

Manx Notes 66 (2006)

MANX NATIONAL SONGS WITH ENGLISH WORDS (1896)

“MANX MUSIC”

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MUSICAL ASSOCIATION, LONDON,

ON THE 14TH MAY, 1895, BY W.H. GILL

[v] It is strange but true that so far as the general British public is concerned, the Isle of Man, notwithstanding its great antiquity, its unique political constitution, its ancient statutes and venerable customs, its invigorating climate and charming scenery, has only quite recently been *discovered*.

But the latest, and perhaps not the least interesting, feature of the discovery is the fact that this little Manx nation possess a native *music* of its own.

The object of the present paper is to give a short account of the writer's recent quest for Manx music, and to submit to this Society, and through it to the musical world at large, some specimens of this hitherto unknown quantity. He can claim no special qualification for the task beyond, perhaps, the mere accident of his nationality—the fact that he is a Manxman. As contributory circumstances, more or less favourable, may be mentioned the following: that the material was collected for the most part at first hand, from the natural intonation of voices unspoilt by modern instruments; on the spot; with his own hands; and in the presence of competent witnesses.

The subject ought to be of interest as opening up a hitherto unexplored field, and thus suggesting material for a new chapter in the history of national music.

The present essay, written as it was at a short notice and with obvious restrictions as to length, is merely suggestive, and necessarily incomplete. Such as it is, it may, perhaps, serve as a prelude to the more adequate treatment of the subject by other and abler hands hereafter.

Mr Ruskin has clearly demonstrated that the art of a country is the direct expression of the mind of its people. and if this be true of the arts in general it is pre-eminently true of music in particular, for of all the arts the most direct, the most subtle, and by far the most expressive is music. Hence, if we would gauge the quality and depth of the emotional temper of a nation we shall find it faithfully registered in its native melodies. And conversely, if we would rightly estimate the quality of the music of a nation we must examine and weigh all the forces—physical, intellectual, and moral—which have acted through the ages as factors in its production.

A national melody is peculiar. Unlike any other form of musical composition, it is not the work of one man but of many. Indeed it can hardly be said to be “composed” at all. It would be more correct to say of it that, just like the flowers of any other natural organism, it flows. Its evolution obeys the laws of heredity, environment,

natural selection, and the survival of the fittest. It is subject at one time to development, at another to degeneration.

Of the innumerable factors which contribute to the building up of the national music of any given country, the following four are perhaps the most important:—

- i. Locality.
- ii. History.
- iii. Language.
- iv. The Temperament—physical, intellectual, and moral—of its People.

I. LOCALITY

The Scenery of the Isle of Man is unique. Its mountains, though of comparatively small scale, are rugged and picturesque. Of the many thousands who visit its shores every year, all are fascinated by the loveliness of its glens, its wealth of golden gorse and purple heather, and its breezy “green hills by the sea.” It seems as though the great agencies of Nature had worked with loving hand in making it fertile and beautiful. Ages before the advent of man, the great frozen sea of the glacial period had wrought for it in its two-fold function. First as carrier, importing foreign material to enrich its soil, and second as sculptor, carving “many an enduring portrait in the profile of its scenery, and many an imperishable engraving on rock and boulder” (Dr Haviland). And as the observant eye sees beauty everywhere, so for the attentive ear kind Nature has provided of her bounty. On the mountain heather the busy hum of bees, [vi] on the rock-bound coast the multitudinous chorus of seabirds, and down in the verdant vales her own sweet songs “in the running brooks.” Verily this little island, like that of Prospero, is “full of sweet sounds” It would be strange if the dwellers in this enchanted land were not infected with the spirit of romanticism, and it is easy to see how to a simple-minded people the sights and sounds of Nature gradually assume definite shape, and at last find expression in wild melodies and the conception of fairies and phantoms. The faculty of seeing the unseen (if the expression may be allowed), and of hearing the inaudible so finely portrayed in Shakespeare’s *Caliban*, is one of the earliest instincts in the evolution of man, and the very essence of the poetic art is but the emphasizing and higher development of this primitive child-like faculty. Hence it happens that to the unsophisticated Manxman—the cottager in the glen and on the lonely mountain-side—a belief in fairies is to this day an essential part of his being. Until quite recently the mythology of Manxland was as real a thing as was the mythology of Ancient Greece. And when, in the words of Professor Shairp, Nature and “the sensitive imagination of man” meet, we have that “result or creation” which we call Art. Thus, in a sense, Nature and Art are one.

So I thought a few weeks ago on the occasion of my last visit to the island in quest of music. I arrived there at five o’clock on a bright sunny morning in Spring. In the

garden a bird was singing love-songs to his bride. Something within me seemed to say “write it down.” I had never done such a thing in my life. Indeed, I have always supposed that the inflections of birds were inexpressible in musical notation. Nevertheless I would try. To my surprise and delight, as I listened, the sounds became more and more definite both in pitch and rhythm. I wrote it down and here is the result. Apart from other considerations, it may be interesting as being unquestionably the oldest Manx song in my collection! But this little incident has, to my mind, a far deeper significance; for have we not here, in that little throbbing breast of this primeval master-singer, the fountain and origin of the music of the western world? The scientists, from Pythagoras to Helmholtz, have given us elaborate treatises on the ratios of vibrations, the laws of harmonics, and the division of the string. Musical historians take us back to ancient Rome, to Greece, to Egypt to trace the origin of the scale. Here in our own land, among the may-blossom of our hedge-rows, this heaven-taught singer seems to have anticipated the latest discoveries of modern science, for behold! his alphabet of tune is identical with our own! (This proved to be the actual notes of the diatonic major scale.)

Our friends will give us a few specimens of the more ancient Manx tunes and, as proof of their antiquity, you will recognise in these some of the intervals peculiar to the ancient modes.

Laying aside all technicalities, the ancient modes may be simply illustrated as follows. Play the scale of C on the piano beginning and ending on C; that is the *Ionian* mode. Next play *the same notes* beginning and ending on D (no sharps or flats); that is the *Dorian* mode. Next play *the same notes* beginning and ending on E; that is the *Phrygian* mode. Then the same notes beginning and ending on F (no B \flat); that is the *Lydian*. Again, the same notes beginning and ending on G (no F \sharp); that is the *Mixo-Lydian*. Lastly, play the same notes beginning and ending on A; that is the *Aeolian* mode. In mediaeval times several of these *modes* or different *ways* of using the notes of the major diatonic scale were commonly adopted, not only in church music but in secular music. Of these modes two have survived to modern times, the *Ionian* and the *Aeolian*, and this in obedience to the universal law of the survival of the fittest. One we call the major scale, the other the minor scale.

Manx music is constructed principally on these two surviving modes; but there are also a good many tunes in the second or *Dorian* mode which, as you see from the diagram, is a minor scale with a sharp sixth and a flat seventh. Then, again, in the *Aeolian* mode, the seventh is sometimes flat, sometimes sharp.

Our first illustration is “Hie my graih shaghey”—a song addressed by a maiden to her companions warning them against the faithlessness of their lovers. It is in the *Aeolian* mode, the seventh note appearing in both forms.

Our next illustration is the air of a song which used to be very popular. It is called “Sooree”—the equivalent of which in colloquial English is *courting*. Although

constructed on the sombre *Dorian* mode it is as lively and “taking” as a song on such a subject ought to be.

Illustration No. 3, “Mylecharane,” is the best known of all the Manx tunes. It has always been associated with a silly ballad quite unworthy of the music. The Rev. T.E. Brown (himself a poet and a musician) admits that the tune must originally have been allied to better words. Dr Clague suggests that the title “Mylecharane” may be a corruption of “Moylley Chiarn” (“Praise the Lord”). The suggestion seems a happy one, for in style and structure the tune is essentially a *choral*, and a fine one too. Our friends will give us the melody in octaves with piano accompaniment. You will please be prepared for the shock produced upon modern musical ears by the flat leading-note on the last beat but one.

II. HISTORY

The next factor in the music of a nation is its History. The aboriginal inhabitants of our island were a race of hunters and fishermen, and the same race originally inhabited Scotland and Ireland. They came from Spain and were known there as the Iberians. In Scotland they were known as Picts, in Ireland as Scots. The Romans called them Picti, the painted people; the Brythons called them Scots, the tattooed people—from the Celtic *ysgwttarr*, to cut or carve. They called themselves Cruithni, from *crotha*—the forms of beasts and birds and fishes which they tattooed on their faces and bodies.

The next chapter of Manx history relates to the Celtic invasion. This was a gradual process extending probably over centuries, and as to the date of it Professor Rhys says: “nobody knows how long ago” it happened. The Celtic race consisted of two branches, the Gauls or Goidels, represented by the Irish, and the Bretons represented by the Welsh. It was from these people (the Irish branch) that we got the surnames so Peculiar to Manxland—names beginning with C, K, and Q. For example:

Clague	contracted from MacLiaigh—the Leech’s son.
Collister	contracted from MacAlister—Alexander’s son.
Clucas	contracted from MacLucias—Luke’s son.
Costain	contracted from MacAustyn—Augustine’s son.
Kissack	contracted from Macisaac—Isaac’s son.
Kewin	contracted from MacEoin—John’s son.
Quayle	contracted from MacPhail—Paul’s son.
Quirk	contracted from MacCutre—Corc’s son.
Quilliam	contracted from MacWilliam—William’s son
Qualtrough	contracted from MacWalter—Walter’s son.

In the tenth century the island was invaded by the Danes under King Orry, who introduced into the kingdom [vii] of Man the first representative parliament in Europe—the original of the present Tynwald and House of Keys.

Towards the end of the eleventh century it was invaded by the Norwegians under Godred Crovan. From the Norsemen we got many of the beautiful runic crosses to be found in our country churchyards, for while the oldest of these are distinctly Irish in character, the latter ones are unmistakably Scandinavian. From the Norse men also we have derived the greater part of our place names, for example: Foxdale. Fleshwick, Grenaby, Niarbyl, Langness, Laxey, Perwick, Scarlet, Sulby, and many others. Strangely enough, we find little or no trace of the Norse element in our ancient language. This has been accounted for on the supposition that the children of Norwegian fathers and Manx mothers would naturally adopt their mothers' tongue in preference to that of their fathers.

In 1270 the island was conquered by Alexander III of Scotland, and became a part of that kingdom. It was he who introduced the well-known armorial bearings of the island, the three legs.

In the fourteenth century the island was seized by Edward II, and has ever since been subject to the English Crown.

From the foregoing brief outline one would naturally expect to find in the national music of the island traces more or less marked of each of the nations who have had possession of it from time to time. As a matter of fact, traces of the Irish, Scotch, and English element are abundant. One of our tunes has been claimed by the Irish, by the Scotch, and by the English. It is called in Manx "Kirk Catriney Marroo," which means "Catherine's Hen is dead." Wherever the tune may have originated, the fact remains that it has, from time immemorial, been associated with an ancient custom held on St. Catherine's Day, and peculiar to the Isle of Man. Some of our tunes, however, are essentially Scotch in character, some are unmistakably Irish, a few might pass for Welsh, while many have the unmistakable ring of the old English School. Considering what an important part the Norsemen played in Manx history one would naturally expect to find a strong admixture of the Norse element in its music; but for the reason already suggested in connection with the language, the babies with Manx mothers and Norse fathers would naturally "take" more readily to the Manx tunes than to the Norse ones. But, however that may be, a further knowledge and comparison both of Manx and Scandinavian music may reveal resemblances which have hitherto escaped detection.

One of our melodies called "Wandescope" (Illustration No. 4), which appears both as a song (in slow time) and a dance tune (in quicker time), is so much in the style of a Sicilian pastoral melody as to raise the suspicion that it may have been imported into the island with its national arms, which certainly came from Sicily. As the original tune, as given in "Mona Melodies," consists of only eight bars, the present "arrangement," in which the melody is considerably "developed," may be open to grave censure. But on the subject of "restoration" I shall have more to say later on. Meanwhile the audience are requested to suspend their judgment. No doubt other claimants for our tunes will come forward as time goes on. Indeed, it stands to

reason, looking at the history and geographical position of our island, that many of its tunes must have been imported ready-made, and not composed on the spot. But, even so, Manxland should at least have the credit of having gathered into her bosom these waifs and strays of the surrounding lands, and thus kept them alive in the great struggle for existence.

One element in the Manx tunes, be they native or only adopted, is very conspicuous—viz., their sad and plaintive character. The dance tunes are bright and merry enough, but the songs are, for the most part, as melancholy as music can make them—sad, and yet not morbidly so. They sound like the wail of the Babylonian captives. For ages past the island was the battlefield, as it is now the playground, of the surrounding nations. Its simple people have gone through the various stages of a conquered nation. Happily, they have passed through the furnace, and have emerged a free people. Though the marks of the fetters remain impressed upon their music, the fetters themselves have long ago fallen into the sea. The cloud has passed away, brighter days have come, and freedom reigns supreme. The Isle of Man rejoices in being “The Land of Home Rule.”

Our next illustration, No. 3, “Ny Kirree fo niaghtey” (“The sheep under the snow”), is, perhaps, the most distinctively Manx of all our songs. The title suggests the character of the music. It is tender, wild, dreamy, and altogether highly poetical. It is noticeable how the ancient modes lend a peculiar charm—the foreshadowing of what in modern music we should call frequent changes of key—the melody passing successively through the following chain of keys: G min., D min, F, G min, B \flat , F, B \flat , F, B \flat , G min.

III. LANGUAGE

The next factor in our analysis is language. The ancient language of the Isle of Man is Gaelic, a branch of the Celtic. It was once the language of Europe and the universal language of the British Isles. Within time memory of men and women still living one-half of the population spoke Manx. Not many years ago it was taught in the schools; it was to be heard in the law courts, alike from the bench, from the bar, and from the witness-box. It was to be heard in the church service on one or more Sundays during each month. Now it is entirely discontinued. It has ceased to be taught in the schools; it is rarely heard in conversation except among the peasantry in out-of-the-way places. Writing thirty-six years ago, an accomplished Manx scholar described it as “a doomed language—an iceberg floating into Southern latitudes.” To-day it is practically a dead language. To the philologist and antiquary, however, it possesses no small recommendation. It is peculiarly forcible and expressive, it is eminently a poetical language, dealing largely with metaphors. For instance, the Manx name for remorse is “a little bone in the breast.” An inconstant person is styled “with me—with thee.” For the water is boiling “they say “the water is playing.” The rainbow is “the going North.” The Zodiac is the “footpath of the Sun.” The word for

child is “half saint,” and for bed “half-meat.” The mere sound of the language has a grand rolling resonance and rhythmical pulse. Take, for instance, the last clause of time Lord’s Prayer, “For Thine is the Kingdom”:—“Son lhaitis y reeriaght as y pliooar as y ghloyr, son dy bragh as dy bragh. Amen.”

This is the grave and sombre side of the language. It recalls the thunder of the big waves as they roll into [viii] the ocean caverns. But it has also a light and bright fantastic side, as illustrated in the following verses imitation of the blackbird’s song:—

“Kione jiarg, Kione jiarg,
Apyrn dhoo, Apyrn dhoo
Vel oo cheet, Vel oo cheet,
Skee fieau, Skee tieau,
Lhondoo, Lhondoo.”

The next illustration (No. 6) will give some idea of how the Manx language sounds when it is sung.

“Te traa gholh thie” (“Time to go home, time to go to bed. The stools are growing hot, while the embers are growing cold”). This tune was sometimes sung to the words of “Barbara Allan,” or, as the Manx call it, “Barbary Ellan.” The air is so quaint and pretty that we may shortly hear of a claimant for it.

There is an old English rhyme, familiar to all of us, which sounds like an exact counterpart of this Manx one. You shall judge for yourselves:

“To bed, to bed,” says *Sleepy-head*;
“There’s time enough,” says *Slow*;
“Put on the pot,” says *Greedy Wat*,
“We’ll sup before we go.”

IV. NATIONAL TRAITS

We now come to the fourth and last factor in the production of Manx music—viz, the Natural Temperament—bodily, intellectual, and spiritual—of its People. Some of our traits of character are conspicuous in our proverbs. One of these is our extreme caution and deliberation. One proverb says “a slow fire makes sweet malt.” Another is “Maybe the last dog is catching the hare.” A third says, “Listen with both ears and then judge.” One of our commonest sayings is “Traa dy liooar!” (“Time enough”).

Those who call us slow generally give us the credit of being also sure. In temperament the average Manx man is something between an Irishman and a Scotchman, the enthusiasm of the one being tempered with the coolness of the other. Neither optimist nor pessimist, he prefers in all things a middle course as the safest. His habitual policy is Moderation. He will not readily commit himself to an unqualified opinion or make a pointblank statement. Everything is “middlin’;” “Are you quite well?” “Aw, middlin’.” He seldom says definitely, “It is so”; but generally

“Maybe it is” or “Lek enough it is.” In every statement a qualification is bound to come in somewhere.

This characteristic of moderation shows itself in all sorts of ways. It applies even to the geographical position of the island, for Caesar describes it as being in *medio cursu*, and a glance at the map shows it to occupy the exact centre between the nearest points of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

Similarly, its first parliament field was placed in the exact centre of the island. Its national arms are three legs conjoined in a circle and so nicely balanced that, as the motto says, you may throw them whichever way you will and they will stand! Its very climate observes the “happy mean,” for it is more equable than that of any other place in the United Kingdom. A wonderfully well-balanced nation, you observe. As a natural consequence, Manx music ought to be a model of symmetry; and, as a matter of fact, it is so. Indeed, this element of symmetry has served at once as an incentive, a justification, and a safeguard in restoring what are obviously missing links in a few of the melodies published in 1820. For instance, in our next illustration (No. 7), “Tappagliyn Jiargey” (“Red top-knots”), the Second section as printed in “Mona Melodies” consists of only six bars instead of the orthodox eight. So inexorable is what Schumann calls “the tyranny of rhythm” that I have not hesitated to interpolate two additional bars to restore the balance.

“Restoration” is a delicate and a dangerous operation. Oftentimes it is synonymous with “tampering” and “tinkering.” Fortunately, however, in the present connection the cases are very few in which it has been found necessary to alter a single note of the melody as handed down. As regards the harmonising of these old melodies, the ground is still more dangerous. A national melody in its original surroundings is like a flower in its native soil. Its proper accompaniments are the changing skies, the sighing of the morning and evening breeze, and, above all, the riti-ils of the human hearts and voices that gave it utterance. It wants no other accompaniment. But, severed from these surroundings, and transplanted into a foreign soil, it seems to want some artificial support. It is a plucked flower and requires a vase. The question is what kind of vase? To that question we get three answers from three different classes of musicians—the purists, the antiquarians, and the people. To steer a middle course between the requirements of these three—to hit the happy mean between naked simplicity and excessive ornamentation—is almost a hopeless task even for a moderation-loving Manxman. In “arranging” these melodies my object has been to bring out the beauty of the tune to the utmost, and if, in investing it with “the best robe,” I have in any instance erred on the side of elaboration, my plea is the desire to please the many rather than the few. With this apology I will now ask our friends to give us the next illustration (No. 8), “Illiam Dhoan,” in which a more modern style of accompaniment has been adopted. The original ballad is a lament on the death of William Christian, who was publicly executed as a traitor in the year 1662. Opinion is divided as to whether he was really a

traitor or a martyr in the cause of freedom. The melody, which is noble and pathetic, is probably older than the words. I have taken the liberty of arranging it as an instrumental elegy, without, however, altering a single note of the original air.

We have seen that the Manx peasantry are naturally superstitious. Whether in consequence of this fact, or in spite of it, they are also essentially religious. The large number and extreme simplicity of their ancient places of worship are evidences of a widespread and simple religious faith; and as in politics there are no party differences, so in religion churchmen and dissenters are bosom friends. The seeds of Christianity introduced, as some think, in the fifth century, by St Patrick and his missionaries, seem to have found a congenial soil. In latter times John Wesley was particularly proud of his Manx preachers and of the islanders generally. He declares in his diary (1777) that in no other place had he found “so plain, so earnest, so simple, and so unpolluted a people.” In those days the Manx sailor before stepping on board his fishing boat was wont to repeat a prayer [ix] invoking blessings on the fruits of his toil—a custom now more honoured in the breach than the observance. From very early times an extensive native literature had existed in the form of carols. These were the fruits or accompaniments of a religious revival which, on the publication of the Bible in Manx, in 1772, received a mighty accession of force. Here, as elsewhere, the opening of this marvellous picture-book operated like the touch of a magic spring. It was the Bible that inspired the greatest masterpieces of literature, painting, and music—Milton’s great epic, Bunyan’s incomparable allegory, Raphael’s cartoons, Handel’s “Messiah.” So in this little kingdom of Man it was the first opening of the Bible in the common language of the country that touched the heart and kindled the religious enthusiasm of the nation; and the result was the production of a vast number of these carols—a form of native literature which, though not of a high order, has a definite value in the history of letters.

Our two next illustrations are specimens of Manx carols: No. 9, “Drogh Vraane ” (“Bad Women”); No. 10, “Baase Chreest” (“The death of Christ”).

I will now, by your leave, state briefly the circumstances which led me to undertake the collection of these Manx melodies.

In the autumn of last year I was invited by some gentlemen in the Isle of Man, including my brother, the Northern Deemster, to go there with the special object of collecting what material could be found with a view to the publication of a more complete and accurate record of our national airs than any that already existed. To obtain the desired material three sources were open to us—viz.:—

- (1) Printed music.
- (2) Manuscript music.
- (3) Oral music.

(1) Of printed collections there already existed only one. It was published in London in the year 1820, under the title *Mona Melodies*, and contains thirteen of, presumably, the then best known songs and dance tunes. The songs were set to

English words by J. Barrow, and the whole of the music was arranged by “An Amateur,” the name being suppressed. This book is practically unknown, and only a few copies appear to have survived. A cursory glance condemns the work as inadequately representative of Manx music as regards both the material and the workmanship. The task of compiling a work of this kind is by no means an easy one. The writing down of music by ear was in those days an accomplishment very rare, even among professors of the art. Hence, apart from the paucity of the material, one is not surprised to find in *Mona Melodies* many inaccuracies of musical orthography, grammar, and accentuation. Add to these difficulties the further one of reconciling discrepancies and of choosing between different versions of the same tune as they appear in different manuscripts, or as the faded ghosts of them survive in the memory of living people, to say nothing of the difficulty of discounting, at their proper value, obvious clerical errors, and of restoring, in the least objectionable way, obvious missing links.

The next example (No. 11), “My graih, nagh share dyn farraghtyn” (“We’d better wait awhile, my dear”), illustrates some of the difficulties referred to. It was doubtless, originally, a beautiful tune in spite of the obviously mutilated version of it in *Mona Melodies*. Fortunately this was one of the few apparently desperate cases I have met with in which a slight operation boldly executed makes an impracticable thing practicable. This and the two other instances already mentioned represent the full extent of my “tampering with ancient records,” for which I humbly crave forgiveness.

For the beautiful English version of this song we are indebted to my friend, Mr E. Crabb.

(2) The next step was to collect what manuscript tunes could be obtained, and by means of these to verify, and where necessary to correct, what were obvious inaccuracies in *Mona Melodies*. In this respect we were singularly fortunate. My old friend and school fellow, Dr John Clague of Castletown, a gentleman well versed in the folk-lore and language of the country, and learned in all its ancient musical traditions, had been collecting material for many years past, and among his manuscripts were versions of most of the airs contained in *Mona Melodies*, as well as others which had been written down by a Mr Shepherd about the end of the last or beginning of the present century. These the doctor placed unreservedly at my disposal. Mr Shepherd was the musical apostle of the island in those days, an educational propagandist with a popular method of sight-singing. This was the “fa sol la mi” method, which was popular in England during the seventeenth century, the scale being sol-faced to the syllables *fa sol la* twice repeated, with a *mi* for the leading note, thus:

sol	la	mi	fa	sol	la	fa	sol	la	mi	fa	sol	la
5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3

Mr Shepherd's formula, according to Dr Clague, was as follows:

"Above your mi, twice *fa sol la*;
Below your mi, twice *la sol fa*."

It may be of interest to mention that this system had the sanction of no less an authority than Purcell, who in his edition of John Playford's *Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (1604) endorses the opinion that "the four syllables are quite sufficient and less burdensome to the practitioner's memory."

(3) As regards the third source of information—viz., *Oral* music, I had, at the outset, gone to the island in the hope of being able to gather for myself material at first-hand; but, alas, I was doomed to disappointment. Everybody said it was too late. The old generation of untaught singing milkmaids and whistling ploughboys, and the race of itinerant fiddlers who used to delight the frequenters of the village inns, and the old people sitting in the cosy chimney-corners of the farmhouses, and the lasses and lads that danced in the barns at the *mehlias* or harvest homes—these rustic musicians had passed away (so they told me), and the old tunes were being replaced by the tunes of the London music halls. However, my gleanings from other soirees were not inconsiderable, and in spite of the seeming odds against me, I still cherished a hope that by a carefully arranged plan of campaign we might yet discover in out-of-the-way spots on the mountains and among the solitary glens a remnant of the old folk who might still have retained a mine of the earlier tunes hitherto unrecorded. Nor were my hopes in vain.

[x] A subsequent visit to the island a few weeks ago has resulted in a success far exceeding my most sanguine expectations and in a very considerable addition to my original collection. With the assistance of my brother, and the kind cooperation of many local friends, we had the good fortune to interview in different parts of the Island quite a goodly number of old Manxmen of ages ranging from sixty-five to eighty-four, all more or less musically gifted and some of whom had in their younger days enjoyed a local reputation as singers in church, chapel, farmhouse or inn, as the case may be. The Manx people are proverbially shy, but that was an insignificant detail. By dint of coaxing, the intervention of boon companions and in some cases the judicious application of bribes and suitable stimuli in the shape of little presents of tea for the wives and tobacco for the husbands, we soon won over their shyness, and in a very short time our ancient minstrels were warbling as in the old times and were ready and eager to give us "all the tunes that was at them." We shall never forget the enthusiasm of these old men and the genuine delight with which they recalled the songs and memories of the past; and, above all, their wonderment at seeing their songs written down in black and white and then hearing them reproduced from the written notes. And as this reproduction of their tunes by a stranger, as by magic, was a revelation to them, so was their singing a revelation to him. Imagine one, whose acquaintance with the ancient modes was confined to church and scientific books, coming suddenly face to face with them in actual, simple, peasant life and hearing

these untaught sons of the soil, born and bred in their mountain solitude—imagine these essentially unecclerstical and unscientific people actually singing “Gregorian” music and perpetrating minor scales with sharp sixths and flat leading-notes in the style of the ancient Greeks, delightfully unconscious all the while they they were doing anything out of the ordinary. It is also noteworthy that to these old people the tunes published seventy five years ago were, with only three or four exceptions, entirely unknown. They had a different *repertoire* of a totally different style and of evidently much earlier date.

As to the probable age of our music as a whole, we have at present little or no data to go upon except its internal evidence. Roughly speaking, we may arrange the tunes chronologically under three classes—early, mediaeval, and modern. Under the first heading we might place al tunes older than the sixteenth century; under the second, those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and under the third, those of the eighteenth century. The tunes of the nineteenth century may safely be left to take care of themselves. What sounds one of the most recent tunes in the present collection (No. 12) must be at least one hundred years old and may be much older. It was whistled to us by a man of seventy, who had kept it in reverent memory all his lifetime as having been sung to him by his mother when he was a baby. He had never known any words to it. This is the only “song without words” that has come to my net. All the rest, even most of the dance tunes, have words, and in many instances the same tune is sung to different words. Whatever may be the origin of this charming Cradle Song, it is so irresistibly suggestive of Scott’s well-known words, “O, hush thee, my babie,” that the present alliance of words and music hardly needs an apology even to Sir Arthur Sullivan.

I will conclude this paper with a few words of retrospect.

Manxland is sharing the fate of all islands. By increased facilities of communication it is practically ceasing to be an island. The Manxman is gradually losing his individuality. Like that of a worn-out coin, his image and Superscription is being gradually effaced. We older Manxmen regard with some apprehension the enroachments of so-called civilisation. When we revisit our old home we find the tide of civilisation has rolled over our sand castles and swept them all away. National traces—physical, moral, and social—are rapidly disappearing. “Utopia, Limited,” is a capital satire on Manxland. An Anglicising spirit pervades the island and is gradually transforming it out of its old self. There is a strange tendency to do everything “as they do in England.” The ancient Baal fires on the mountains have disappeared, and in their stead we have the glare of the dancing saloons. One almost deplores, with Mr Ruskin, the introduction of railways. Fortunately, as we think, the trains have not yet learnt to go so fast “as they do in England.” One of the latest phases of this Anglicising infatuation was the restoration of Peel Castle with stone actually imported from England. Some years ago they wanted a church built, and of course they went to “the neighbouring island,” as they playfully call it, for an architect, and

he ran them up a grand spire, "as they do in England," and the next year a Manx Boggane, in the shape of an equinoxial sou'-wester, made for the spire and tossed it into the adjoining field. The village of Laxey rejoices in possessing the biggest water-wheel in the world, the like of which does not exist even "in England"; and so on and so on.

Already, as we have seen, their language has gone the way of all flesh. Thanks to the members of the Manx Society, they have done good work, each in his own line, in preserving in their publications some at least of the characteristics of their nation. To these must be added the names of four notable Manxmen. Mr Hall Caine's romances have earned for himself and his country a great, if not an altogether irreproachable reputation. My old friend and master, Mr T.E. Brown, has, in his *Fo'c's'le Yarns*, gathered up the fragments that remain of the Anglo-Manx dialect—the transition from Manx to English—and embalmed them in the amber of his inimitable verse. Haply his poetry will live when all traces of the original Manx language and Manx character shall have passed away. Mr A.W. Moore, in his *Manx Note Book* and *Manx Surnames*, has gathered and handed down to posterity touch that is interesting and valuable in the insular folklore, and Mr P.C. Kermodé is rendering valuable service in connection with the beautiful Runic crosses and other antiquities of his native land.

Something else still remained to be done for our island—I mean in the way of catching and recording before it was too late the last lingering echoes of the old Manx ballads. To this task Mr Moore has also with laudable zeal addressed himself, and he has announced as shortly to be published a collection of Manx songs and ballads, some of them with the accompanying tunes. Of this point a word of explanation is due, if only to remove the impression which might otherwise exist that there is any feeling of rivalry or competition between Mr Moore [xi] and myself. Though we have been working in the same field, our aims are different; not antagonistic, however, but complementary. His preferences would seem to be historical and antiquarian while mine are innately artistic. From my point of view hypothetical harmonies founded on "the correct Celtic modes," as Mr Moore's prospectus puts it, as also the original Manx words, interesting as these are from an archaeological point of view can have but little attraction for an average nineteenth century musical public. Hence, as I have already stated elsewhere, my humbler aim is to present to the public only a selection of the best of the old melodies with more or less modern harmonies (say sixteenth to eighteenth century), with suitable English words, not necessarily translations, the general "arrangement," harmonies, and interludes being in a *mode* and "language understood of the people." In short, I am trying to do for the music of Manxland what Tom Moore and Sir John Stevenson did for the Irish melodies and what, in our own day, Mr Baring Gould and his coadjutors have been doing for the songs of Western England. But the fact is, the world wants to see both sides of the picture, the antiquarian and the artistic, and it is

perhaps as well that as chance has ordered it, the two workers in the same field, Mr Moore and myself, shall have wrought separately and independently of each other. It will, at least, be interesting to compare the results of our labours. As regards my own share of the work, I will only add that the task, though immensely pleasurable in many ways, has not been unmixed with feelings of sadness; for as each one of those venerable singers sang his song there seemed to accompany it the “measured beat and slow” of the Dance of Death. It was plain that he was singing his *Nunc Dimittis* and the reflection was irresistible that within a few short years these last of the Manx minstrels will have departed in peace, and that, but for these small but timely efforts on our part, their tunes must have died with them. “Now you have got the tunes,” some will ask, “are they worth preserving?” Posterity must decide. Meanwhile, if by the simple act of faithfully and reverently recording these old melodies the present writer and his fellow countrymen may be instrumental in rescuing some of them from oblivion, they will have the satisfaction of not having wrought in vain.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Song—“The my graih shaghey” (The Maiden’s Warning).
2. Song—“Sooree” (Courting).
3. Song—“Mylechaiane.”
4. Dance tune—“Wandescope.”
5. Song—“Ny Kirree fo niaghtey” (The Sheep under the Snow).
6. Parting song—“Te traa gholl thie” (Time to go home).
7. Dance tune—“Tappaghyn Jiaigcy” (Red Top-Knots).
8. Elegy—“Illiam Dhoan” (Brown William).
9. Carol—“Drogh Vraane” (Bad Women).
10. Carol—“Baase Chreest” (The Death of Christ).
11. Song—“My graih, nagh Share dyn farraghtyn” (We’d better wait).
12. Cradle-song—“Oh, hush, thee, my babie.”

Violin Miss Mary S. Hemming.

Violoncello Miss Minnie B. Theobald.

Flute Mr J. Finn.

Piano Miss Grace M. Smith.

Vocalist Miss Dora Gill.

Source: W.H. Gill, “Manx Music.” *Manx National Songs with English Words: Selected from the MS. Collection of the Deemster Gill, Dr. J. Clague, and W.H. Gill, and Arranged by W.H. Gill* (London: Boosey, 1896) v–xi. First appeared as “Manx Music,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* xxi (1895): 115–31.

MANX NATIONAL SONGS WITH ENGLISH WORDS (1896): MANX MUSIC

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2006

