

What she collected, and what she concluded

The instrument this edition is built around, on one sheet.

Gomme is two writers in one book. One is a collector of extraordinary care, who prints the version, the place, the collector's name and the tune, and tells you when a version came from a printed book instead of a person. The other is a Victorian folklorist explaining that a children's ring game is the remains of a human sacrifice. The first is why the book is still used. The second is why it has to be read with the two kept apart.

This register does that, class by class. It is the instrument of this edition.

The tunes

WHAT GOMME COLLECTED

Taken down from the children singing, by Gomme herself or by a correspondent, and printed unaltered: "The tunes of the games have been taken down, as sung by the children, either by myself or correspondents (except where otherwise stated), and are unaltered." {{tunes}} of them in this volume, each with the place it was collected.

WHAT SHE WAS TOLD, OR READ

Where a tune came to her from a printed collection or through a third party, she says so in the line under it.

WHAT SHE CONCLUDES

Nothing. She does not argue from the tunes at all — no claim about antiquity or origin anywhere in the book rests on a melody.

HOW TO READ IT

This is the most reliable material in the book and the least used by anyone since. A tune is hard to falsify and hard to remember wrongly at length; the words of a game drift far faster than its melody. It is also the part of her work that was genuinely new.

The versions of the rhymes

WHAT GOMME COLLECTED

{{versions}} versions across these {{games}} games, each printed with its place and its collector. Where the source is a book rather than a person, the citation is given instead — {{printedSources}} of them here.

WHAT SHE WAS TOLD, OR READ

The county and the collector are her correspondents' words, not her own observation. She never claims to have heard most of these games herself.

WHAT SHE CONCLUDES

That the versions descend from a common original which can be reconstructed by comparing them — the assumption behind the analysis tables.

HOW TO READ IT

Take the versions as evidence of what was sung where, in the early 1890s, by the children a particular adult happened to ask. That is a real and useful thing. The reconstruction of an original is a nineteenth-century literary method applied to an oral tradition that does not work that way, and nothing in the collection depends on it.

The methods of playing

WHAT GOMME COLLECTED

How the ring moves, who stands in the middle, what happens at the end of each verse. Usually first-hand, either hers or her correspondent's, and usually specific enough to follow.

WHAT SHE WAS TOLD, OR READ

Where a game was described to her in a letter she prints the letter's account, sometimes at length and in the writer's own voice.

WHAT SHE CONCLUDES

That the actions are dramatic survivals — that a stooping child is a corpse, that a line advancing and retreating is a marriage by capture.

HOW TO READ IT

The actions as described are the second most reliable thing in the book, and this edition's playing guide is built from them. The dramatic reading is conjecture and is always at the end of an entry, where it can be read or skipped.

The origins

WHAT GOMME COLLECTED

Nothing is recorded here. This class is entirely inference.

WHAT SHE WAS TOLD, OR READ

She cites Halliwell, Chambers, Brand, Strutt, Jamieson, the Folk-lore Society's own publications, and correspondents' opinions.

WHAT SHE CONCLUDES

That *London Bridge* remembers a foundation sacrifice; that *Green Gravel* is a funeral; that *Nuts in May* is marriage by capture; that the games are, in general, "unconscious folk-dramas" of "events and customs which were at one time being enacted as a part of the serious concerns of life".

HOW TO READ IT

This is the survivals doctrine of E. B. Tylor as applied by her husband's generation, and it is the part of the book that did not survive. It was abandoned in the middle of the twentieth century, and modern work on children's games treats them as a living culture with its own inventiveness rather than as a museum of forgotten rites. Read these paragraphs as a document of 1894 — they are unusually clear and unusually honest about being speculation — and do not read them as findings.

The comparative tables

WHAT GOMME COLLECTED

Nothing new. Every cell of a table is a line already printed above it in the entry, rearranged.

WHAT SHE WAS TOLD, OR READ

The arrangement is George Laurence Gomme's, and she says so: "an analysis of the game-rhymes on a plan arranged by my husband, and which is an entirely novel feature in discussing the history of games".

WHAT SHE CONCLUDES

That a rhyme has an original form which the versions descend from, and that setting them side by side recovers it.

HOW TO READ IT

The tables are a nineteenth-century method — the stemma of a manuscript tradition, borrowed from textual criticism and applied to songs learned by ear. Nothing in the collection depends on them, and this edition cannot print them; the note at the back says why and what replaces them.