

Fading and Fadow

Author(s): M. M.

Source: *All Ireland Review*, Vol. 2, No. 46 (Jan. 18, 1902), p. 401

Published by: All Ireland Review

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20545781>

Accessed: 20-06-2016 04:43 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



All Ireland Review is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *All Ireland Review*

"FADING AND FADOW."

TO THE EDITOR ALL IRELAND REVIEW.

DEAR SIR—Mr. Craig's interesting letter in the "A. I. R.," re the source of Fading and Fadow, "the fine jig," whose *locale* of origin has hitherto escaped the tracking instincts of etymologists, suggests to me that a possible derivation is to be found in a dance which I once saw "evolved" when I was a mere boy, but just old enough to take a hearty and enjoyable interest in all things Terpsichorean. It was called *Rinka Fada*, and must have been no new fangled or modern dance; for, though the old and experienced step dancers of my native district were quite familiar with the name, they had forgotten most, if not all, the figures and evolutions. The name stuck in my memory for two reasons: first, because I had never before heard the word *Rinka*, our only word for dance being *dhousa* or *dhausa*; and, secondly, because the *Rinka Fada*, as I then saw it performed, was unlike any of the ordinary dances which I had seen up to that time.

The leader of the performance was a woman, half-tramp, half-beggar, who, I believe, used to come annually (every winter) to our district from some part of Connemara, and received open and generous hospitality for her undoubted gifts of *rannta* and *rinka*. She succeeded in reviving several old dances among us, and such was the impression of her personality in that department that her name, which, by the way, was an unusual one, is quite fresh in my memory even now. The *Rinka Fada* had "figures" enough—a sort of quadrille, I think it was, but not exclusive of jig. No doubt some of your readers will be able to tell you and Mr. Craig what the *Rinka Fada* is if it survives anywhere in Ireland.—Yours truly,

M. M.

AN IRISH NATURALIST AND WRITER.

Now for many years I have been seeing from time to time in the *Daily Express* essays on Irish Natural History of a singularly beautiful character, the work of one who is not only a most close, absorbed, and sympathetic observer of nature, but might be described as a prose-poet by virtue of his refinement, tenderness, and susceptibility to natural impressions and the unfailing perfection and beauty of his language. The essays as to their subjects are always cotemporaneous with the passing months and seasons, dealing with some rural or sylvan aspects of the changing lives of the feathered and four-footed population occupying this island side by side with man, observed or observable at the time when his essays appear.

Who he is I do not know, but feel certain that these essays, if collected and published as a book, would make a most instructive and entertaining addition to our supply of native Irish literature. I am very glad to bear testimony to the worth of this beautiful Irish writer, and with great pleasure reprint the last of these charming essays which has come under my notice. I believe most of my readers have not read it, and that those who have will be glad to read it again, and in a form more fit for preservation.

While the members of our literary societies and sodalities are urging each

other, and with great energy and perseverance, to produce Irish literature, and at last inaugurate the Renaissance, here is one who is actually producing it.

STOATS AT PLAY IN WINTER.

Where fir-needles thickly strew the ground, forming so soft a carpet that our tread is noiseless, and even the sentinel rabbit stamping his foot on the plantation's floor produces only a dull thud, a serener atmosphere prevails than in the open field or the copse of leafless trees. There is practically no undergrowth in the pine wood, except where the soil is suitable to bilberries; these often contrive to flourish amid the Scotch fir's peculiar leafless mould, but other vegetation is apt to find so much turpentine oppressive. Consequently there is nothing to catch or crackle under our feet, and we often find that, thanks to the stillness, we have quite unconsciously intruded on scenes which, among any other surroundings, our approach would have prematurely broken up. One of the choicest sights which the woodland thus affords is that of a group of stoats at play. In or near every pine-grove there are pretty sure to be a few of these animals living, for reasons not difficult to guess, being mainly based on the attachment shown for the same sort of cover by various other creatures whose names are on the stoat's gamelist. Generally they keep out of sight; but on every keeper's tree the nailed-up corpses of "weasels"—all our Irish weasels are really stoats—figure prominently enough to prove that such "vermin" are not rare in the neighbourhood. It is, however, where keepers' trees are least in evidence that we have the best chance of seeing the stoat in one of his playful moods. Few of us possess any love for the poaching, bloodthirsty "weasel"—the very name has an almost creepy ring about it—yet it is scarcely possible to contemplate with other feelings than pleasure and admiration the spectacle of the joyous rompings of these really beautiful little animals, when three or four of them unite in such a scene as we now refer to. Over the soft brown needles they frisk with an agility marvellous to behold—such racing and leaping, such charging and counter-charging, turning of somersaults, and cutting of other absurd capers, that the squirrel itself might well look down in astonished envy at the athletic and acrobatic exploits of its dreaded little neighbour—who, by the way, can run up a tree, when he likes, considerably faster than any squirrel. One part of the play is particularly characteristic. Two stoats sit facing each other in kangaroolike attitudes; suddenly, with a signal-cry, both rush forward, spring high into the air, and there cannon against each other, then, falling to the ground, rush on and occupy one another's original places, whence they immediately repeat the performance *vice versa*—each from the opposite view-point. Mere ecstasy of high spirits, and nothing else, seems to actuate these gambols, and the wild guttural "kroo-kroo-kroo" which forms their accompaniment is as unlike as possible from the notes uttered by the same creatures under more serious circumstances; for instance, the shrill warning or defiance cry of the mother stoat when the safety of her young is

supposed to be threatened. Then her scream is ear-piercing, and so short, as well as sharp, is the cry that without seeing her one cannot locate the animal. She glides about, too, in so stealthy a fashion that not a rustle or motion of any sort is detected among the long grass and brambles in which she lurks, and there is something ghost-like in the mystery of that shrill screech hurled at us now from this side, now that, quite near, yet yielding no clue to the spot it comes from. But here, in the charmed circle of family or club play, the call of the stoat sounds rather as if a pigeon were trying how fast it could coo. Neither ventriloquism nor any other art of concealment is practised; the spot chosen for the manoeuvres is usually a clear space, a cart track through the wood, or a lane skirting its edge. There is in every motion of the elegant little animals a perfect abandonment of the care and stealth that generally belong to their rather serpentine character. As long as the charmed observer stands still they mind him no more than they do the surrounding trees.

By and by, one of the group disappears, perhaps to return again, perhaps not. Sooner or later, however, the number—whether it was three or four at the outset—is reduced to two; and of these, one is brown, the other red. The curious "play" now ceases; there is no more charging, nor cannoning against each other in mid-air. In fact, it begins to dawn on us that, after all, there was something serious in the mimic warfare we have witnessed. True, it was all exceedingly harmless; not one of the creatures was hurt; in the act of final retreat, one of them, perhaps, rushed twenty feet or so up a tree-trunk, and if he fell to the ground he still seemed none the worse, but bolted up again as rapidly as before. Still the fact remains that the medley has resulted in a pair of stoats remaining master and mistress of the field. The affair was a genuine tournament—a trial of strength and skill, according to certain laws obeyed by the musteline chivalry. Perhaps a lady's hand, perhaps a manorial property, was the prize—we suspect generally the latter. In such combats, whatever be the precise motive, Nature recognises how little it would conduce to the welfare of the species that every beaten aspirant should leave the field crippled or mortally hurt—so that even the stoat, so deadly in his attack on rabbit, leveret, or rat, can frequently settle his differences with his own kind in a manner almost as gentle as the rivalry of singing birds.

[The other day I was leaning against a gate in the avenue of a country place, close to which was a gully running under the way. A beautiful little stoat came out of the gully on to the avenue, and for a time during which I could count ten, stood motionless, looking me with his marvellous bright eyes; then, like flash, vanished into his gully.—ED. A.I.R.]

EDITOR'S ADDRESS.

[I have surrendered my Campus Sagittariorum in the country; and where I shall henceforth be found is uncertain. I shall be somewhere in Ireland, no doubt, and no doubt cogitating and scribbling as usual. Letters addressed to me, to 56 Henry Street, Dublin, will be sent after me wherever I may be.]