

W.W. Gill

*Customs and  
Traditions,  
Cures and  
Charms,  
Fairies and  
Phantoms*

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W.W. Gill

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Cures and Charms,  
Fairies and Phantoms

Edited by  
Stephen Miller

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## CONTENTS

Introduction	i
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### CHAPTER I

#### CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1 Seasonal Customs	1
2 Birth, Marriage, and Death	4
3 Omens and Prognostications	6
4 Various Bygones	9

### CHAPTER 2

#### CURES AND CHARMS

1 The Cancer Cure	13
2 The Teares of Ballawhane	14
3 Remarks on Manx Herbs	16
4 Blood-Charming	17
5 Holy Wells	19
6 Other Cures and Charms	20
7 Witches and their Craft	23

### CHAPTER 3

#### FAIRIES AND PHANTOMS

1 Fairy Washers	27
2 Red Women	28
3 White Ladies	29
4 Other Fairy Matters	31
5 Giants	33
6 Demons, Friendly and Malign	35





## INTRODUCTION

*Customs and Traditions, Cures and Charms, Fairies and Phantoms* reprints folkways material collected by Walter William Gill which was originally published in the third of a series of ‘Manx Scrapbooks’ written by the author. Gill, it would appear, began to collect and publish material on Manx folkways in the period after 1918; a great deal of his material is localised, having been largely recorded from informants in the Maughold area. Bar the fact of his death in 1964 there is little biographical detail at present to report. His activities bridge the gap between the wave of enthusiastic Victorian collectors of the closing decades of the 19th century and after—Charles Roeder, Sophia Morrison, A.M. Crellin, A.W. Moore, Dr John Clague, the Gill Brothers, J.F. Clucas—and the more recent initiative of the Manx Museum’s *Folk Life Survey*, which developed after 1945, and the activities of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* in tape-recording the last native speakers of Manx.

*A Third Manx Scrapbook* was published in 1963 by the ‘Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society,’ the first ‘Scrapbook’ having appeared in 1929 and the second in 1932, both published by Arrowsmith of London and Bristol. In 1934 Arrowsmith published Gill’s *Manx Dialect: Words and Phrases*, which on the imprint states it to be number four in the series of ‘Manx Scrapbooks.’ The actual appearance of the third number nearly some thirty years later in 1963 suggests something of a problem between Gill and his publishers. At least it did appear, escaping the fate of the personal papers of so many of the folklorists active on the Island, namely to be lost.

W.W. Gill’s ‘Manx Scrapbooks,’ are now long out-of-print and only rarely available on the antiquarian market like so much of the published material on Manx folkways. The ‘Scrapbooks’ are a remarkable mine of information on a variety of topics and deserve to be more widely known and appreciated. The material presented here is taken from chapters I to III of Part II of *A Third Manx Scrapbook*, namely: I, ‘Customs and Traditions,’ 267–307, II, ‘Cures and Charms,’ 311–341, and III, ‘Fairies and Phantoms,’ 345–389. The material has been edited—omitted have been entries not based on actual fieldwork but drawn from other works on Manx folkways. Parts of the commentary by Gill in places has also been edited out where it has been felt that it is not either strictly relevant or sensible. The typography has been brought into line with house-style. The marginal numbers refer to the pagination of the original edition.

Stephen Miller  
20 OCTOBER 1993



## CHAPTER I

### CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

(1) SEASONAL CUSTOMS (2) BIRTH, MARRIAGE, AND DEATH

(3) OMENS AND PROGNOSTICATIONS (4) VARIOUS BYGONES

#### (1) SEASONAL CUSTOMS

- 267 **Weather Calendars.** Written notes of the weather are taken during the first twelve days in the year; with these the weather of the ensuing twelve months is expected to agree, in the ratio of month to day. Some people begin their observations on the 1st January, but the old-fashioned method is to start with 'Old New Years Day,' the 12th January.
- 268 **Rolling Easter Eggs.** Every district seems to have had its appointed place for this Easter Monday amusement, which was formerly as popular as in the rest of the British Isles, and is still practised to some extent. Port St Mary children went to a certain slope at the little bay of Perwick. In Kirk Bride the Fanks on Kionlough was the favoured spot 70 years ago, Quarrie says. Ramsey children, I believe, still carry their hard-boiled eggs to the top of the Fairy Hill or Fairy Mound on Ballastowell on the morning of Easter Monday, and roll them one by one down its grassy sides. A regular picnic is enjoyed. The mothers accompany the children, baskets are carried, and the contents, including the surviving eggs, are eaten after the rolling ceremony is over. Games and races follow. This hillock is respected as an old burial-place. Some home-made historians even regard it as the site of the battle of Sky Hill. The result of its attempted cultivation was described in *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 140. More recently a deep hole has, for some unknown reason, been dug into the top.
- 269 'Good Friday Eggs,' as they are called in some Manx districts, are boiled hard with the addition of gorse-bloom to the water to make them a greyish-yellow colour, with a moss called *scris-ny-greg* for crimson, with another moss taken from the stone 'hedges' (walls) to give a pretty silver-grey, or with onion-skin for pale yellow shades. Logwood may be purchased to dye the eggs blue, cochineal to dye them red, and so on. Boys knock their eggs against those of others, as in the game of 'conquers,' and he who can break his opponents egg wins it and eats it.
- Easter Monday Sails.** It was customary in various parts of the Island to go for a pleasure-sail in the bays or harbours on Easter Monday.

270 **Easter Bonfires.** ‘On a beautiful Easter Thursday evening (5th April), just at sun-down, many fires suddenly appeared blazing and smoking on the hill-tops in the Isle of Man. In about ten minutes they all vanished as suddenly as they had appeared, and a Manksman, who was asked to explain the cause, looked much disturbed, and went his way in haste without answering’ (Campbell, *Tales of the West Highlands*, 4, 1862, 402) The author seems so sure of his unusual date that his observation is worth reproducing.

**Tynwald Day, 5th July.** In the high bank on the left side of the lower part of the Glen May river, below the village, a trickle of water falls into a hollowed stone which somewhat resembles an archaic stoup. On Tynwald Day, especially if a visit to the ceremony was to be made, it was customary to go early to this spot, wish three times while gazing into the basin, and drink of its water.

**Climbing South Barrule.** The ascent of South Barrule mountain was made on the second Sunday in August, or ‘the second Sunday in harvest,’ as it is sometimes expressed. The climb culminated in a visit to the cairn at the summit. On stones  
272 taken from this the climbers scratched their initials and carefully replaced the stones. Nothing was said by the old man who was my informant about drinking at the spring there; but in view of the visits to other wells this may have formed part of the ceremony, if it deserved the name.

**The Hop-tu-naa-Boys** varied their proceedings (already recorded by other chroniclers) by pounding the front doors with cabbages, turnips, and other weighty objects fastened to sticks, if the householders refused to open and give them the customary pence.

A pathetic last flicker of the *Hop-tu-naa* custom is visible in the following excerpt from the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* of 2nd November 1933:

A correspondent writes—‘I had been led to suppose that the Halloween (or Hollan-tide) celebrations had completely died out. But in the afternoon of 31st October, and in Douglas of all places, I saw a little thing of about four proudly carrying a turnip lantern, scooped out from one side to hold the candle, and most artistically decorated on the surviving surface with a mans face, complete with a slit for the mouth. The  
277 turnip, of course, played a most prominent part in the Manx version of Halloween ceremonies, and indeed All Saints Eve was known in some districts as ‘Thump-the-Door Night.’ Parties of the ‘mob-beg’ would gather outside the houses of people who were not specially respected, and bombard the door with turnips. A group of lads who were prosecuted at Ramsey some years ago for persecuting some old cot-tager whom they thought eccentric pleaded in excuse that they were only honouring a good old custom.’

**Christmas decorations** in the form of holly, ivy and the like, should be left in their places on the walls until Pancake Tuesday, when they are burned under the pancake frying-pan, for luck during the rest of the year. A man who appeared in Douglas Police Court in 1933 for setting his chimney on fire pleaded that he, or his wife, was complying with this custom. A few people, however, prefer to take down their 'Christmas' on Old Christmas Day.

**The Kissing Bush** or 'Bunch' was a great hoop of holly, ornamented with apples, oranges, paper roses and streamers, hung at Christmas from the ceiling for the purpose implied in its name.

**The Mollag Bands.** The Christmas-tide 'Mollag Bands,' like the Wren Boys and other ceremonial processions, descended in the course of time from men to boys before dying out altogether. My only recollection of the 'Mollag Band' is that of an itinerant party of boys with blackened and raddled faces and eccentric attire, one or more waving and thumping with a mollag and all bellowing some popular song of the period. But I have been told by old residents that the Ramsey 'Mollag Band' formerly consisted of fishermen, headed for a period by a big Irishman who swung his *mollag* at the end of a pole and swatted all who ventured too near. Some members of the old processions were dressed as women. The party used to go into shops and demand money, in addition to collecting coppers en route. They had a marching-song with English words. The police put an end to the custom about fifty years ago, on account of the mens' rough behaviour. The Peel 'Mollag Band' seems to have had much the same characteristics. Castletown and Dalby had a dance of their own, recently rescued by Miss Mona Douglas. A woman who remembers the custom in Castletown over fifty years ago says that when she was a child she was so much afraid that she never dared even to look out of the window when the band was passing, and once, when they tried to come in at the door, she fainted. At all these places they came out after dark, when the Wren Boys had finished their performance. The people everywhere, and not only the children, seem to have stood in greater awe of the bands than the swinging bladders warranted, or even the occasional rowdiness, and it would be interesting to know whether any superstitious feeling lay behind this timorousness; and if so, of what ceremonial procession the 'Mollag Band' was a vestige.

**Sailing Toy Boats.** A localised Christmas-tide custom which has hitherto escaped notice was practised at Poylvill, a shrunken pool, remote and usually deserted, near the Stone Circle and Hut Dwellings on the Mull in Rushen parish. 'It was coming on to Christmas time, the children were practising the carvals, the little boys rigging up their boats to sail at Pulveel, and many a father too digging out a little yawl' (Blanche Nelson's MSS, circa 1900). The date particularly referred to was that of the loss by explosion of the brig *Lily* in the Sound in 1852.

## (2) BIRTH, MARRIAGE AND DEATH

**The New-Born Child.** When a woman was expecting a baby no animal dying on the farm was, if avoidable, buried until she was safely delivered.

‘When a child comes into the world, the first thing done (now in our own days) is, if it is a boy, to wrap it in a singlet or pair of flannel drawers of its fathers if a girl, in a flannel petticoat of its mothers and so soon as it is put into the cradle a Bible and a pair of flannel drawers are laid on the cradle, and the same on the mother’s bed.’

‘Neither mother nor child is ever let out of the house until the christening day, and then, before going out, a bit of vervain is sewed into the child’s under-clothing and also into the mothers. A little bit of soot is also put on the child’s person, and a bright steel sewing-needle quilted into some part of its clothes.’

280 ‘Great care is taken that the name which the child is to receive is not made known to any person except those who have to know, until after the christening.’

‘The future of the child depends in a great measure on whether the stranger who first sees it, after its father has got the first look, is a ‘lucky’ person or not. The greatest honour any person can do to a child the first day it is taken out for a walk is to spit in its face’ (Nelson MSS. Her observations were made in the South of the Island, the Howe in particular, where she lived as the wife of a fisherman).

**The Bride’s Luck.** ‘The luckiest thing for a bride to have on her wedding day is a borrowed pocket-handkerchief’ (Nelson MSS).

**The White Gloves.** It was an old Manx custom that the bridegroom should present the bride with a pair of white gloves to be worn at the ceremony. Hence the title of a Manx song, ‘*Piyr dy Lauenyn Baney.*’

281 **Penny Weddings.** When the marrying couple were in poor circumstances it was the custom to leave a *dollan* (‘sieve’) in an unobtrusive but convenient spot in the kitchen. Into this every guest dropped a penny towards defraying the cost of their entertainment. The same thing under the same name was done in Scotland and England.

**Betrothal on a Sacred Stone.** In *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 242, note, an extract from Wood-Martin’s *Elder Faiths* describes how bride and bridegroom ratified the wedding ceremony by clasping hands through certain holed stones in Braddan Churchyard, and mentions betrothal customs of the same character in Scotland and Ireland. Of the same nature as all these was a practice in Onchan. ‘The Onchan Cross was called the Troth Cross, it having been customary for engaged couples to place their hands on the head of the cross, and there plight their troth, the idea being that all who

did so would live long and happily together, and be blessed with many children' (Dr J. Bradbury, 'Sketches and Stories of the Isle of Man,' *Oldham Chronicle*, 1891-92). This last-named cross was probably the one figured on Plate XXI in Kermodé's *Manx Crosses*.

**Exchange of Sods.** When the heir to a farm married the heiress to another farm they used to exchange a sod from each farm. The symbolism is obvious, as it was in Scotland when, at the conclusion of a sale of land, a little earth and stone were transferred to the hand of the purchaser.

- 282 **A Celtic Funeral Custom.** Kelly's *Manx Dictionary* contains a definition which implies that the Manx retained down to a late period the custom of expressing grief by continuous hand-clapping. At funerals in Ireland and the Highlands this, accompanied by the 'keen,' was part of the duties of professional mourners. In Man the name for such a person was *Basseyr*, 'a clapper of hands, particularly in morning' (see Kelly, s.v. *Basseyr*).

**White Stones and Burials.** White stones, ranging from the size of boys' marbles up to that of small boulders, are plentiful in or on burial-places both ancient and recent. Almost every Manx tumulus excavated yields a quantity. In the remains of the *keeills* or cells they are found under the floor, under the doorway, even under the altar. A certain burial-place, most probably pagan, has a circle about 23 feet in diameter composed of white quartz boulders and filled up with small stones most of which are quartz also. Their use in comparatively modern graves is illustrated by the following excerpt from the *Ramsey Courier* newspaper of 22nd July 1893, over the signature 'H.S.':

- 283 'I have noticed at the digging out of old graves in Bride Churchyard that at the bottom of nearly every old grave you will generally find a number of round white stones. These stones are often found close together, and are about the size of hens' eggs. I have counted as many as twelve in one heap, but very often the number is three, six, or nine. I have been asking several old people the meaning of these stones, but can learn nothing regarding them save that the churchyard had been used as an old Catholic burying-ground, and that it was customary to put in the coffin these white stones, so that the departed spirit could hurl them at the Devil, in case he was interfered with on his journey to the unknown world.'

None of the graves in question would have been more than a couple of hundred years old, and most of them more recent.

**Salt and the Dead.** The placing of salt on a corpse has been recorded for Man as for many other countries. In this connexion an enquiry that appeared in the *Ramsey Courier* for 16th September 1893, may be quoted. The writer mentioned 'a funeral

(about 12 years ago) at Kirk Lonan, when the floor of a child's grave was sprinkled with salt. That it was done I know as a fact.' The correspondent wished to know the exact date and the reason for the procedure. I could trace no reply.

**Information sought from the Dead.** There is a family tradition in the West of the Island that after the sudden death of a farmer his wife paid regular nightly visits to his grave in the hope of meeting his spirit and learning from it where he had hidden his money and some other valuables. But her quest was in vain.

285 **Respect for Relics and Rullicks.** The fear of untoward consequences must have saved from destruction many old chapel walls, burial mounds, boundary and other memorial stones, thorn and elder trees, and such like evidences of the past. In the two previous volumes I have given instances of the tradition on this subject. Here are three more.

The man who dug up the remains of the ancient chapel at Booilley Velt in Maughold was struck by lightning in consequence, and his head and mouth were crooked ever after. (Frederick LaMothe's mss).

The father of C— of Balla— in Andreas gave him on his marriage a smaller house a short distance away. One morning he found the son ploughing up the ground skirting the chapel called Keeill Thustag. He was very angry, and warned him that if he went on with it he would bring serious trouble on himself and perhaps on the rest of the family. He stopped at once, but what he had already done lost him some of his best horses and cattle. (Oral)

T. of Ballateare in Kirk Bride destroyed a tumulus on that farm. The family, which had held the place for many generations, thereafter produced no more heirs, and consequently soon died out. (Oral)

### (3) OMENS AND PROGNOSTICATIONS

286 **Boots on the Table.** The wide-spread objection to placing boots on a table has been mentioned, for the Isle of Man, in a previous volume of this series.

**Yellow Flowers Unlucky.** In the spring time yellow flowers of any kind should not be brought into the house until the goslings are hatched out of their shells, or they won't hatch. (Oral) There is some fancied connexion, probably, between the colour of the flowers and that of the goslings, but the line of reasoning is not obvious.

**Breaking the Stretch at the Well.** 'If a young man and a young woman who are keeping company happen to be standing at a spring-well of an evening, and the young man throws out his arms to stretch himself, and he breaks the stretch part-way without letting any part of his arms or hands rise above his head, he and the girl



will never be married, because he broke the stretch at the well' (Nelson MSS).

**Prognostic of Visitors.** 'Some young people from the Rectory having called at a farmhouse in the parish, and being detained by the rain, were induced to have tea with the family, when it was observed that company had been expected, because the cock had been crowing on the doorstep.' [Note to Revd W. Kermodé's *Parochialia*, manuscript account of Ballaugh Parish written circa 1870s, added by his successor, the Revd E.W. Kissack. Per P.W. Caine.]

- 287 **Strange Women Unlucky.** If any woman not belonging to the household, especially a red-haired woman, came into a field where C— of Cardle Veg, Maughold, was in the act of beginning a piece of work, he would always put it off till another time. (Oral)

**The Lucky Black Lamb.** It is thought an excellent omen if the first-born lamb of the season is black, especially if the ewe is white. The more completely black the better. But if this lamb dies many others, of the usual colour, will follow it. And if you intentionally kill a *tarroo-deeyl* ([the] 'devil's coach-horse') no black lamb will be born in your flock. (Oral)

**The Fatal Fairy Rings.** Three fairy rings in a line, especially if the line ran due North and South, were an omen of disease among the cattle of the farm where the rings occurred. (Quarrie)

**A Sign of Rain.** When strongly defined sun-rays are seen extending to the surface of the sea, the sun is thought to be sucking up water into the clouds, for it to fall again in rain. The phenomenon is therefore taken as a prelude to wet weather. (Oral)

**An Ill-omened Communion Cup.** The use of a certain communion cup at Kirk Malew, in Parson Gill's time, is said to have been discontinued because it was noticed that people who drank from it went mad afterwards. It is true, I am told, that insanity (whatever its cause) was unusually noticeable in the parish about that time, the 1860's. (Oral)

- 288 **The Seventh Boat.** The Manx fishermen's dislike to being the 'third out' of the harbour when the fleet was leaving for distant waters was common to all the six ports; but Port St Mary had, in addition, a taboo of its own against being the seventh boat to leave. This was thought to be almost as ill-omened as the third. (Oral)

**Herring-bones to be Burnt.** If you don't take care always to throw the bones in the fire after eating herrings, the fish will never get back to the sea, and herring will be scarce next year. This custom explains an obscure sentence in *A Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect*, s.v. *Feel*—'Not a herring felt out of the sea but them that have had their bones burnt.' The meaning of 'felt' here is still not clear to me.

289 **Wishing Stones at Peel.** On Peel Island, between the two ruined churches, lies a flat stone on which people used, and perhaps still use, to stand while formulating a wish. For the antiquity of the practice I am loth to vouch. A former custodian of the Castle and its precincts was an assiduous discoverer of items of interest for visitors.

When the unmarried reader next finds himself or herself at the North end of Peel Promenade, he should remember to touch the cliff which blocks further progress in that direction; if he fails to do so he will never be married. I take no responsibility for this assertion either.

**The Wishing Stone, Port-y-Vullin.** 'The Wishing Stone' was the popular name of the cross-slab with a 9th-century inscription which stood at the left hand side of the road on leaving Port-y-Vullin for Kirk Maughold, in the 'Ago Field.' It is now preserved at Maughold Churchyard. In all probability it had been removed to the roadside hedge from the treen chapel and burial ground of Ballaterson close by. (See Kermodé, *Manx Crosses*, 122, 'Crux Guriat.')

290 In the neighbourhood from which the stone was removed in 1895 a tradition of Sanctuary still clings about its memory. I have been told that 'if a man had done a crime he could be hanged for, like stealing a sheep or murdering someone, if he could get past that stone (it wasn't a cross at all, though some people called it that), he'd be safe.' Also, 'people used to wish when they went past it, especially if it was a dark night. The women used to do like this [imitation of a curtsy] passing it in the daytime, and some of the men would touch their caps.' A Catholic friend suggests to me that the 'wishing' was a vestige of the short prayer, accompanied by a genuflection, which would be offered at the cross in pre-Reformation times. And such reverence may well have been accorded it, when it stood in its original position near the keeill down to some date prior to 1811. Burial parties would perform a more elaborate ceremonial there.

According to several other legends this cross-slab is in reality an old woman who was turned into stone. (See *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 455.)

**The Wishing Stones at the Dhoon.** There are two stones on the broogh just above Dhoon Bay, to the north of the shore, called 'the Giant's Stones.' Their Manx name is *Meir ny Foawyr* ('Fingers of the Giant'). A different account of their origin says that they are not his fingers but himself and his wife in a state of petrification. They are smooth slate slabs a few inches thick and 10 feet high by as much across, standing upright and parallel in the soil, about 18 inches apart. A local custom was to stand squeezed between them, facing north-east or seaward, with a palm placed flat against each, and wish. (Oral)

**The Wishing Stone, Rhenass.** A reputed 'Wishing Stone' stands near the foot of Rhenass Fall, at the left hand side looking upwards, in Glen Helen. It is vaguely connected with supernatural beings. (Oral)

(4) VARIOUS BYGONES

**The Game of Cammag.** In the Dalby district I have been told by an old native that a grand *cammag* match between picked-up sides was customary at the Niarbyl on Easter Mondays. In other parts of the Island it was more especially a Christmas-tide amusement. Roeder was told in Rushen that 'on the 31st December they used to play cricket, which was done with a ball and a stick with a crook (*cammag*), and they ranged themselves on two sides, twenty men on each side' (*Yn Lioar Manninagh*, 3, 190). The misnomer of 'cricket' which is here given to the game may have been due to the name of the ball or its substitute—the 'crig' or 'crick.'

293 An old Kirk Michael shepherd remembers seeing, on a Sunday morning about Christmas time, great numbers of men coming from Ramsey, Peel, Laxey and Douglas to Cronk Dhow, Michael, to play Cammag. The snow stopped Dibb's cartload of provisions at the bottom of the hill, and the driver had to carry the baskets up on foot. But the match was played, and the provisions eaten afterwards.

**Old Fishing-Lines.** A friend of mine, a retired fisherman, possesses a line made by his grandfather which has been in use, he tells me, for fully a hundred years. It is made of horse-hair, three-ply on two-ply, and plaited throughout by hand—a tedious task. The hairs for such purposes were taken from horses, not from mares, because the latter wet the tail in urinating, and the ammonia weakens the hair. Colts at grass with their tails still undocked were thought the best to take it from. Modern lines bought at the shops are said to be composed largely of cotton, which has no 'give' in it and is apt to snap. Another theory held was that stallions' hair should be chosen because they are stronger than mares.

294 **Old Costume.** The men wore a little tight-fitting coat something like a boy's jacket in front, having two narrow pointed tails with a pocket under each. It was worn buttoned up on cold days, and 'let go slewing' on fine ones. With this went short knee-breeches, coarse grey stockings (finer quality for Sundays), and a tall felt hat with a narrow brim, called a 'crock hat.' (Nelson MSS. The epoch when these fashions flourished is not stated, but it appears to be about a hundred years ago.) This costume, besides being picturesque, had according to tradition a practical value. When the stone ballast was being put into the fishing-boats at the beginning of a season, the skipper sat with a leg each side of the stern-post so that his coat-tails hung overboard. When they dipped evenly into the water the boat was judged to be ballasted and trimmed.

**How they baked in old times.** Mr James Mylchreest, a native of Lonan, has kindly given me a description of a baking-stone (*losb*), or 'stone oven,' which was removed from the little farm called Booilley Vane in that parish when the house was being pulled down about 60 years ago. 'I remember being shown the stone oven on which they baked. It was somewhere about 3ft 6in long by a couple of feet wide, and very thick to prevent it from cracking. On one side the turf-fire was lit, and left until the stone got red-hot. Then the fire was bodily pushed to the other end of the stone, the stone dusted, and the cakes put on. When hard enough they were stood on their edges around the fire to finish them.' The *bonnags*, made of barleymeal, were 6ins or more in diameter and 1½ ins thick. The oatcakes were a little broader, but only about ¼ in thick.

295 **Food Taboos.** Old-fashioned Manx people will not eat fresh-water eels or river-trout, although they will eat sea-eels and sea-trout.

305 **Manx-speaking Birds.** In certain fanciful fables talking birds are the sole characters and indulge in dialogues between themselves. One between the plover and the blackbird is based on a proverbial saying to be found in Macintosh's Highland collection—'The *londubb*, the long-clawed *londubb*, I gave him the sheltered grassy wood and he gave me the black desert mountain.' In the Manx version this is expanded into an argument between the two birds. There are also some bird-songs translated into Manx rhymes. Several specimens of both classes have appeared in *The Manx Note Book*, [Morrison's] *Manx Fairy Tales*, and *Mannin*. Simple we may find them, yet they are genuine products of native literary art, and one of the last refuges of the spoken native tongue.

306 One anecdote, typical of a number in which a bird's song is rendered into Manx words, pictures a dishonest miller of East Baldwin surreptitiously taking double multure from the one customer for grinding his corn. Just as he is dipping the measure into the sack for the second time a blackbird carols on a bush by the door. The song reaches the miller's dusty conscience as—'Goaill foilliu daa cheayrt, drogh wyller, goaill foilliu daa cheayrt? Neems y goll insh Awhallian!' ('Lift two multure, vile mealy miller, will you? Lift two multure? Oho! I'll tell Awhallian!') And away the blackbird flies to tell the farmer, as the greedy miller supposes, who thenceforward mends his ways and confines himself to his legitimate commission, when there are birds about.

Manx birds are not always on the side of the Recording Angel, however, for there was one in Glen Rushen that held very lax views on the sacredness of property. When 'Dollin the Blackguard' was helping himself one night to a fat wether on South Barrule (hundreds of years ago, of course), he heard a voice from the darkness piping—'Gow daa keyrrey, Dollin, gow daa keyrrey! Cha inshyms y toshiagh.' ('Take two sheep, Dollin, take *two* sheep! I won't tell the Coroner.') The advice struck Dollin

as sound, so he took it and another sheep.

**Manx Version of the Magpie Rhyme**

‘One for sorrow, two for joy,  
Three a wedding, four to die,  
Five, a ship upon the sea,  
Six, a letter soon for me.’

**A fragment of a Manx Song**

‘O graih my chree, vel graih ad orrym?  
Ta ayd veg, cha nel my follym.  
Visthress veg, hig der as vooar,  
Visthress vooar, hig dy liooar.’

Taught to a boy named Kelly by an old man in Glen Helen, and heard by Mr J.T. Irving about 25 years ago from Kelly, then a Liverpool policeman. I give it as it was given to me, without attempting to rectify it.



## CHAPTER II

### CURES AND CHARMS

(1) THE CANCER CURE (2) THE TEARES OF BALLAWHANE

(3) REMARKS ON MANX HERBS (4) BLOOD-CHARMING

(5) HOLY WELLS (6) OTHER CURES AND CHARMS

(7) WITCHES AND THEIR CRAFT

#### (1) THE CANCER CURE

311 A brief mention of this was made in the *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 188, among 'Magical Cures.' There is, however, nothing of the supernatural about it, merely the mystery surrounding secret remedies in general. Further enquiry has enabled me to fill in the outline previously given of the Andreas blacksmith's method of treatment, and to correct two of my statements there. The operator's name was William Mylrea, not Mulroy, and the secret has *not* been lost.

Specific instances of cures worked by Mylrea are well remembered in the North of the Island. His remedy extracted entire the superficial 'cancer' or *epithelioma*, which in most cases grew on the lower lip, and may sometimes, I think, have been caused by smoking the old-fashioned clay pipe which has now gone out of use. A description of one typical cure will suffice.

312 A Liverpool policeman named Crennell, a native of Bride, consulted the Liverpool Infirmary doctors about a growth of this kind on the left side of his lower lip. They said it must be cut out at once. He refused to have it cut, and told them he would ask for leave, go to the Isle of Man, and have it taken out by Mylrea. They replied, 'If this man is successful, will you put the growth in spirit and bring it back for us to examine?' He promised to do so. When he reached the Island he went straight to Mylrea. Mylrea laid him on his back and took a long look at the cancer. At last he said, 'Well, Crennell, I wish you had come a fortnight sooner. I believe I can draw it out for you even now, but it will take longer and cost you a lot more pain.' He then made a 'patch'—a small poultice or plaster—and gave it to Crennell with instructions to wear it for two weeks. During that period he was to lie at night on his right side only, with the end of a lead pencil, or anything similar, in his mouth to run off the saliva; and he was to be careful not to let himself sink into a deep sleep lest he should swallow the 'patch.' In the daytime he was seen, by one of my informants, walking

up and down on the shore with his head wrapped in a shawl, half mad with pain. At the end of the fortnight Mylrea pulled the cancer right out. The same informant, H— of Ballaghenny, who saw it afterwards, describes it as resembling a leek, with little threadlike roots. Crennell gave it to the Infirmary doctors, and from it they learned, [it was said], more about the matter than all their surgery had taught them.

- 313 Mylrea had inherited the secret from his father and grandfather, and he passed it on to his son; but the son was reluctant to use it because of its risky nature, the chief ingredient being arsenic, i.e., trioxide of arsenic, or its sublimation.

## (2) THE TEARES OF BALLAWHANE

Memories of Charles Teare's wonderful powers seem inexhaustible. It may be that he is sometimes credited with the achievements of other men, in the family or outside it; but there can be no question of the natural skill in medicines, both human and animal, enjoyed by the Teare family for several generations. Charles's descendants carried on the tradition after his death. All this demands an explanation, and folklore has supplied one which satisfies its retailers. In my *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, 179, will be found a tradition that the Teares possessed a mysterious book of charms and remedies, a volume which had been handed down the family for an unknown length of time. Since writing that paragraph I have learned more about this fabulous collection of recipes or prescriptions.

- 315 The Manx story is that on a dark and stormy night long ago a French ship was wrecked at Rue Point on the coast of Andreas. The men of the Teare family of Ballawhane, or wherever they lived then, rescued some of the crew at great personal risk, and the Teare women-folk gave them shelter, food and clothing until they had sufficiently recovered to depart. Among the rescued men was the captain of the ship, and he, when quitting the Teares, left them as a mark of his gratitude a manuscript volume of a medical nature. It is said that he gave it to the celebrated Charles Teare's father, but it seems likely that the family skill is to be dated back to an earlier generation than that. At any rate, the man in whom the family genius flowered most brightly died over sixty years ago. He was then aged and bent, but clear-minded and in full possession of his powers, I have been told by one or two people who remember him. Here are a few more stories about him which have been handed down. In these the boundary-line, if there is one, between ill-health and supposed bewitchment cannot always be drawn.

An informant's elder brother—they were farming together in Maughold—had a remarkably fine and valuable sow which he was keeping in his cart-house, as she was near to farrowing. She had been warmly praised by a Manx-American who had returned from Illinois on a visit, and in consequence of his envious feelings, it was



316 believed, she 'went mad' the same evening, refused to eat, broke out into the fields at the back of the house, and disappeared. My friend and his brother lit the stable lantern and went out with two men to look for her. At last they found her in the mill-ditch, in a fair way to be drowned or smothered. With great difficulty they got her out and back into the cart-house, but she was still very queer and wild, and would not eat. They thought she was going to die, and decided to send word to Ballawhane, a distance of eight miles. Teare said to the messenger, 'Sit down and wait awhile, and I'll give you something.' After a time he went out to his garden and cut a herb here and a herb there, and came back with a bunch which he handed to the messenger with instructions for its use. When the man got back to Ballasloe they boiled the herbs to a broth. Then they slung up the sow (for by that time she could not or would not stand), with ropes made fast to the roof; my friend, though but a youth, lending what help he could in the awkward business. His brother put a stick between her teeth, the way she couldn't bite him, and poured the broth down her throat out of a beer-bottle. Then they all went in to their suppers. When they looked at her again after supper she was as right as the mail, and came running for her food when they called her.

Besides possessing the power of stopping the flow of blood in man or beast, Teare could cure the 'fairy stroke.' A man named Tom Kermode woke up one morning with his mouth all twisted to one side. Teare got herbs together to make a drink, and  
317 sent them to the man's wife. She boiled or simmered them and gave them to him, and he was cured completely.

A boy, a lumper of about 12 years old, who fell asleep among some gooseberry bushes in the garden of a Maughold farmhouse was taken ill immediately afterwards, and nothing could be done with him. His father was advised to send for Teare. He refused, for he did not believe in him. A neighbour, seeing how bad the boy was, set off to Ballawhane on his own account. Teare said to him, 'The boy has been lying where he should not.' He gave the man some herbs out of his garden and sent him back, with a warning to the parents never to let the boy lie there again. The liquor from the herbs was given to him on the sly by his mother, but he was a long time getting better.

The father of the boy may have had a religious objection to Teare's methods. But it is acknowledged that the 'doctor' had not everyone's confidence. One evening he was drinking in a public house in Andreas with three other men. (It is not impossible that this was really his son Charley Chalse, i.e., Charley, son of Charles.) When he hinted that it was now their turn to stand treat they began to abuse him, accusing him of 'blindfolding' (hoodwinking) people and taking their money under false pretences. For Teare always expected a half-crown, or two if he could get them, for doing a cure. At their words he got up to go out. As he walked to the door he looked at the men

318 over his shoulder and said—‘There’s more than one of you fellows won’t get home to-night.’ After leaving the inn one of them fell into a hole and broke his neck. The other two got strayed and fell asleep by the roadside, and when they woke up next morning they were in the wrong direction from their homes.

That, as I have said, may have been one of Teare’s sons. The kudos enjoyed by the father was immense, and is strikingly shown by what happened when he accidentally left his purse in a fishing-boat he had been ‘doctoring.’ The purse, appropriately a net purse, was a tempting fetish of which the crew at once availed themselves. Any money there may have been in it was, I have no doubt, put by to send to its owner. But the purse itself was cut by the skipper into as many pieces as there were men in the crew, and shared round. They were boiled with the tea in the boat’s teapot, the liquor drunk, and the residue of tea-leaves and bits of purse thrown over the nets. This was at Peel. (See LaMothe, *Manx Yarns*, 176.)

The ‘doctoring’ of the boat probably consisted of sprinkling it and the nets with broth from herbs supplied by Teare from his celebrated garden, and perhaps dosing the skipper with the dregs. A Northside man and his wife whom I know remember Teare giving a big bunch of *cushags* to the crew of a Ramsey boat that was going to Kinsale, ‘for luck at the fishing.’ One of the same couple mentioned of his own accord the incident described in *A Second Manx Scrapbook*, s 180–81, where a cow was cured by Teare. This informant turned out to be the younger brother in the story. The cow’s trouble was not due to ‘buitching,’ but to a piece of turnip that had not been chopped small enough and had stuck in her throat.

### (3) REMARKS ON SOME MANX HERBS

The place of herbs in the insular system of cures and magic is a subject that would need a chapter to itself, and at present both space and time are lacking. But a word may be said of the technical rules governing their use by practitioners both professional and amateur. Some plants were most efficacious if ‘lifted between the lights’; that is to say, gathered (fasting) just before sunrise; others, when the morning sun first shone on them; others again could be gathered at any time. The degree of resistance by the roots, if pulled, or by the stems to the knife, if cut, signified the degree of seriousness in the malady or wound they were intended to cure; or, if they were to be employed in magic, the strength of the opposed influences. An insect on the herb when gathered, or unusual markings, were unfavourable omens. A bunch of mixed herbs was best collected from three or nine different spots. If an inward sense of darkness or weakness was felt while lifting, it proceeded from the powers opposing the cure or charm, and had to be conquered by an effort of the will. A steady concentration of the mind was all-important, as in the employment of a spoken charm. If the herbs were mixed in a broth, they were stirred with the sun’s motion for a cure;

against it, and with the left hand, for black or destructive magic.

320 The herb sent by Charles Teare for the boy who had 'been lying where he should not' was probably *lus-ny-moyl-moorey*, the marsh-mallow (also the Manx name for the common mallow, according to Cregeen), which was used both internally and externally to remove the results of walking or lying on 'bad ground' that is to say, ground affected (in two senses) by the fairies. The Manx name has been said to mean 'herb of the big lumps, or knobs'; but it may be remarked that the Irish name of the common mallow is given by Dinneen as *lus-na-m'ol-mor*, 'herb of the big insect.'

Two plants are pre-eminent in Manx folk-medicine and white magic. One is the vervain, known as 'varvine.' The other is the mugwort, *Artemisia vulgaris*, which has three names in Manx—*bollan vane*, 'white plant,' *bollan feaill Eoin*, 'plant of (St) John's festival,' and *lus lheeab*, 'gray herb.' This used to be worn on Tynwald Day, and contests with the *cushag* or ragweed the honour of being the national floral emblem. A song and a dance tune bear its name. More to my present purpose, it was carried, and otherwise utilised, as a protection against, and a deliverance from, every kind of supernatural danger and evil wish.

'If you could ever dig up the whole root of a dandelion without breaking it or leaving the end in the ground, it would cure anything. But there is a little milky bit at the very end of it you can never get, it breaks off, or the Devil bites it off, they say, the way people won't get the cure.' So said old Mrs Borris of Glen Aldyn to me at her fireside some 35 years ago, and as an amateur gardener I fully believe her. The dandelion's Manx name, *lus-y-minniag*, 'herb of the pinch, nip,' is perhaps explained by this habit of the Devil.

#### (4) BLOOD-CHARMING

I have known men who claimed it, men who had benefited by it, and men who had seen others benefited. Patients and eye-witnesses have told me that the flow of blood stops without the patient being touched or taking any active part in the cure. His faith is deemed helpful, but not indispensable. In one case a celebrated practitioner was so drunk that he had to be held up while he pronounced the charm; but it worked. In another the man relieved of haemorrhage was unconscious. A retired Ramsey business-man has told me that he happened once to be crossing to the Island in the same boat as a Peel man named Gawne. During the trip a seaman or stoker hurt himself and bled profusely. A medical passenger said he would soon bleed to death, but Gawne saved his life without touching him, merely using a spoken formula.

Gawne's powers were generally recognised, and I believe his gift was inherited. Another celebrated blood-charmer was Jack Corlett of Ramsey, commonly known as 'Jack-o'-me-onny,' a nickname which I may have misspelt because I have no idea of

its meaning. Jack was especially efficient with animals. In ordinary veterinary operations, such as opening a vein in a horse's neck, the bleeding can be stopped by the operator, who is often a blacksmith. But unless he possesses more than the normal  
 323 ability to check haemorrhage he will not rely on himself alone. A friend of mine when about 11 years old watched a farrier cut a tumour out of the vaginal passage of a neighbour's cow near Leodas in Andreas. It was a serious operation, and the farrier refused to begin it until Jack Corlett came. As soon as the growth was cut out Corlett muttered his charm, and the bleeding ceased. This my friend saw, he says, with his own eyes.

Some of the more or less professional castrators of animals use a charm to stop the consequent loss of blood. An instance of failure comes, at second-hand only, from a former tenant of an inn at Ramsey Bridge, named N. K— His wife's grandfather occupied his leisure with farriery. One day he 'cut' a bull at Ballasaig, and was perhaps a bit careless, for the bleeding began again after he had left the farm. The farmer sent a message to him at Cornaa, and he tried to work the charm from his own house, but without success. His wife, who also had the power, was attending a confinement not far away. Although she was rather drunk at the time she was able to use the charm, and the bleeding, over a mile away, stopped at the exact time, of which a note was taken.

Perhaps the most celebrated of modern Northside blood-charmers was Jim Crellin of Baldromma in Maughold—not of Ballaberna, as stated on 191 of *A Second Manx Scrapbook*. Crellin was a Primitive Methodist preacher who had come to Maughold from the parish of German. He was considered to be somewhat simple or 'innocent';  
 324 for example, he never used strong language, however provoking the circumstances might be. Many stories are told of his powers. When a new pumping-wheel was about to be erected at the North Laxey Mine, one of the men, in helping to get it through a gateway, cut an artery in his shoulder against some projecting piece of metal. Crellin was immediately sent for. When he arrived the man lay in a semi-conscious state through loss of blood. The only words Crellin was heard to say were, 'Stand up and hold your hands above your head.' He did not put a finger on him, but the bleeding stopped in less than five minutes. (How far this result was due to any super-normal influence may be open to discussion.) A man at Smeale damaged a bull by his clumsiness in 'cutting' it. The blood could be heard pouring down on the straw, and the bull was dying. A message was sent to Crellin at Baldromma, and from there he stopped the bleeding with his charm. The distance between the two places is about six miles in a straight line. Crellin had other gifts; how he could pacify a rebellious horse is told further on, in 'The Charmer and the Stallion.'

Blood-charming should not be paid for in coin, but something ought to be given to the charmer, 'baccy' or other desideratum. If such a charm is taught to one who

disbelieves in it or makes improper use of it, his instructor cannot use it again effectually. Crellin is said to have sold his secret to a certain local clergyman, who wrote it down and took it away to England with him. After that Crellin lost his power. Several charms against bleeding have nevertheless been imparted to collectors of Manx folklore, and appear in their books.

Of men living in 1935 who were credited with the power of blood-stopping may be mentioned a farm labourer at Ballamodda, Malew; a man at the Jalloo, Maughold; a painter living in College Street, Ramsey; a man employed in the coal-trade at Ramsey; and J. G—, a farmer at Ballabeg, Andreas. The last tells me that he has also the power of immediately easing the pain and inflammation consequent upon burns and scalds.

## (5) HOLY WELLS

**St Maughold's Well.** Whatever else they may cure, most of the holy wells are 'good for the eyes,' but the famous one at Kirk Maughold is pre-eminent in this respect, as in others. The principal days on which it was visited for any purpose were Easter Day and the second Sunday in August. Coins, and little crosses made of two bits of straw, were thrown into the water, within the memory of local people still living. The formalities were observed at the moment when the sun was rising out of the sea.

J. K—, an elderly native of the parish, says that once, when he was crossing from Liverpool to Ramsey, a woman came up to one of the deck-hands as they steamed into Ramsey Bay, and asked where was St Patrick's Well. He replied that it was high up yonder, on the cliff above them, and pointed to the spot, but she was unable to make it out. He asked her what she wanted to know for. She replied that her sight was very bad, and she had been told that if she bathed her eyes in the water of that well her sight would get strong again. The sailor afterwards told my informant that some days later she came up to him as the steamer was leaving Ramsey, and asked him if it was not himself she had been speaking to before about the well. He said it was. She told him, 'I have done what I came to do, and now I can see the well from here as plainly as you can.' I enquired of John whether she was a Manxwoman. His answer amused me. 'She used to be, but she'd gone to live in Liverpool.'

Many Maughold people call this spring 'St Patrick's Well,' and in other parts of the Island I have heard it termed 'St Patrick's Well at Maughold,' not 'St Maughold's Well.' A widely-diffused legend also connects it with Patrick, as in the case of the well on Peel Head. His horse and himself took a flying leap from the sea up the cliff, and where they 'let' the water gushed out for them both to drink of after their journey. It is pointed out that the well has the shape of a horse-shoe, with the imprint of the frog of the hoof in the middle. Neglect has now obliterated the frog, I find, even though the eyes are laved with the water; and the water is mere ooze.

Mr Robert Looney remembers that when he was a boy his mother used to provide beds and a good supper in their barn at Magher-y-Kew for people who came from Laxey and Douglas to get the benefit of the well. It was always on the Saturday before the second Sunday in August that they came. They slept at Magher-y-Kew, and went on to Kirk Maughold in the small hours of Sunday to wait near the well-side. As the sun rose, or just before, each patient 'teemed' the water from the little basin three times with his right hand, and bathed his eyes or his sores. Most of the visitors were Roman Catholics.

328 Some, perhaps most, of these Catholic visitors were cured of their ailments but so were many Protestants; for St Maughold, or St Patrick, or the well-fairy, was quick to reward genuine faith of whatever denomination. A Dissenter who found in early middle age that his hair was fast leaving him bathed his head in the water and left a rag on the bush. Five years ago he was walking about Ramsey with a good head of hair at the age of 75.

Only once before have I heard of 'well-dressing' in the Isle of Man. Pieces of cloth were ranged round Chibber-y-Chiarn at the top of Glen Dhoo, Ballaugh, on Old Midsummer Day, *A Manx Scrapbook*, 27.

**Water from Chibber-y-Noe.** Of another Northside well, Chibber-y-Noe or Knowle, near the burial-mound called Cronk-y-Knowle not far from Ramsey, Mr William Cubbon of Douglas tells an anecdote which corresponds in motive to ideas about other Manx wells.

A woman of the district who was very ill and confined to her bed begged for a cupful of this water to drink. It was brought to her. Next day she asked for another. To save trouble she was given water from the more convenient domestic well or pump. She took one taste and exclaimed indignantly, 'This isn't Chibber-y-Noe water at all! Bring me the right stuff.' So they had to go and get it.

#### (6) OTHER CURES AND CHARMS

**The Eyes.** A cure for 'scale' (cataract?) on a child's eye is lump-sugar crushed extremely fine and poured into the eye. Both eyes are then shut and the lid of the affected one gently rubbed with the tip of the operator's finger. The next time the doctor sees the patient he asks in amazement, 'However did you get the scale off?' Similarly, a sea-shell called *braain-fnolley* or *braain-olley* was powdered and blown into eyes human, equine and bovine.

**A Cure for Consumption.** A Maughold man was cured of consumption by taking a wise woman's advice to get out of bed at midnight and go down to the shore, and there eat as many 'sea-snails' (whelks) as he could swallow. Next morning he was

found fast asleep on the shore, and his health kept improving from that time on.

**The Dungheap and the Swelling.** Kitty C— of Cardle Vooar cured, many years ago, a man I knew who was troubled with a swelling under the great toe which hindered him in walking. She went with him to the farm ‘midden’ (dunghill) at Rhenab, Maughold, and directed him to thrust his bare foot into it while she repeated a charm [under her voice]. The cure worked.

**The Cross of Soot.** R. L—, a Kirk Maughold farmer, strained his wrist badly while stacking and could not use it at all. He had it charmed by a man he knew, but got no benefit. He then went to the man’s brother, who made L— kneel at the hearth, 331 took hold of his wrist, put a cross of soot or ash on it with his forefinger, and stroked it lightly, muttering some words under his breath. On his way home L— tested the wrist and found it as strong as it had ever been, and no pain from it. (From R. L— himself.)

**Dead Hand.** ‘A poor woman in a neighbouring parish having a child suffering from some strumous affection took the little one to the churchyard, and sprinkled it with earth from a new-made grave. This, however, not proving a perfect cure, she next took the child to a house where a man was laid out preparatory to his being put into the coffin, and she drew the hand of the corpse over the features of the child two or three times, with what effect we are not told.’

‘A woman in this parish (from whom one might have expected somewhat more of commonsense), a short time ago took a child of her sister’s, who had a trifling blemish or birthmark somewhere on the face, to three different houses where she had heard of a corpse, and had the mark stroked with the dead hand, expecting the operation to be effectual in removing the blemish.’ [Revd W. Kermodé’s *Parochialia*, manuscript account of Ballaugh Parish written circa 1870s. Per P.W. Caine.]

**Toothache Charm.** A relative (well-known to me) of the man who was cured of a swelling by the wise woman of Cardle—see above—was given a written charm for toothache by a man named Joughin of Rhenab, a member of a ‘skilled’ family. This he was to wear as an amulet. Its formula is common all over the British Isles—‘Peter 332 stood at the gate, and Christ came passing by. Christ said to Peter, Why are you so down-hearted? Because my teethache, Lord. I’ll give you power over the toothache for ever.’ The beneficiary has told me that she was never troubled with toothache while she kept the charm, nor—it must be admitted—after she parted with it to a member of her family.

**A Headache Charm.** Another friend of mine uses a charm to relieve her daughter’s headaches. This is accompanied by pressure of the hands at the front and back of the head simultaneously. It is said to alleviate the pain. Pressure of even the sufferer’s own

hands is, I believe, found beneficial in such cases, without any charm being spoken. In fact, the hand flies naturally to a painful spot.

**The Egg Charm.** A cure for a bewitched cow. Get the right herbs from a wise person, and nine eggs from a long way off so that they will be ‘clean of *buitcheragh*.’ At midnight and with the doors fastened put a third part of the herbs and three of the eggs in a pot with some well-water, and let them boil for exactly three minutes. Do this for three nights running, and the same with the other two-thirds of the material. (Abridged from Nelson MSS.) Nothing is said about giving the mess to the cow, but probably that was done.

333 **Fairy-holes.** The virtues of ‘fairy-holes’ spots where three quarterland-boundaries meethave already been described in *A Manx Scrapbook*, 315. To the places there particularised may be added two more—one at the junction of Ballavastyn, Leodas and Kiondroghad, in Andreas, and another on the Eairy, in the lane going down to Straledn, at Port Mooar, Maughold. Soil from the latter was used to throw over a sick animal so recently as five years ago, according to what I then heard on the spot.

334 **Giving away the luck.** A man who was landing his catch of fish on Peel Quay was approached by another fisherman of the same fleet, who said, ‘That’s a grand catch that’s at you this morning, John! There’s not pot-luck itself at us, not enough herring to make a breakfast for me and the men.’ The first man said to his mate, ‘Give him half a basket.’ After he had gone off with it the mate said, ‘You fool! We’ll get no more herring this season.’ ‘Why not then?’ ‘Haven’t you given away our luck? And you never put any salt on it either.’ Sure enough they could do no good afterwards. At last the skipper went to Nan Wade and told her about it, and asked her could she help him. ‘I can,’ she said, ‘a lot better than you can help yourself, I’m thinking, for you’ve acted like a fool.’ And she gave him a bundle of herbs. These he took home and boiled. The crew drank some of the broth, and the remainder was sprinkled over the nets and boat. When Nan was giving the skipper the herbs she told him not to shoot his nets till it was dark (thirty or forty years ago the nets were frequently shot before sundown) and at daybreak the man who had robbed him of his luck would come to him, but he was to be given nothing. These instructions were obeyed. In the second watch the fish were heard lashing about in the nets, so after some discussion they started to haul in. As the sun rose and they were getting in the last piece, the man bore down on them, calling out, ‘A good shot, Johnny!’ But this time he was given no herring, and the luck returned to the boat from that day on.

**The Charmer and the Stallion.** The man who told me this was watching a party of men trying to get a stallion across the gangway of a steamer lying in Ramsey Harbour. The poor beast was determined not to go on board, and after a long spell of chivying and shouting its mood was a mixture of viciousness and panic. At last a man named



Crellin, who also was looking on, stepped forward and told them to leave the job to him. He went quietly up to the horse, which made no attempt to evade him, and stroked its neck and nose. At the same time he said something to it—in Manx, my friend thought; at any rate it was not in English. Crellin then walked across the gangway, and the horse walked after him.

335 **The Golden Pig.** ‘Anyone fasting from dawn to dark on the eve of the Little Christmas, and then eating a whole barley-cake and a slice of bacon with a drink of well-water, will see the Golden Pig with the jewel buried in its skull, which brings luck and fortune to the beholder.’ (From Miss Mona Douglas)

## (7) WITCHES AND THEIR CRAFT

337 **The Maughold Men and the Witch.** Two men were walking from Ballajora to Ramsey to catch the coach for Peel, where they were to join their boat for the herring-fishing. Soon after leaving home they met a woman they knew, who lived close by. She asked them where they were going, and they had to tell her. ‘Aw, *my gillya bogh*,’ she said to one of them, ‘don’t forget *me!* Bring me a few herring when you come back.’ After leaving her this man observed to his companion, ‘We’ll not do much good this week, for that one can harm yer.’ She was a witch. Well, after two or three nights’ fishing and nothing taken, the skipper said to the crew, ‘Did any of you meet with a woman on your way to the boat?’ ‘Yes,’ said the Maughold men. ‘And what did she say to you?’ They told him what had passed. The skipper then said they must go to a certain witch-doctor at Keeill Thustag in Bride, give him half-a-crown, and tell him the whole story. They went, and the doctor said to them, ‘Yes; I’ll give you better luck next week.’ He handed them some herbs to be used in the right way. On top of that he told them, ‘Let one of you, when you go back to Ballajora, take a scissors and cut a bit off the end of her skirt or her shawl when she’s not looking, and have it stitched into your own clothes, and she’ll never be able to do you any more harm while it’s there.’ They did it, and got plenty of fish from that out. (From a friend of the two men, in his own words.)

338 **A Charm against Jealousy.** Newly-married women were sometimes ‘buitched’ (bewitched) by the jealousy of men who had wanted to marry them and had been disappointed. One result of this was a sort of smothering sensation in bed. To put an end to it, a beeve’s heart was stuck all over with pins and boiled at midnight with all doors tightly shut. By this means the guilty person was drawn willy-nilly to the house, and could then be dealt with. (Abridged from Nelson MSS)

**Half-choked in Bed.** A Rushen woman married a wealthy widow-man who had an unmarried sister. On several occasions the wife was half-choked while asleep in bed, as though by a hand squeezing her throat. A ‘wise person’ told her that if she could

find out who was doing it, and warn her in the presence of two witnesses 'never to do the like of that again to her no more as long as the two of them would be living, it would stop her at it.' The next time it happened she woke as the witch was vanishing, and caught a little glint of her dress, by which she knew it was her husband's sister. Next day this woman was unable to deny her guilt. She admitted that she was 'mad' because the money would go to the new wife. (Nelson MSS, dated September 1899)

339 **A Burnt Sacrifice.** M— of Crowgreen in Maughold was a man who had bad luck in everything he touched. Nothing prospered with him in any branch of his farming, although he believed in following the old ways and customs. His ewes wouldn't lamb, his horses and beasts went wrong; and when one of his cows dropped a dead calf 'it was what they call the last straw to.' So he resolved to put an end to his misfortunes if he anyway could. William G— the miller advised him to burn the dead calf at the nearest cross-roads (which would be on the way up to Rhullick-ny-Quakeryn). So he kicked a cartload of gorse at the spot, poured some oil on it, put the calf's body on top, and set fire to the pile, till the calf was burnt to a cinder. The miller had spread the news, and a small crowd turned up to watch the proceedings. It was generally believed, and there was some expectation of the sort in this case, that when the smoke began to rise the witch who had caused the bad luck would be irresistibly attracted to the scene, and could then be compelled to withdraw her ill-will. Nothing of the kind occurred, however, nor did M—'s affairs improve thereafter. The man who told me the story saw the light of the fire from a little way off, but he did not go any nearer. It is now fully 25 years since M— died, and about 45 since the performance of the rite.

340 **The Spell of the Buried Heart.** To compass an enemy's death a beeve's (bullock's) heart was placed in a box as though in a coffin, and taken at midnight by the principal and two confederates to a cemetery. There a hole was dug and the box put in it. The entire burial-service was then read aloud, with the name of the intended victim in its proper place, and with special care not to omit the shaking of soil on the box at the words 'dust to dust and ashes to ashes.' The 'grave' was then covered up and all traces removed. This exercise in black magic was described to Blanche Nelson by the son of a man who worked it upon a newly-married woman. She soon began to waste away, and died. The man himself, after his own death, used to be seen walking about Corvalley farm on the Howe. The whole affair was well-known to the local people in 1899, and the woman's death was unhesitatingly ascribed to the spell.

**Knots for Wind.** The magic knots that were bought by sailors and fishermen down to quite recent times to give them favourable winds were usually tied on a belt woven of flax, which was to be worn continuously. Sometimes a handkerchief was used, as Rhys was told (*Celtic Folklore*, 331). There was a special way of untying the knots which was almost as important as the wise woman's ritual in tying them. Such knots

did not go out of favour until Manx fishermen ceased to make the long voyages to Lerwick and Kinsale.

341 **The Familiar Bees.** The Q—s, of St John's, one at least of whom was prominent in the annals of Manx witchcraft, used, some 40 years ago, to keep a number of bees whose docility aroused suspicion. The suspicion seems to have been that they were employed as 'familiaris.'

**How to Kill a Witch.** The commonest of witch-stories has found a home at Crowgreen in Maughold, as well as at other places in the Island. An unusually big hare was several times seen walking about the farm 'street,' as impudent as sin; that is to say, in as self-possessed a manner as if it were a pet animal. None of the dogs could be persuaded to attack it. They seemed to take no more notice of it than they did of the pig. At last the farmer put a sixpenny piece into his gun and took a shot at the creature. He must have hit it, for it vanished with the bang of the gun, and a certain old woman was found shortly afterwards 'lying in bed hurted.'

**A Charm against Bewitchment.** The following formula is useful when there is any suspicion of the evil eye or ill-wishing—'God bless thy eyesight! May the harm thou art wishing for me fall on thyself.'



## CHAPTER III

### FAIRIES AND PHANTOMS

(1) FAIRY WASHERS (2) RED WOMEN

(3) WHITE LADIES (4) OTHER FAIRY MATTERS

(5) GIANTS (6) DEMONS, FRIENDLY AND MALIGN

(1) FAIRY WASHERS

351 **Manx Fairy-Washerwomen.** The fairy-washerwoman of Maughold haunted a crossing-place on the Struan-ny-Niee named *Boayl-ny-Niee* ('Place of the Washing'). A local man, R. L—, calls this spectral laundress a *Liannan Shee*, and says he held a lighted candle in one hand while she beat the clothes, or whatever it was she had, with her *sladhan* held in the other. A still older native of the district, K—, whose father actually saw her, and was not frightened at all, says she was 'a lil red woman, and used to have a candle stuck in the bank beside her' (which was more sensible and convenient than holding it). In both versions she came out of the river, and to see her was a sure sign of dirty weather at hand, but of nothing worse. (I enquired carefully about that.) The Washer may not have been thought to be always the same personage, or a party of fairies may sometimes have been seen, for I have heard the Boayl-ny-Niee casually alluded to as 'the place where the fairies washed their clothes.' But I could meet with no more than the two accounts just given.

In other places in the Island it was always in parties that they did their washing.  
351 There was a flat stone, not now discoverable with certainty, in the Rhenab river a little way below where the lodge now stands, and at this the fairies were both heard and seen at night and early in the morning, washing clothes.

At the side of the Gretch river in Lonan, in a spot called 'the Fairy Ground,' the fairies used to be seen washing their babies. These solicitous mothers, like the Maughold laundresses, always wore red costumes.

Three other fairy washing-places, which have been mentioned in print but are not included in any volume of folklore, may be added here. At a river-crossing in Glen Rushen the fairies soaked, beat, and shook out their garments, and hung them on the gorse-bushes to dry. One article, a beautifully-made cap which was too small for the smallest child in the glen, was brought home by a man who saw it being put on a bush; but his mother made him take it back, 'for fear the fairies would be

afther it, an there wouldn be res' in the house on the night' (*Yn Lioar Manninagh*, 4, 161). Again, at an unnamed place in Arbory the fairies were often heard 'beetling and bleaching their clothes down at the stream.' In another glen, children saw the fairies' newly-washed linen spread out on a rock to dry (*Chambers' Journal*, 1855). Similar sights may have given its name to 'Glen Nee-a-nee' in Kirk Bride, thus spelt in Quarrie's verses. The name probably contains the same word as Boayl-ny-Niee, where the sound would be better represented by 'N'ye.'

## (2) RED WOMEN

In the parish of Maughold, especially, I have been struck by the prevalence of 'the Little Red Woman,' whose Manx name, *Ben Ven Jiarg*, is still to be heard, though  
 354 not often. Even in a specimen of the ubiquitous changeling story, the fairy who exchanges the two children in the harvest field, and re-exchanges them when her own child howls, is a Little Red Woman. These Red Women are more important members of the Manx fairy-world than I had realised, and a census might reveal that they are more numerous, proportionately, in Maughold and Lonan than in the other parishes. We have seen that the Washer at Boayl-ny-Niee was of this sinister hue, and among the sisterhood is perhaps also to be reckoned the celebrated little red-cloaked woman who patrolled the Northern mountains, the *Ben Veg Carraghan*.

355 **Men and Things at the Brummish.** The Brummish, a field close to Ballaglass farmhouse, contained the once-celebrated inn, the *Brummish Veg*. There were in fact two licensed houses there, and the stones of the larger one are still in the haggart walls. Two were needed, for in those days the population was both denser and thirstier. Fishermen, farm-boys, and miners from the lead-mine on the bank of the Ballaglass river, often spent their nights in these public-houses, drinking, singing, playing cards and spinning yarns. (The mine was started by some foreigners. They were good miners, and mighty clever at making 'beads and glass things.' They lived at the Brummish.) Many a man coming up from Port Cornaa to his home the upper part of the parish would get no further than the Brummish Veg. Jimmy Fargher and Peter Kermeen on their way to it saw, just about where the electric tramline is now, a Li'l Red Woman—the *Ben Veg Jiarg*—going in-under a gorse-bush almost at their feet. Peter gave the bush a kick as he passed it, but Jimmy said, 'Leave it alone, it's doing  
 356 us no harm.' A terrible bad pain came into Peter's leg, though he was but a young fellow then, and it never left him after. He was lame from that time out.

Another man, who remembers hearing of this affair at the time it happened, says it was not a Red Woman but a little white dog they saw. Perhaps the original story was that the Red Woman had a white dog with her. This would be the fairy dog so frequently met with in the company of 'Themselves.'

**The Red Woman and the Changeling.** A woman who was shearing (reaping) on the farm of Ballagilley had left her baby on the ground close to the hedge. While the work was going on, one of the other reapers, who had stopped for a moment to straighten his back, saw a little Red Woman come to the child and pick it up, leaving another baby lying in its place. She then carried the woman's baby away with her. The one she had left behind set up such a piercing howl that everybody stopped working to look, and the mother dropped her reaping-hook to run to it, thinking it was her own. But the man held her back, saying, 'Wait now, till we see what'll happen.' They all stood watching, and the child kept on screaming. In a minute or two the fairy-woman came hurrying back down the field from somewhere they couldn't see—she must have come through the (stone) hedge—with the right baby in her arms, laid it down where she had found it, and disappeared through the hedge again with her own child.

Such stories, with local variations, are of course common. I give this one on account of the abducting fairy's colour.

### (3) WHITE LADIES

357 Why the Ladies are always white and the Women red I cannot explain, nor yet why 'White Lady,' unlike 'Red Woman,' has no equivalent in the native tongue. True, there was a celebrated *Ben Vane* in Marown early in the 18th century, but she was only a witch. *Liannan Shees*, however, are often called 'White Ladies.'

**Liannan Shees of the South.** The *Liannan shee* seems to have preferred the men of the South of the Island to the Northerners. Some of these fascinating vampires have been described by Charles Roeder and others appear in my previous volumes, but the census is still far from complete. One attached herself to old Harry Ballahane of Rushen Parish, 'and when he would sit to meat wouldn't he be throwing her a sup of porridge?' (Nelson MSS). Another, recorded by the same historian of manners in 1898, followed Nick Kermode's grandfather, when he was a young man, from the fields right into the house. It was dark outside, and he thought she was Shen Moll, his wife, though he was puzzled when she didn't answer him. But when he got in his wife was already there. She couldn't see the fairy woman, and wondered why he wasn't eating his supper. 'Don't you see this one?' was his explanation. At that she grinned at him shocking and went through the door. And there was another man, a  
378 White Woman was seen walking at his side from Cregneish up the Mull one night, when he was going on the hill to 'take the stars.' When they taxed him with he couldn't deny it. This actually occurred in 1898.

**A White Woman in the Darkness.** A retired lighthouse-keeper whom I know fairly well has a tale about his father and another man. They were walking past Kirk Arbory

(?) one night, and they saw the figure of a woman dressed all in white standing in the angle of the wall just opposite the Church gate. When the man went across to speak to her she took him by the arm and spun him round and round till he was dizzy, and then let go of him so suddenly that he nearly fell down on the road. The marks of her fingers remained on his arm up to the day of his deathdark imprints on the biceps.

A very similar [encounter] is related in [the] Nelson MSS; but for Kirk Christ Rushen. In that adventure the apparition was standing just outside the Vicarage front-door, which was shut. The two men thought at first it was the wife of the Vicar, who sometimes put her out. She gripped the man who accosted her, and he had a hard job to get free. He looked years older afterwards, and always had her finger-marks on his arm.

A sexton of Kirk Christ Rushen, now long deceased, told me a very similar story many years ago, so it may be regarded as common property.

359 **White Lady of Lewaigue.** She was often seen on Lewaigue Bridge, which crosses the little stream close to the farm gate. One time she came right into the house itself and walked upstairs, dressed in rustling silk, in front of a woman who was living there. The woman was so frightened that she wouldnt stop at Lewaigue any longer, and went away to live at Creg-ny-Mult.

This White Lady is believed to have some connexion with the celebrated Christian Lewaigue. The woman he wronged in his unregenerate days certainly haunted the road from the farm to its junction with the Douglas road, and further than that, apparently, since she waylaid him at Ballure Bridge, as related in the *Second Manx Scrapbook*, 75. But after Christian's time she showed herself to Mark Harrison's father when he was farming Lewaigue. He went out of the house one Saturday night to look for a man and a pair of horses at were very late getting back from Ramsey. When he was between the gate and the bridge he heard 'a rattling (i.e., rustling) like a silk dress, and someone passed him like a shadow and went into the house.' But when he returned, no stranger had been there.

Another man, when passing exactly the same spot one night, saw nothing unusual, but his dog stopped, and stood as though pointing at the bit of a shrubbery there. It then drew back slowly, step by step, and finally turned tail and bolted up the road. The dog, this man assured me with all the conviction of a dog-lover, would have defended him against any earthly odds, whether man or beast, and never showed fear in its life except that night. It was our passing the place together that put him in mind of the incident.



## (4) OTHER FAIRY MATTERS

360 Whatever parish they may grace, many of the Manx fairies are of an imitative disposition, just as in other countries. In mines, quarries and boat-building yards they have been heard, and occasionally seen, carrying on at night after the men have finished  
 361 and gone home—but without any noticeable result next morning, wherein they differ from Fenoderee. A sidelight on the latter's chief characteristic reached me lately in a Maughold man's comment on Fenoderees. 'You had to do a bit of the work yourself first,' he said, 'to start it, to show them how lek, and then they'd go on with it for you.' It was his belief that Fenoderees used to be numerous, each one attached to his own neighbourhood; not merely a single journeyman-worker for the whole Island.

Among these mostly invisible bands of fairy workers the best known to the general public are the woodworking elementals of the *Ooig-my-Seiyr* ('Cave of the Carpenters') on the coast of Patrick. The explanation of their activities that one meets with in print is that they were engaged in making barrels for the herring they were going to catch and cure; and it is averred that to hear them promised good fishing. The sounds heard coming from the cave, however, are accounted for in two other ways. One is that they were building new boats for their fishing-fleet. The other is that they were making coffins, but not for themselves. They were heard going at it with unusual vigour before a well-remembered disaster to the Peel-side boats. Consonant with this explanation is the belief that good fishing for the fairies meant poor fishing for the sons of men, and vice versa. Also that to see their boats, or rather the innumerable  
 362 twinkling lights of them, at sea, was a warning to put in, for it heralded a storm.

**The Fishing-fairies.** Fairies belonging to the colony at the top of Glen Rushen used to come down late at night to go fishing from Glen May shore, where they kept their  
 364 boats hauled up in the caves. One time they found a party of Irish fairies just landing. There was a great battle with fists and stones between the two clans, and many were killed and many wounded. A man was watching from the brews, and he wanted to shout a 'good word' to scatter them, but his tongue wouldn't stir in his head. At last a troop of fairy cavalry galloped down to the beach, headed by a rider on a white horse. He laid on to the Irish fairies with a stick he was carrying, and drove them back to their boats, but in doing this he got pitched into the sea and drowned. As he went down he cried out '*Yee mie!*' ('Good God!') Now these were the very words the man who was watching had been trying to get out. The rider was not exactly a fairy, but a Glen May man who had been picked up at sea by them when he was drowning, to help them in their fishing and fighting. After this he was never seen by any person again.

**Captured by Fairies.** What were most likely the same lot of fairies figure in another Glen May story. Two men were due to go to the fishing at Peel early one morning.

365 A. asked B. to give a whistle and a knock at his door in the village street as he would be going past. A. and his wife heard a whistle and a knock, and he went to the door, but no one was there. He hurried up the hill in the hope of catching B. A little later exactly the same signals were heard again by A.'s wife. She opened the door and found B. standing there. He had just come from his house lower down. She told him her husband had gone, and B. started off to overtake him; but neither he nor anybody else ever saw A. again. The only trace of him was his cries heard in the lower part of the Glen whenever the boats were going out at Peel, and he was believed to be held captive by the fairies. They must have overheard what he asked B. to do, and done it themselves first. A regular trick.

**Fairies' Mooring-place.** A party of youngsters rambling one Sunday afternoon about the Calloway inlet in Perwick, Rushen, came across an iron bolt, with a mooring-ring attached, firmly fixed in the rock. They made rather strange of this, because none of them had ever seen it before. They used all their strength to get it out, but it would not budge for them. A few days later they went there again to have another try at it, but there was no trace of bolt or ring, nor any hole in the rock at that spot. They or their elders came to the conclusion that the thing had been accidentally left there by fairies who had been using it to tie up their fishing-boats. (But would it in that event have been made of iron? More probably they made it seem like iron to the boys.)

366 **Fairy-women on the Howe.** A man who lived on the Howe in Rushen was crossing a field called the Naiee Veg late one night, and he saw a flock of little white things jumping up nearly at his side. At first he thought they were ponies, but very little ones. All of a sudden they changed into tiny women and made for him. He took to run, and they ran too. Half way across the Naiee Mooar he thought they'd have him. As he ran he could hear a chain rattling. He just got home before them and banged the door to. Next morning he couldn't stand, and hadn't the use of his legs for months.

**They try to steal a Woman.** A woman, while lying in bed with her husband a short time after the death of her baby, heard 'a dreadful noising on the stairs like a whole troop of feet coming up and a log getting dragged.' She was frightened, knowing well it was the fairies coming to take her. They crowded into the room, and she could hear them planning together in dreadfully coarse voices what they were going to do with her. They wore red caps and had 'terrible nice little ears, something the shape of gin-bottles the men used to be bringing from Holland.' One of them said (in corrupt Manx), 'Let's take her out with us.' At last when she was nearly 'freckened out' she found strength to rouse her husband. As soon as he woke they were 'in the splutter' to get away, and made just the same noise again going down the stairs. Auntie Ett afterwards 'allowed enough' that they would have had her away with them only that she got the man wakened, and they 'angry mos' pirriful' that he wakened up. The

log, it appears, was to take her place in bed till they could get clear away with her.  
 367 (Nelson mss. By a postscript this occurrence can be dated to the end of the 19th  
 century.)

**The Fairies' Share.** The *soddbag-rheynney*, 'dividing-cake,' was an extra bit of dough baked in a flat cake, broken into small pieces, and scattered on the kitchen floor or just outside the house for the fairies to enjoy in the night-time. When a Kirk Bride girl baked, cleaned up, and went to bed without having made the *soddbag-rheynney*, the fairies gave her a smack in the eye to wake her up and remind her. Perhaps this was November Eve or May Eve, when such offerings were compulsory.

**The Fairies as Souls of the Dead.** This element in the doctrine of fairydom is well seen in an account of how the 'Little People' came regularly into the North Lonan schoolhouse when one 'Tommy the Clerk' was master there. (He got this name because he held at the same time the positions of Parish Clerk, Notary Public, and other important clerical posts.) No matter how securely this scholarly Tommy locked the doors before going to bed, 'Themselves' would find their way into the house and disturb his slumber. But in 189- the new Electric Railway Company brought their line just behind Tommy's cottage and school, and in making the necessary cutting they unearthed a large quantity of stone coffins, human bones, and other relics of  
 368 interments as Manx archaeologists are well aware. After these had been removed the fairies were seen and heard no more. (See *Manx Quarterly*, No. 7, 617.)

## (5) GIANTS

369 The first item in this section is a folk-tale kindly sent me by Miss Mona Douglas. It was heard by her in the Laxey district in three versions, and rather rambling, which I have unified.

**The Undersea Giants.** A Laxey miner got lost in the workings, and while trying to find his way out came to a great room hollowed in the rock, with tables and chairs in it all of stone. The light in the room was yellowish, and seemed to come from above. Six great powerful men in queer rough clothes were sitting there and staring at him. He asked them in Manx to direct him to the upper world. They spoke among themselves in a language he could not understand, and then one turned to him and told him he was under Laxey Bay, and a good way out too. 'This is the castle of the giants that used to be living in Laxey, and you are the first man that ever found his way down here.' They said they were just putting in the time till the Island would be fit for heroes to live in again, and they had been waiting there hundreds of years. Then one of them gave him a cled on the head, and he didn't know anything till he  
 370 found himself outside the big door. He could never hit on the way down again. This was heard with variations from two or three different people, 'and I remember,' says

Miss Douglas, 'that in a mine disaster that occurred when I was about eight years old one or two of the bodies were not found, and some people thought the giants had taken them, and they weren't dead at all.'

**The Big Man of Ballure.** The Big Man (who was not the same personage as the Fenoderee) did work for the Christian family of Ballure, near Ramsey. He was often seen knocking about their land. Willy Carberry, an Irish pedlar who always wore a top-hat and carried a big box on his back, was coming up the old Douglas road (a rough green track) one St Simon's Fair night (1st November). There was a middling strength of moonlight in. When Willy got to Cronk-y-Rushen on the Rhoan, where the little river crosses the road to fall into Ballure Glen, he felt he would like a drink, and knelt down to get it. As he rose up again he saw the Big Man standing above him on the other bank. 'He was half the height of a telegraph pole.' (To make sure he was not the Fenoderee I enquired whether he was clothed or naked. 'He was fully dressed, and carried a long staff in his hand.')

This road, by the way, is the one on which Betsy Juan-y-Whilya or Crowe was murdered some 50 or 60 years ago, as is well-remembered, for murders are rare in the Island. When I explained to the friend who told me of Willy's adventure why I had asked him about the Big Man's costume, it reminded him of much gossip concerning the Fenoderee. All of it was familiar except that when old clothes and porridge were offered to him he said indignantly, 'Trousers without legs to wear them, food without a mouth to eat it! If Ballure Glen is not for me I'm away to Glen Rushen.' He said this in Manx, naturally.

**The Dhoon Giant and his Wife.** Over some domestic question which is lost to history these two worthies fell out one day and threw stones at each other across the lower part of the Dhoon Glen. Three of these stones dropped close together and still stand as the boulders called *Meir-ny-Foawyr* ('Fingers of the Giants'). The two disputants can yet be heard brawling on rough winter nights by anyone who ventures near enough. On certain stones at Lhergydhoo in Kirk German to which the same name is given, gigantic finger-prints can be seen by the imaginative; but this does not explain the name of the Dhoon stones so some other legend about which must have perished.

**The Giant's Tracks.** What are locally described as 'the tracks of a giant who lived on North Barrule' are to be seen at the river below Thallooqueen, Maughold, and this is the way he made them. First he threw a big boulder from the top of the mountain into the river, and then he came down himself and scrambled across. But he slipped doing that, and his cheek hit the rock in one place, and his foot (or fist) left another mark in another place.

**The Giant's Footprint.** This, in Manx, '*Track'-ny-Foawr*, its usual name, is on Bal-

372 lacannell (now part of Ballafayle), Maughold. It lies almost at the edge of the steep cliff beyond the farm-hedge, and overlooks a small bay. It is well-hidden by the long grass that has grown over it in recent years, but when this is cleared off there appears cut or hollowed out in a bulge of rock a rough likeness of a human right foot, much larger than modern feet. The depth is about 3 inches; the toe end narrows sharply to a strip about an inch wide and three inches long, which is open at its termination. Though now concealed and nearly forgotten, the 'print' was formerly well-known to the young people of the neighbourhood, who used to gather there in their spare time and amuse themselves by putting their feet into it. The giant who made it swam over from Cumberland, and climbed the cliff by a path which has now crumbled away.

**The Giant's Finger-Prints.** A boulder on the highest point of Shellag brows, close to the Jackdaws' Church, if you know where that is, bears the finger-marks of the giant who threw it from the top of North Barrule at an enemy's ships which he saw approaching the coast of Bride. The name of the boulder is *Clagh-vedn* ('White Stone'), and the Jackdaws' Church is a stretch of the clayey cliff-side where a large congregation of birds nest annually.

(6) DEMONS, FRIENDLY AND MALIGN

**More about Gob-ny-Scuit**

373 A spirit must have dwelt on this spot ever since the first settlers on the East slope of North Barrule heard the wind howling and moaning among the rocks and peered timidly into the fissure below the summit. From the name of his holding here 'oul ny-Scuit' has taken his title, as many less memorable Manxmen have from theirs. His personal name, if he ever had one, has been forgotten, but he belongs to that numerous and influential family, the *Bugganes* of the Isle of Man. Local people who incline to historical explanations for such problems say that he was originally a man who killed another man in the corner of a field on Ballagorry, and ran away to hide in the *Towl Buggane* ('Buggane's Hole') at Gob-ny-Scuit. There he lived for a long time, and when he died—or without going through that formality, for different tellers have different versions—he was turned into the spirit who afterwards haunted the mountain-side and used to be seen occasionally going down to Ballure shore in three strides. Sometimes he did threshing for farmers, but his chief function was to shout 'Ha-oo, ha-oo' before stormy weather. By this thoughtful act he saved many a harvest; nor did he confine his demonstrations to harvest-time. Sometimes he ventured down nearly as far as the Hibernian to utter his friendly warning. One September Sabbath morn, when all the people were worshipping in Cardle Chapel, they heard him shouting insistently '*Cluck hoods*' ('Gather in!') So they didn't make  
374 a long service of it that day, but away and they worked all night till they saved it. Well, would you believe it, next day turned out lovely! And the night after that they

heard old Gob-ny-Scuit again, shouting as hard as he could go. He liked having a joke with them sometimes.

The Gob-ny-Scuit *buggane* was heard roaring terribly on the seashore too. Once at least he was even seen there. An old man named Corkill who lived at Straledn in Port Mooar used to go down early in the mornings to see what the tide had brought in. One day he was startled to see the *buggane* standing at the mouth of the big cave called Hee-Kerna Mooar. The thing said to him, 'If you don't look at me I'll not look at you,' so he passed on. The cave is believed to connect with the fissure on Barrule.

375 It was near the scene of Corkill's adventure that a girl named S— found, about 50 years ago, a little lump of gold on a rock above high-water mark. Seven years later she sold it, she told me recently, for £2 17s 6d to a Liverpool pawnbroker, after having refused better offers. Much industrious searching by local people followed her discovery, but no more gold was found. I think it was tacitly attributed to the fairies.

**The Buggane of Kione Dhoo.** Port St Mary men used to pour a noggin of rum (half a gill) into the sea from their boats as they passed the headland of Kione Dhoo on their way to the Kinsale and Lerwick fishing-grounds. The object of their sacrifice was a cave called *Ghaw-Kione-Dhoo* ('Black Head Inlet'). The late J.J. Kneen told me that rum was occasionally thrown from the top of the cliff also, with the words '*Gow shen, y veisht!*' ('Take that, evil spirit!' or 'monster').

376 The respect entertained locally for this demon led to the naming of a Castletown fishing-boat after him, the *Beisht-yn-Kione-Dhoo*. Other boats in the fleet, mentioned in Roeder's *Manx Notes and Queries*, had an equally supernatural flavour: *Glashtin*, *Ben-rein Ferrish*, and *Buggane-y-Smelt*. The last-named was supposed to be the ghost of a member of the Gawne family of Kentraugh.

**A Monster of the South.** When he was a young man at Ballafesson, K—, who is far from being a neurotic subject, was walking home one evening from Castletown by the shore road. Near Strandhall 'some big black thing' came out of the sea and crossed the road just in front of him. Further on he had to pass through three field-gates. Although the night was windless every gate was shaking violently. When he tried to climb one of them to get out of the field there was such a commotion all round him that he took fright and scrambled over the hedge (stone wall) at another place. After he had got home and was just starting on his supper, there was a terrific crash overhead. He left his supper and went straight to bed without even taking off his boots, believing the monster followed him home and was hanging about outside.

377 **The Moddey-Dhoo of Milntown.** [T]here are supernatural black dogs all over the Island. Those I know best haunt the North. Of the Milntown one I have written in a

previous volume, but in further confirmation would add that a friend of mine met it in 1930, by night, coming from the direction of Sulby. As usual, it had enormous fiery eyes which lit up its face and shoulders, a long shaggy coat. It was black, and bigger than any natural dog. It turned aside and leapt right across the road, to disappear up Glen Aldyn.

In the parish of Lezayre, at any rate, the *moddey-dhoo* is a harbinger of evil. In the foregoing case his appearance was followed, a few nights later, by the cloudburst amongst the Northern hills which laid much of Glen Aldyn in ruin.

**Moddey-dhoo of the Rhenab Road.** Two men going home from their work at the North Laxey Mine walking along the highroad near Ballagorry Chapel and the Dhoon School. Just about there a 'spooyt' comes out of a field into the road. It was two o'clock the morning, with a drizzle of rain and weak moonlight showing through it. As the men walked along they discussed some jaunt they were going to take next day. Suddenly they heard a great splashing and noising at the spooyt just in front of them, and in the glimmer of moonlight they made out the shape of an animal about the size of a Newfoundland dog coming out from the dub or ditch under the spooyt. 'Its eyes were blazing like saucers, and it troddled over the road into the ditch opposite and down towards Creg-ny-Mult. It was black, and half the size of a calf.' Next shift they told the other miners about it, and an elderly one said, 'John, don't you know what that was?'. 'What was it?' 'It was the *moddey-dhoo* of the Rhenab road.'

**The Moddey-Dhoo of Ballaugh Glen.** There is a stretch of road in Ballaugh Glen, between Scroundal Mill and Ballathoar house, which has had in the past a very bad reputation at night. One of its manifestations was a black dog which appeared suddenly at people's feet without their having seen it coming, and disappeared in the same mysterious manner. A friend of mine avers that he was 'the finish' of this apparition, and this is how he exorcised it. As he was passing Ballathoar gateway late one evening he saw it standing there, a few feet away from him. He made a grab at it and managed to get his hand on its neck, but it sprang from him and 'cleaned off,' and was never seen by anyone again. At least, not at night; for he knew the dog well enough. It was a trained animal, and if its owner showed it a strange sheep in a flock by daylight and told it to go and get the same sheep later, the dog would bring it to him after nightfall. Hence its nocturnal wanderings. This explanation of a *moddey-dhoo* is nearly as marvellous as the more usual one, that it is the incarnation of a lost soul.

**The Moddey-Dhoo of the Mooragh.** A small barren gully at the north end of the Mooragh brows near Ramsey is haunted by a black dog, and possibly by something even worse. At any rate, it is a spot that a few people, I am told, dislike to pass at night, even since a summer bungalow has been planted at the mouth of it. It runs

immediately below the old earthwork marked 'Fort' on the Ordnance maps, which has been identified with an ancient place of execution named *Cronk-y-Croghee* ('Hill of Hanging').

**The Moddey-Dhoo of Dreem-y-Jeeskaig.** This neighbourhood, at the southern limit of Maughold parish, was haunted by a particularly large and terrifying specimen. Sometimes it was seen coursing an invisible quarry over the edge of the cliff, sometimes merely lurking by the roadside. Once, when Kewley of the Booilley Mooar was a boy, over 80 years ago, he was driving home from Ramsey with his father, and they met this *moddey-dhoo*. The horse shied violently, throwing them both out of the trap or cart, and bolted for home. As they were picking themselves up they saw the dog in the act of jumping over the cliff-edge, apparently into space. Thus far one authority. Another, at the opposite end of the parish, has told me, quite independently of the foregoing affair, how an extremely evil spirit was laid at Dreem-y-Jeeskaig, which I suspect to be the one just mentioned. At any rate, it was such a violent and obstinate demon that they had to call in Ewan Christian, generally known as Christian Lewaigue, himself, for no one else could do any good, though many had tried. The first time he addressed it, it told him to come again on a certain night, alone. He went the second time as requested, and after that it was seen and heard no more; but what passed between the two of them he would never tell. He was never the same man again, after this affair.

**The Tarroo-Ushtey of the Mooragh.** In Ramsey Mooragh dwelt a *tarroo-ushtey* ('water-bull') whose roaring and splashing often disturbed the occupants of a cottage situated towards the southern end of the garey. (The cottage was pulled down when the park and lake were made.) So fully accepted was this creature's existence by the townspeople that when the foghorn of the newly-installed Bahama lightship blew its first blast, the men of a large timber-yard adjoining the harbour rushed out in force, armed with whatever they could pick up in a hurry.

**The Tarroo-Ushtey of the Booilley Grongan.** In a field called the *Booilley Grongan* ('Cattle-fold of the Humps') above Booilley Velt in Maughold, a young lad saw what he took to be a calf running after one of their cows. When he got home he told his father that one of the cows had calved. The father was dubious, but went to the field to see. He could find no calf. He went back home and said to the boy 'You'll not tell me again there's a calf when there's no calf,' and laid hold of a stick to give him a thrashing. But it was the *tarroo-ushtey*, for they were smaller than the ordinary cattle, and generally black. They did not, as a rule, harm human beings, but preferred to avoid them. It was on account of the cattle that they were so much disliked. They used to get into the fields and bull the cows, and cause abortion, or else lead them into danger. Once a man named Murray, coming down the road to Cornaa Mill, saw the *tarroo-ushtey* in the act. That was near the Brummish.



These particulars were related in a manner even more rambling than usual, and I could not make out how the boy was proved, after his thrashing, to have told the truth. As there is a pool thereabouts called *Dem-ny-Taroo-ushtey* that was probably the place from which it issued. Though harmless to mankind, its roaring heard at Ballafayle was followed shortly by the death of a man there.

**Other Maughold Water-Bulls.** Rhenab Glen, the 'Glen Mona' of the exploiters, was haunted by a black *tarroo-ushtey* which was greatly disliked. At the cascades below the gatehouse the ivy at one time hung down into the water, and a number of wild cherry-trees grew there. These made convenient roosts for the hundreds of woodpigeons that came over from Cumberland every year at the beginning of harvest to feed among the stooks and the cherries. They had to be discouraged with shotguns, so one evening when the moon was full two men went with their guns to thin them out and get something for the next day's dinner. One man had his foot on the stone wall to get over it, when he saw a dark shape like a bear coming up the path just below him, and it began roaring like a bull. It was the Rhenab *tarroo-ushtey*. The two men went away in a hurry and left the pigeons alone.

382 The same black water-bull used to be seen near the beach at Port Cornaa, in the little swampy clump of sallows which borders a wooden bridge across the Rhenab river. This was probably one of its lairs. Young Jimmy Fayle, who lived in the stone hut just above the beach, was coming home before dark by the Glen road. He happened to look down at the shore, and saw the *tarroo-ushtey* lying on the bank of pebbles. And that was not the first or the last time he saw it round there, either.

**The Ballagorry Glashtin.** The *Glashtin* is a kind of water-monster, ill-defined but not, I think, to be confused with the *Glashan* of the Scottish Highlands. Little is now heard of the *glashtin* in the Isle of Man and perhaps its legend has been taken over by the *Taroo-Ushtey*. The same suggestion may be made concerning the *Cabbal-Ushtey* ('Water-Horse'), a dangerous creature. However, at Ballagorry Chapel in Maughold there used to be a bog-field, a marshy hollow which has long been filled up; and an old woman who lived adjacent often heard the *glashtin* 'tearing' at night in the field. But it was never seen, as the Tarroo was. That would be between 50 and 60 years ago.

**The White Horse of North Barrule.** One sunny September afternoon about six years ago I chanced to meet two elderly Maughold men, one an old friend, the other a recent one, who had been friends of each other from boyhood. The conversation soon assumed the form of a duet between the two on the fruitful theme of old times  
383 and happenings. Between them they evoked from their memories, among other interesting matters, a story about the mountain at the foot of which we stood. The father of one of them and the grandfather of the other went up its south side with

their dogs in a south-easterly snowstorm, when the snow was drifted higher than the tops of the hedges. They were searching for sheep that had been snowed under, and digging them out. While they were busied with their work between Park Llewellyn and the summit, the elder man happened to look upward, and saw on the skyliue what appeared to be a pony, or a small horse of the old Manx breed, as white as the snow itself. It was standing there and gazing down at them. He drew the other's attention to it. The younger man said, 'Will you come up with me and see what it is?' But his companion would not venture, and the younger man was afraid to go alone. For no ordinary horse would or could have been on the tops at that time. The horse stood there watching them for something like a quarter of an hour, while they were going along looking for breathing-holes made by buried sheep. Then it moved off northward. They were both oldish men, so the affair may be dated to between 70 and 80 years ago.

384 **A White Horse and its Rider.** Another White Horse used to be seen in the adjoining parish of Lonan, on the rough road that goes Westward from Cushington. Sometimes it was near a hollow in a field there, sometimes it was right down in the hollow. It was a small horse, quite distinctly seen, but its rider was not so clearly visible, or the description of him had been forgotten my man who told me. If any special significance has ever been attached to the apparition, that is forgotten too.

**Horses of the Night.** The sound of invisible galloping horses is often heard in many parts of the Island. Two children sent from Thaloo Queen in Maughold at night to get the doctor, heard a horse coming up the road after them when they were above the Barony gate. It had nearly got up to them when the sound stopped. Nothing was seen.

Two shepherds belonging to Park Llewellyn on Barrule were sheltering from heavy rain against the pillars on the road near Park Llewellyn house. They heard the sound of 'a tremendous heavy horse, galloping like thunder.' It seemed to leap the gate into the field and go off towards Barrule tops. Again nothing was seen. This was between 1 and 2 a.m.

385 **The Mysterious Tracks.** Many winters ago, but not so far back as the sight of the white pony on Barrule, a four-legged creature with 'half a hoof on each foot, one in front of the other,' was tracked right across the North Maughold farmlands in the snow. No one was able to tell what sort of a creature could have made the footprints. They were most clearly visible across the Ards. My informant knew perfectly well what the tracks looked like, but though I questioned him till he began to get irritated he was unable to explain them more lucidly.

**The Stone Chest.** The *Kistey Mooar* ('Big Chest') is the name of a great stone slab in Ballaglass Glen, on the North bank of the river a couple of hundred yards above

Cornaa Mill. A crock full of gold was found under it once. A howling sound coming from it on still days or nights is a sure sign that there will be a storm in a very few hours. Personal testimony to the truth of this, from personal experience, comes from J. K— and others, with further corroboration from G—, the miller. Up to this stone come the salmon in their spawning season, but never a yard beyond it. In a 'tunnel' under the bank a little further upstream a man hid from a press-gang that wanted him. They walked right over him and never knew he was there. But I sense more striking traditions about this stone, if they could only be got at before they fade.

In the Lar Wood on the opposite side of the river there used to be seen a figure like a man in a long white shirt with large shining buttons.

**Queer Things in the Mountains.** The route formerly used by people travelling on foot or horseback between Laxey and Sulby went up through Agneash and the northern fork of the Laxey river, across the rough track which has since been improved into the Mountain Road, and down into Sulby Glen by Block Eairy. At the watershed between the two river-heads, a short distance south-west of Clagh Ouyr, stood the important boundary-cairn called Clagh Height, where three sheadings and three  
386 parishes meet. Only its fragments now remain. At this spot it is quite usual for wayfarers to hear music and voices proceeding from some unseen source, just as at the Granane in Laxey Valley, at a spot on Dalby Mountain, and at other places. The ground at Clagh Height is quite level for some distance around, and there could be no flow of underground water, whatever might be the case at the other spots. Nor have its uncanny manifestations always been confined to the hearing. In more recent times, Robbie F—, called the 'Plumber,' though in fact a mason, saw at this place, in daylight, a donkey standing without any owner in sight. He concluded it belonged to some tinker on his travels about the Island; but while he was looking at it, it suddenly changed into a great black dog and ran off along the Mountain Road towards Ramsey.

**What the Horse Saw.** A man was starting from Ballaglass farm just before daybreak to go to Ballasalla for a load of lime from the lime-pits there. As he went through the gateway he saw something black in the ditch outside. The horse saw it too, and would not pass it till he was forced to. Coming back from Ballasalla the horse fell dead near the Brown Cow in Santon. The man himself was ill for months. He ought to have gone out some other way, when the horse jibbed like that.

**387 The Lighted Window.** Empty or ruined houses that are haunted are sometimes seen by passers-by in the night-time to be lit up for a few moments and then to go dark again. Two brothers were walking one evening along the road under the hills from the Cheu Hear, the West side of Bride parish, towards the Lhen Moor, for the fishing. Not far from Ballabeg they passed an old house that had the name of being

haunted. It was all in darkness as they went by, but when they were about a hundred yards further on one of them happened to look back, and 'every window was shining like a thousand candles.' His brother saw the same thing when his attention was drawn to it, and so did many other people before that and afterwards.

**A Haunted Farm.** 'A ghost haunted a fine old mansion near Sulby Bridge,' observed the local newspaper on the last day of 1932. Or was it less the house itself than a part of the estate? The haunting of the K— is generally ascribed to the ghost of a murderer, but the accounts of him vary widely, after the fashion of many oral traditions. As they are not entirely distinct from each other in the public mind I shall run them together.

A man is buried in a corner of the Bridge field. He had been hanged on the farm. The hanging was performed quite unconventionally. The Coroner of the day, one Cowley of C— in Lezayre parish, wished to save the time, trouble and expense of a formal execution at Castletown, so he tied the rope round Comaish's (the criminal's) neck and slung him over his shoulder for so long as was necessary.

388 Alternatively, the Coroner paid a man to hang a criminal there, along with a girl of weak intellect who was implicated in the murder of the man's wife. The girl, a native of Sulby, was the last woman hanged in the Island. She was buried under the roadway just outside the Bridge field. This was done with the intention that everybody should walk over her grave, because she had been so wicked. Or, Comaish gave his wife arsenic in Ramsey and walked, or drove, home with her. At the bridge she fell dead. He was hanged in a field on the Kella and buried at the cross-roads.

In short, the true features of the case have become horribly distorted in the course of time; but with the actual history of the affair I am not concerned. Enough to say that the spot has for a long time been in bad odour, and I am not sure that one or two fatal accidents there during the motor-cycle races were not secretly attributed by some people to this malign atmosphere.

**Haunted Spots in Douglas.** The *Brown Bobby* inn formerly stood on the left side of the Peel road a little short of the Quarter Bridge. After a murder there, for which nobody was ever brought to trial, the spot was haunted by the spirit of the victim, and it was difficult sometimes to induce horses to pass it late at night.

A carriage and pair used to be heard driving up the avenue to the front door of the Nunnery house, and this was followed by sounds as of people alighting. Then there was silence. Nothing was ever seen.

Both these 'takings' are mentioned in Forrest's *Manx Recollections*, Chapter 2.

389 **An Apparition at the Lhergy Rhen.** The father of my Ramsey informant, R. F—, was sitting alone in the kitchen of the Lhergy Rhenny, Sulby Glen, about 10 o'clock on a clear June evening. The house being situated high on the hillside there was still a little light, and he was able to note the dress of an elderly woman who suddenly appeared at the opposite end of the room, went up to the fireplace, turned round, and walked out through the doorway. There was no such woman about the house no woman of any age, at the time. Twenty years after this happened, an Englishman living and farming at the same house, for whom my informant had been working, told him of a strange woman he had seen when he was in the house alone. He said she wore an old-style white sun-bonnet, a red shawl and a dark skirt, and asked F— whether he had ever heard of anything being seen there. F— then told him of his father's experience, which tallied exactly as regards the costume. B—, the Englishman, seemed to know whose 'spirit' it was, F— thought, but would not give her name.

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