to him, of which 'The pictures are very *graphic*'.

On Eastern erotica—Burton's specialism—Clouston emerges as knowing but not judgemental. He shows a wide-ranging acceptance of folkloric materials, recognizing their value and the need for their inclusion in full: we later find him hoping a 2/6 edition of the *Heptameron* is 'not castrated'. He displays a detached amusement that some avid subscribers may well have had interests more prurient than scholarly. Having 'glanced at the separately printed & uncastrated collection' of Basil Hall Chamberlain's 'Aino Folklore' that had just appeared in the *Folk-Lore Journal*, he wrote, he 'found nothing particularly obscene—that is, compared with the *Kama Sutra*, the *Perfumed Garden*, and the *Ananga Ranga*! I know an old gentleman here who has ordered a copy—and I chuckle to think how he'll be disappointed!' (that 1888 letter refers to Chamberlain 1888a; the fuller edition was published as Chamberlain 1888b).

He is often light-hearted on such topics. Of Lady Burton's decision not to include Kirby's 'Contributions' and Comparative Table in her new edition of the *Arabian Nights* he wrote: 'It would perhaps hardly do to insert a Table of contents that has in it "How such a one broke wind", especially as the Queen is supposed to read the work!!' He did not confine his attention here to Eastern material, describing the *Novelle* of Anton Francesco Doni as 'mostly very smutty'. He wrote elsewhere at finding 'highly amusing' what he regarded as 'evidently a type blunder' in Allibone and Clark's list of tales. I have been unable to identify this work: it possibly refers to

the American historian and novelist Thomas Allibone Janvier, who spent time in Provence and later worked with the illustrator Walter Appleton Clark. What amused Clouston, ‘arising probably from the second word being indistinctly written’, was a reference to ‘seven virgins’. The mistake may possibly have stemmed from misreading the French *verges* (yards) as *vierges* (virgins).

Where Kirby was ‘an avowed theist’ (Brett 2020, 127), Clouston’s letters show a sturdy rationalism, first expressed in a typically sardonic way. On 23 December 1887 he pledged to return a book after Christmas because there is ‘no use sending book packets at this ~~curr.~~ blessed time,—when the Post Office is overworked with “Parcels” for “dear” friends. But though I’m no believer in superstitious, priest-begotten “times of seasons” that doesn’t hinder me from wishing that you may have many, many happy and prosperous years to come’. Over their acquaintance, sufficient intimacy developed for Clouston to be more forthright. Some notes in 1890 address points raised over Clouston’s study of Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*. Clouston calls magical mirrors ‘an artful imposition, so far as describing dead or distant & unknown persons, anyhow, which is absolutely impossible, according to my creed—or non-creed, if I may use such a term’.

Clouston was particularly scornful of the turn to Theosophy and Eastern mysticism by former socialist Annie Besant, writing that the ‘feathers of my quill-pen turn up in disgust at having to write her name!’ (This may have been more sensitive in London, as her brother-in-law Walter Besant was then on The FLS Council.) He wrote to Kirby in 1891, ‘I trust your fine intellect has not fallen into the snares of modern “Theosophy”!’ Kirby’s theism was informed by an earlier study of Spiritualism and Swedenborgianism (Brett 2020, 123–33), so he may have been less hostile than Clouston thought. Where Clouston wrote that ‘Science—true science—must *begin* its investigations with *matter* & it will never get *beyond* it’ (original emphases), Kirby saw ‘no real conflict between Religion and Science’ (quoted in Brett 2020, 133).

Clouston’s Thinking on Folklore and Polygenesis

Clouston’s working method was always ‘to display parallels, in extended quotations or summaries, and to let the readers draw whatever conclusions they felt were warranted’, thus creating ‘a virtually unparalleled corpus of analogues and story and motif comparisons in a manner that was at once both scholarly and entertaining’ (Whittaker 2004, 350). Dorson saw in Clouston’s exhaustive pursuit of individual stories and their components a foreshadowing of the tale-type and motif indexes (Dorson 1968a, 260). These letters show this at a personal level, referring Kirby not just to unpublished germane material, but also to existing relevant collections. Some were Clouston’s own compilations, like his articles on folktale analogues in the *Canterbury Tales*, published alongside work by F. J. Furnivall and E. Brock (Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston 1888). He also sent Kirby cuttings of some of his *Notes & Queries* contributions.

Whittaker describes Clouston’s books as ‘relatively theory-free’, as they were implicitly compiled to demonstrate the Eastern origins of stories, although this itself

embodies a theoretical position (Whittaker 2004, 350). The correspondence reveals a comprehensive reading of contemporary folklore research focused on—but not restricted to—tales. Further, Clouston’s offer of references to his own compilations does demonstrate the theorizing behind his ideas. His letter of 4 June 1887 may be the most important explanation of that yet available to us. To Clouston’s mention in print of the ‘horrible mode of putting a culprit to death’ by cutting them in two (Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston 1888, 394), Kirby had clearly suggested an analogue in the Talmudic and post-biblical tradition of Isaiah being ‘fastened between the boards & sawn asunder’. Clouston’s letter acknowledged the comparison, which he thought ‘a common practice in Asiatic countries formerly’, but he wrote that he considered the original reference simply to splitting a victim with ‘an extremely sharp & well-tempered scimitar’, citing another reference from his own publications. This should add some nuance to Whittaker’s claim that ‘it is certainly true that he did not investigate [folktales’] meaning’ (Whittaker 2004, 350).

The letters show Clouston reading and thinking hard about folklore scholarship and developing positions of his own, which may not survive to us in directly articulated form. He described Hartland’s *Science of Fairy Tales* as ‘a capital book, albeit I don’t agree with all his conclusions’, while praising Hartland’s ‘masterly & conscientious’ work. Clouston was also critical of ‘by far the greater number’ of members of The FLS, who, he thought, ‘care very little for the science of folklore, & pay their guinea annually because they get more than their money back in the shape of books issued by the Society!’ This is all the more pointed as Clouston, although a regular contributor to the journal and clearly engaged through Kirby in discussion with leading members of The FLS, does not appear in its membership lists.

Clouston’s letter moves onto his discussion of ‘Asiatic and European version of *The Man of Law’s Tale*’ (Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston 1888, 365–414), offering the most important clarification of his positions on the diffusion and origin of tales. Clouston, as Whittaker notes, took no part in public arguments on this, but he was certainly interested, writing here that ‘The Jonah legend is spread all over the world, & its origin is well worth investigating’, and quite prepared in correspondence to state a position. In his *Man of Law’s Tale* article, Clouston had mentioned Nicholas Trivet’s *Life of Constance*. Of that, and William Tell tales, he told Kirby:

Mr Clodd may be right, that such things found in many countries never happened at all; but I hope he does not claim for the several versions *independent inventions*. This, at all events, will never do in the case of *written* stories which can be traced, in many cases, from one book to another. Moreover, in *all* folk-lore⁶, I am of opinion that mankind are more inclined to adopt or adapt what has already been invented than to set about inventing for themselves. But this is a *quæstio vexata*, & I’ll say no more about it here. (Original emphases)

The final withdrawal from discussion may be frustrating, but this indicates familiarity with the public dispute. More interesting is his firm rejection of polygenesis, and his understated view of literary transmission. Returning to Clodd’s discussion of William Tell tales a month later, Clouston suggested that the Irish-American novelist Thomas Mayne Reid (1818–83) had adapted the legend ‘to his purpose’, that is, for literary reasons, in his novels of American colonial life.

Notwithstanding that—and his firm opposition to polygenetic origins—he could also write, ‘But there seems to me nothing more likely than the same sort of thing to have often happened in widely separated places, especially among semi-savage races who have always prided themselves in expert archery’. He points to similar Turkish and Persian legends, and provides modern comparison in stories of the marksmanship of American backwoodsmen. Correspondence with Kirby here stands in for discussion with Clodd himself. From Glasgow, Clouston addresses Kirby in London, knowing that Kirby is discussing with others there. In September 1887 he wrote explicitly, ‘I refer you & Mr Clodd to a note of mine ...’.

Contemporaries linked Clouston with the thinking of Theodor Benfey (Dorson 1968a, 258). On the basis of the circulation of stories once written, Benfey tended to over-emphasize the earliest ‘literary redactions of a tale’ over later orally transmitted variants, in Kaarle Krohn’s words (Dundes 1999, 43). Clouston, however, recognized transmission more cautiously, covering only movement ‘from one book to another’. More significant, perhaps, is his view of continual adaptiveness and reuse by folk narrators, which would seem to allow for the continued reincorporation of oral material into the written record.

Even if intended to argue for diffusion of any story from a single point of origin, this would at least avoid Benfey’s over-emphasis on earliest literary publication. This is expressed in Clouston’s reiteration of method later in the same letter, writing about discussions with Francis Hindes Groome, author of *In Gipsy Tents*, who had forwarded via his publisher ‘a number of *genuine* Gipsy folk-tales. I advise him to publish all he has collected, and thus add to the fast-increasing material over which comparative “storiologists” may wrangle—with the ultimate result, possibly, of us getting at a few *facts*’ (original emphases)—the last word underscored three times. Again, this does not so much contradict Whittaker’s claim that Clouston was compiling ‘to let the readers draw whatever conclusions they felt were warranted’ as give it greater depth (Whittaker 2004, 350).

Folklore and Literature

This letter also introduces Clouston’s consideration of what we might now describe as ‘folkloresque’ adaptations and representations in literary works.⁷ He mentions Robert Southey’s *Thalaba*, ‘his best & perhaps only meritorious production; yet, like [Thomas] Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*, the materials are all derived at second hand’. He does not seem to find this material inherently interesting, but he recognizes its public position as allegedly reflecting traditional material. ‘How far can Hans Andersen’s *Fairy Tales* be trusted as genuine folk-tales?’ he asked. ‘Not far, I guess’, writing later that ‘I don’t think any of Hans Andersen’s tales are of his own invention—they are Norse legends embellished by him to suit *modern* children’s taste’ (original emphasis). When Kirby noted an analogue of a noodle story found in a novel by George MacDonald, Clouston wrote dismissively that ‘I ... don’t intend’ to read any of his novels ‘while thousands of better books remain unread by me’.

He was not hostile to literature. Clouston defended the accuracy of a reference to Lord Lytton's 1842 novel *Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale* as it was 'written with the book before me, & open at the passage', and he had recently read it 'for the 3rd or 4th time'. This letter (12 November 1890) is highly suggestive for students of the folkloresque. Clouston thought *Zanoni* written 'in imitation of [Alexandre] Dumas' *Joseph Balsamo*', about the occultist Cagliostro, but that Lytton had prepared 'by a long course of reading in the works of celebrated necromancers, astrologers &c &c'. Clouston saw this as Lytton's attempt to distance himself from the possible accusation of having invented such things, which would point to the requirement that the work be seen to reflect folklore somehow, even at a remove. Lytton's purported breadth of reading also allows Clouston a jibe at Lang and his 'usual superficiality': 'It has often seemed to me that Lang is credited with far more knowledge of folk-tales & all that sort of thing than he really possesses'. That letter further confirmed Clouston's general interest in literature—he had suggested Kirby as a possible subscriber to a 'striking' plaster medallion of novelist Wilkie Collins—and his interest in occult discussions.

The Kalevala and Controversy

The letter of 28 September 1887 gives the first sense not only of Kirby's interactions within The FLS, but also of his own developing folklore work. Clouston is making commercial publishing suggestions, offering an introduction to the Blackwoods' publishing house, but Kirby's interest in Baltic folklore is already prefigured in a reference to 'your translation of the German collection of Finnish tales'. Given the dispute about translations in which Kirby would shortly be embroiled, this is significant. Clouston did not criticize Kirby for working from an intermediate language, a question that would dominate his work on the *Kalevala*. His letter also underscores just how pioneering Kirby's studies were. Clouston's outline plan for approaching Blackwoods emphasizes this, advising Kirby to tell them both of his support and that 'the popular Finnish Tales are quite unknown in this country'. He placed this comment in the context of wider folkloristic debate about origins and transmission, writing that

in view of the bran-new [*sic*] theory, that our European languages do not point to a Sanskrit source or Aryan, but *Finnish*, these Tales, apart from their interest to the mere reader for amusement are likely to be of value to English philologists and story-comparers. (Original emphasis)

That such a voracious assimilator of comparative material as Clouston did not know the source book is itself an indication of just how ground-breaking Kirby's work was, but this comment is important for other reasons, as it confirms Clouston's enthusiasm for providing as wide a range of sources as possible. It also corrects slightly any suggestion that Clouston was shaping material to argue Eastern origins for tales, and expands his view of transmission beyond 'the network ... between Asia and Europe', even if 'that field still today remains largely his own' (Dorson 1968a, 264).

Two weeks later we see the first inkling of Kirby's plan to translate the *Kalevala*, one of his most enduring contributions to folklore. Its international impact can be estimated from a later reprint, which incorporated observations by Kaarle Krohn and Aino Malmberg into Kirby's own endnotes (Kirby 1985). Kirby originally intended to work from Anton Schiefner's German translation, a plan that would generate much discussion and disagreement, although that was still ahead at this juncture. Saying he was 'much interested', Clouston promised to assist with subscribers as far as possible. Expressing satisfaction that future MP John Bamford Slack and Burton's publisher Leonard C. Smithers had subscribed, he promised to 'do what I can to get others *practically* interested in so important & unique a work as it promises to be' (original emphasis) and urged patience: 'the Finnish Tales & Kalevala will not spoil by taking things easy'.

The two projects were at different stages, as another letter that month showed. Clouston was rearranging Kirby's manuscript of the Finnish Tales 'to render it more presentable to Blackwoods'. Noting the anticipated similarity to Slav tales, Clouston wrote that for his 'notes to be of any scientific value we must go much farther afield'. He had, he said, already 'seen enough to convince me that the collection is both interesting and important'. A month later he called it 'a capital collection'.

Discussion of Kirby's proposed *Kalevala* was rapidly overtaking developments, however, as his prospectus had attracted much attention and criticism of its specimen draft canto (Brett 2017, 26–27). The dispute, played out in the *Athenæum*, involved many prominent literary and folkloristic figures (Brett 2020, 181–86). With hindsight, it concerned the desirability of translation directly from the Finnish rather than from a German version (Branch 1985, vii), the argument of, *inter alios*, Edmund Gosse, Max Müller, and Andrew Lang. (The agreement of these last two on anything is itself noteworthy.) The reactions of Kirby's main supporters—Burton and Clouston—suggest it was not seen in these terms at the time. Burton thought Kirby's 'polemicists might have a rival translation in mind' (Brett 2017, 27), with Clouston agreeing in April 1888 ('I think Burton is likely to be right'). The American John Martin Crawford's translation (from the German) did indeed become the first English edition of the *Kalevala*, although to Kirby goes the distinction of the first English translation made direct from the Finnish.

Kirby's translation, inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), retained the Finnish trochaic tetrameters. Longfellow's metrical inspiration had been Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, and he had learned some Finnish in Sweden in 1835 (Calhoun 2004, 108). Promoting his translation project in 1888, Kirby identified the *Kalevala* as 'the root source of inspiration for *Hiawatha*', in Brett's words (Brett 2020, 189). The rhymed metre gives epic poetry an affected and artificial character in English, which has made Kirby's translation dated, but Kirby was evidently serious about his study. In 1889 Clouston offered to obtain a book of Hiawatha legends for him, having himself written to Longfellow in 1880.

Clouston's 15 April 1888 letter draws out another aspect of the dispute. He found Kirby's *Athenæum* opponents 'very narrow-minded and *impractical*' (original emphasis), objecting chiefly to the absence of any English version at all. Gosse had

suggested ‘that unless a translation is made direct from the Finnish original, the German versions will do well enough’, which Clouston thought ‘sheer nonsense’: ‘Why are we to go forever to a foreign language for our knowledge of the literatures of different peoples? Granted that German is known to many readers in this country, are there not a far greater number of intelligent folks who are ignorant of German?’ Clouston was insisting primarily on *accessibility*, a repeated point informative of his attitude to public dissemination. When Kirby had criticized his use of the word ‘fairy’ rather than ‘peri’, Clouston acknowledged the technical correctness but defended himself on the grounds of general comprehension: ‘what better term than Fairy for the comprehension of the average general reader? If a man would be *read* by “all sorts & conditions of men”, he must use words everybody understands’ (original emphasis).

Suspension of Kirby’s *Kalevala* and Personal Tensions in Publication

Despite Clouston’s encouragement, Kirby temporarily set the *Kalevala* project aside. Family tradition suggests Kirby was distressed by the dispute (Brett 2017, 27), but the correspondence indicates no immediate suspension of the project. On 25 March 1888 Clouston inquired about subscriptions, and he expressed pleasure in December that the work was progressing. Crawford’s translation had appeared by then, as Clouston also asked about a review he had not yet seen. Kirby was taking stock, however. He learned Finnish, and corresponded with Julius Krohn, and later his sons Kaarle and Ilmari, and the Finnish Literary Institute, who seem to have encouraged him to resume the translation (Brett 2017, 34), which was eventually published in 1907. He had continued working on Baltic epic poetry in the interim, learning Estonian and producing his other major translation (the *Kalevipoeg*) for the two-volume *The Hero of Esthonia* [sic] (Kirby 1895). Brett identifies the turn to Estonian lore as triggered by the 1891 International Folklore Congress in London, but Kirby was already interested and connecting the Estonian and Finnish material. In 1890 Clouston acknowledged his ‘Esthonian tale of the Mermaid’. Kirby gave his paper on Estonian folklore collections at the 1891 Congress ‘at the request of’ Kaarle Krohn, who was unable to attend (Jacobs and Nutt 1892, 427), and hosted Ilmari Krohn, who was. In his preface to *The Hero of Esthonia* Kirby referred to his ‘intention of publishing a critical English edition of [the *Kalevala*] on which I am still engaged’ (Kirby 1895, ix); it is thus possible that he was only ever refocusing rather than sidelining the project. Kirby had been in poor health, and his beloved wife fell ill, eventually dying in 1893. In 1904, resuming work on the translation, he wrote to Kaarle Krohn of the ‘various impediments’ to the project: ‘from the attack made upon me in The Athenaeum by a London Professor who blamed me for proposing to translate it in the first instance from the German instead of direct from the Finnish, to the loss of my wife’s sympathy and encouragement, and the constant pressure of scientific work’ (quoted in Brett 2020, 249).

However, the dispute over the translation had placed a question mark over what was being done. An unsigned short note in the letters, dated only ‘April 1888’, states,

'Some uncertainty having been expressed respecting the scope of the proposed work, it may be well to add that the translation will be revised throughout from the Finnish text, and annotated from Finnish and other sources'. We cannot be certain, but this probably refers to the Finnish Tales rather than the *Kalevala* proposal. Clouston remained encouraging, however, appealing in March 1889 to Kirby's expertise as a possible contributor to the new edition of *Chambers' Encyclopaedia*. (He later apologized for not having been able to 'get you placed for it'.) In 1891 he again inquired of progress on the *Kalevala*, writing, 'I trust you have not shelved it, after so much study & research'.

Clouston knew the internal politics and personal tensions of scholarly publication from his experience with Burton. In April 1888, two weeks before expressing his agreement with Burton's assessment of the *Athenæum* dispute, Clouston wrote to Kirby of his exclusion from the *Arabian Nights*. He handled it sensitively, given that Isabel Burton had solicited Kirby as his replacement. 'Before the rupture', Burton announced he would require notes for volume five but not volume four, and Clouston now found it 'very strange' that Kirby had been asked for notes to both. Clouston remained perplexed, pondering three months later about Kirby apparently not having written notes to the fourth volume 'tho' you purposed doing so'.

Andrew Lang and Sir Richard Burton

The correspondence is dotted with Clouston's personal observations and opinions on his contemporaries, adding much to our appreciation of interactions and relations at the period. As we have seen, Burton's rejection did not affect Clouston's regard for his colleague's scholarship, but the letters do augment our view of the orientalist. Burton's reputation is well known so it is unsurprising to find Clouston, wry about risqué publication, regarding Burton's inclusion of some tales left untranslated in *Sheykh-Zāda* (1886) simply as an attempt to 'add a little spice'. Clouston's description of Burton as 'a queer man, full of inconsistencies & contradictory things' is consistent with other opinions, but he offers an example. Burton, Clouston wrote, 'once pretended' to him that a biography (Hitchman 1887) 'was done without his sanction' even while he was supplying the author with materials. (Clouston called Hitchman a 'poor toady'.) Burton had a change of heart after publication and the book was withdrawn, although Lady Burton then plundered it for her own 'official' biography in 1893.

Clouston's comments shine a personal light on contemporary folklorists, and on Clouston himself. Sharpness is reserved chiefly for Burton and Lang, although personal feeling does not overstep decency. Perhaps surprisingly, given the dispute with Burton, Clouston is more hostile towards Lang, but even his sharpest digs rest on a touching nobility. He expressed a malicious glee that Lang was 'much chagrined' not to have been reappointed Gifford Lecturer at St Andrews. Citing an anonymous informant at the university—'who, I can candidly confess, doesn't seem to *like* the great Andrew' (original emphasis)—Clouston commented on Lang's 'usual superficiality': 'It is actually said that his "discourses" were so shallow & uninteresting that his audience

latterly dwindled down to some 3 or 4'. Amusement at Lang's expense notwithstanding, and despite his own even greater financial dependence on being identified publicly and commercially as a folklore expert, Clouston was defending a nobler view of their common pursuit. In a touching passage, Clouston wrote that, according to his source, Lang

is said to have grown of late years much 'stuck-up' & jealous of every man who is in the folk-lore 'line' of 'business'. If this be so, he stands absolutely alone; for sure am I there's no class of literary or scientific students more free from such paltry feelings.

Clouston's discussion of both men in his letter of 12 November 1890, written shortly after Burton's death on 20 October, also says much about his own view of folklore and folklorists. He wrote that Lang shared with Burton, whom Clouston knew better, that 'useful, but questionable, knack' of assimilating other scholars' work and passing it off as his own. That letter gives additional insight into the controversies around Burton's death.

Clouston reported a letter from Burton's old friend Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot detailing Isabel Burton's response to her husband's fatal heart attack. Burton described himself as an atheist, but identified his upbringing with the Church of England, which he called 'officially my church' (Wright 1906, 37). Isabel was a Catholic, and Clouston was not alone in being scandalized by her actions: '*when he was insensible* Lady B caused extreme unction to be given to him, hence the Roman Catholic (temporary) burial' (Clouston's emphasis). Burton's family were even less forgiving. His niece insisted Burton was already dead when the priest arrived (Stisted 1970, 414). Mentioning that Lady Burton was now arranging her affairs to return to England, where Burton would be buried permanently, Clouston predicted accurately enough how Burton would be treated by a church to which he had never adhered: 'No doubt, as in the case of [lexicographer Émile] Littré, the Church of Rome will claim the renowned Haji Abdallah as being of their "communion of saints".' (Haji Abdallah was the Arab merchant disguise adopted by Burton for his Somaliland Expedition of 1854–55.) However rueful, Clouston retained his humour: Burton, he wrote, 'would have made an *excellent* saint' (original emphasis).

The second Catholic interment created a schism between Lady Burton and many of Burton's friends and family, who were appalled at his misrepresentation in death and boycotted the event. Stisted called it 'a painful sequel to a noble death' (Stisted 1970, 415). At the time of Clouston's letter, however, that was still ahead, and the full impact of Isabel Burton's reaction to her husband's death was yet to be seen. Clouston was interested in Burton's literary remains, telling Kirby he thought it 'doubtful' Burton had 'left anything *complete* in the shape of literary work' (original emphasis), but was aware of several ongoing projects, including on erotic classical poetry. Lady Burton's religious convictions led her to destroy some, at least, of her husband's papers. She has been vilified for this, although the extent of her destruction has been overstated. Clouston was most interested in Burton's outstanding manuscripts and unpublished works, some of which have not survived. He quotes Arbuthnot's (unsuccessful) intention of obtaining the manuscript of Burton's second translation of the *Perfumed Garden*. His earlier translation had

omitted the homosexual material, and Burton considered the complete translation both his most important testament and a source of revenue for Lady Burton, who had been offered six thousand guineas for it. Clouston wondered whether Lady Burton would hand them over 'now that, according to her faith, her *cara sposa* lies in "the odour of sanctity"'. She did not. Clouston was also interested in a translation of Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone*, which Burton had told him in 1886 was 'three parts done'. Clouston found this particularly interesting as a source text ('I could furnish notes of analogues &c'). With his repeated emphasis on accessibility, he thought it valuable because it had not yet been fully translated into English.

Clouston's Personal Difficulties

The letters show repeatedly this commitment to as thorough a publication, dissemination, and consideration of folklore as possible, which also had financial implications for the freelance writer. He told Kirby that Chambers' *Encyclopaedia* pay rate (two guineas per page) was 'by no means bad if one got plenty of the work', but the publisher was now cutting down on contributions. In 1891 Clouston was in straitened circumstances, saying he was going to have stop sending pieces to *Notes & Queries* because they 'bring in no money'. He eventually had to request a loan until a cheque arrived from his publisher. Kirby, we know from Clouston's acknowledgement, speedily obliged.

Clouston spared neither himself nor Kirby from his wry observations. In 1891 he corrected a misunderstanding caused by being 'misled by your caligraphy [*sic*], dear boy, so blame yourself'. His criticism of the handwriting of Kirby and others is tempered by regular complaints about problems with his eyes. In 1895 he wrote that he had 'injured' his eyes two years earlier trying to decipher the 'almost microscopic' text of a fifteenth-century mnemonic Bible, but they had troubled him long before that. In early 1888 he wrote of his eyes having improved after a holiday. Barely a month later he again had to take time off because of eye pain.

The need to rest his eyes conflicted with his need to work, and may have exacerbated what seems like some domestic disorganization. Sometimes no personal blame can be attached, as when he returned a book lent by Kirby with the mortified confession that his cat had knocked a bottle of ink over on it. Several letters, however, refer to misplacing paperwork. On one occasion he rediscovered some notes from Kirby 'by chance' following another bout of ill health. Earlier, he had mislaid some notes he had written for Kirby, insisting optimistically, 'They can't be lost, however'.

The correspondence reveals the additional tensions placed on an evidently sensitive and thoughtful man by his personal situation. His eyes were not his only health concern, and there are repeated references to attempts to recuperate. The first direct reference to his health comes in a letter of December 1887: 'I have been far from well, since I got your last letter, but am now somewhat better'. This may support the reading that Kirby was already aware of some health issues, although that must remain interpretation. Clouston's health problems created a vicious cycle:

he fell ill through overwork, fell behind because he was ill, then was forced to overwork to catch up. In August 1889 he wrote that he had been ill for nearly three months and was 'weak as a cat' from strong medication, but most of his ailments had been alleviated apart from the 'often excruciating' rheumatism. Given the ongoing cycle of problems with his eyes this was optimistic (three months later he wrote of the last 'six months of torture'), and later letters reported continued problems with rheumatism and sore eyes, not to mention sleep disrupted by the pain.

It was clearly an agonizing situation, and he sought refuge in holidays and rural retreats where he could. His last letter here (27 February 1895) was the only one not written from Glasgow, but from a 'rural spot' outside the city, West Balgrochan, Torrance of Campsie. He had gone there in May 1894 'After many vicissitudes', intending to spend a fortnight with a married sister, Margaret Ann Walker (not named in the letter), but stayed on. For all the holidays and rural relocation, Clouston's health was clearly worsening, and he died the following year.

Conclusion

The paucity of biographical detail otherwise available about Clouston makes these letters invaluable in and of themselves. Their relative focus, however, allows us also to cast a closer eye on another unjustly neglected folklorist of the period, Kirby, as well as giving some insight into relationships within and around The FLS in its early years. It is perhaps too much to hope that further, similar tranches of correspondence may continue to turn up, but it should give us some hope that we may yet find more information about our forebears, their ways of thinking, and their ways of working.

Acknowledgements

While authorial responsibility is mine alone, this article would have been impossible without the generosity, support, and assistance of Ursula Dommett, whose contribution is evident throughout. That the article has taken so long to reach completion reflects numerous health problems on both sides, and I thank her above all for her patience. I am especially grateful to her for sharing these invaluable documents and discussing them so enthusiastically and warmly. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers at *Folklore* for their stimulating comments, and the helpful support of Jessica Hemming and Antone Lanatà Minard. Finally, I should acknowledge Margaret Lyngdoh's incomparable encouragement during revision of this article. This contributed nothing material to its content, but if the Clouston-Kirby correspondence demonstrates anything it is the significance for our study and thinking of friendship and social interaction between scholars.

Notes

¹ I am grateful to Ursula Dommett for allowing me sight of the documents. I follow her usage here, retaining her married name for personal correspondence and her family pen name for her publications.

- ² I appreciate, too, the anonymous reader's point that Dorson's historiography and his decision-making process also deserve systematic review and reappraisal.
- ³ I am grateful to Matthias Forshage of the Swedish Natural History Museum for his discussion on Kirby.
- ⁴ Copyright in correspondence belongs to the sender's estate. Clouston was not the only one of his siblings to die unmarried and/or childless. Despite our efforts, neither Ursula Dommett nor I have been able to trace any residuary heirs, with the bloodline apparently ending in the United States in 1963.
- ⁵ The reference is to the review (dated 2 May 1887) of *Popular Tales* (Clouston 1887) in *Knowledge: An Illustrated Magazine of Science, Literature, & Art* 10, n.s. 2 (October 1886–November 1887), 163–64.
- ⁶ The word is split across two lines in the letter. I have retained the hyphen, as Clouston hyphenates it elsewhere in the letter.
- ⁷ Although directed towards contemporary mass culture, the concept is also useful for earlier interactions with popular and literary cultural forms. The interested reader should start with Foster and Tolbert (2016).

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