Manx Notes 94 (2007)

"(FROM LEZAYRE)"
KARL ROEDER'S SECOND PUBLICATION ON MANX FOLKLORE (1892)

MANX FOLK-LORE, 1882 TO 1885
(COLLECTED BY C. ROEDER, MANCHESTER)

(FROM LEZAYRE)

The old people never give out any milk or meal without first sprinkling it with *salt*, to keep off the fairies.

SALT.—A friend of Mrs G. killed a calf, and sent her boy with a piece to Mrs G., but in her hurry forgot *to sprinkle it with salt*, and the fairies followed him and licked him till he was sore, and when he got home his mother had to wash him in salt and water to take the fairies' charm away.

FIDDLERS.—There used to be a great many fiddlers on the Island, four used to come on the floor, two men and two women, and they danced an X.

FAIRIES.—Do you know that little cottage down Loch-ny-guiy side, said Mrs G., a little, little thatched house by the river; well, Casheens was the name of the man living there, and when he was a lump of a boy he remembers one day before Chrisermus, being sent to bed, and he was terribly cross, because his mother was making a grand *bonag*, an' he kept his eyes open, not wanting to sleep. He slept in his parents's bed, and after they were in bed, he crep', an' he crep', an' he got to the oven at last without waking his father and mother, an' when he got theer he was dreadfully *frickened*, for theer was one of the "little uns" sitting up before the oven, with his han's like claws put up as like he was going to scratch him, and his great red eyes a-starin, and starin' vicious at him; well, he rushed back to bed *midlan*' quite, and he was glad to goodness gracious to get theer, like enough too—I wouldn't have gone to the oven by night, not if I'd been starving, and I'm thinkin' it 'ud be a long time before he'd go pokin' his nose theer again.

For years Mrs S. had been an invalid, and never went out of doors, except to sit for a few minutes in the garden. However, one day the doctor said she seemed to much the better, a short drive would do her good; so her husband ordered the carriage and they drove out; they had not ridden far, when all at once his wife pointed her finger, saying:—"*See there*, *they are beckoning* me, I must go, the coffin is waiting, I see the plumes shaking." He tried to calm her, she fell back in the carriage with her finger still pointing to some unseen spectacle. Two hour after they reached the house, she was a corpse.

THE WATER HORSE.—"Now, theer's a relation of mine, Jim Quirk by name. He's a real smart one, and *terrible* fine, not the man to be afeard of anyone, but one night his senses were near taken away from him; he was tellin' it many times in this house.

ISSN 1351-2293

One winter's night, two years ago, when all the ground was covered with snow, my relation Jim in the evening came into the cottage, covered with snow and as pale as a sheet, like as if he had been frickened. 'Well, Jim,' says I, 'what's been your work to-day? He looked at me so strange, I began to tremble. Then he laughs, *queer like*, an' says, 'I had work enough to last me some time to come. I left home six o'clock this evening to go to mend Farmer S—'s barn. It took me two hours before I got to the river. I could not see the bridge at all, at all, and the *couth* (cold) was something terrible, I did not know what to do, when I saw good luck, an *old mare*, with bit already in its mouth; so I catches hold of it and jumps on its back. He, without my leading, plunges right into the water, and takes me along under, and the water, woman, was as cold as ice. I though I should never see the land again, when all of a sudden the *sleech* plunges out on the other side, and before I could give it a taste of my stick, it had gone under the water again. I was terrible frickened, and it will be a long time before I get on the back of a water horse again."'

Fairies.—A woman living up on *Barrule* was taken sick, and her husband went for the doctor. All at once the woman called. "Mother, mother, do come here quick." Well, her mother ran to see what it was, and just when she got on the stairs she saw a *big* man standing, *with a three-cornered cocked hat*. So, she thought it must be the doctor. She passed on to her daughter's bedroom, and asked her what she wanted, and she said:—"*The Bishop of the Fairies* has been here, and he took out a cake and broke it in two, and gave me half."

Fairy Music.—As the husband and an ould man, coming home over the mountains, passed a ruined cottage, which serves now for a cow-stable, they *heard music*, and such carryings-on. Well, they could not fancy who it was, the windows of the cottage being stuffed with sods. So the auld man goes and puts one of his eyes to the keyhole, and see the fairies dancing and fiddling away, an' one of the fairies put his fiddle-stick right through his eye, an' he has never seen since, an' *that*'s *true*.

Fairy Child.—An old man was coming here often, and my daughter would be giving him a penny to tell her some fairy tale, and he come in one day and told her about a young woman who went to be churched. She left her baby in the cradle, and a *tailor* sitting by, and when she was gone the tailor goes to the baby and asks it to come and dance and he would play a tune, and the baby got up on the cradle and commenced dancing till *the tailor went off fiddling away with the baby*. When the woman came back she looked in the cradle for the child and could not find it nowhere, so it became a fairy child—*that*'s *what they* were saying.

One night when the boys were coming home for supper, they happened to look through the window, and saw the *fairies eating up their supper*. So one of the boys said to the other fellow, "Will you cut away that's been left over?" "No," says he, "will you?" "Well, yes I don't see the good of leaving my supper," and its said the fellow who would not touch his supper died before the year was over, and other was all right.

One day, long years ago, my mother was sitting by the fire preparing dinner ("peelin taters") when the door was suddenly opened, and a little old woman came in. She had a red skirt and a kind of petticoat just thrown over her head like, and dear me, she looked queer. "Good morn to you mothy," says she, "I've come to borrow a grain of male (meal) from yer," and she pointed to a small bowl of meal on the plate-shelf, and she says, "P'raps yer can spare this." "Well," says my mother, "you may have it, an' welcome." "Thank yer, mothy, for yer great kindness, I will return every grain," an' off she goes, and soon father comes home, and mother says, "John, there's been a *fairy woman*," but father he laughs at mother, and goes out to his work smiling. Next day the same queer little woman comes, and says she, "I've brought the male, mothy, and if yer take this and wrap it in a clean cloth, and put it in a hole in yer room, you will always have as much male, and you and yours will never want." Well, every day they turned out good, and one day the fairy woman came and said, "Mothy, I have not seen yer for some time, but I've come to ask you to do something more for me. Go to your stable, and turn your cows' faces to where their tail is, because the dung come right through our house (she lived underground), and if yer do this with a good heart your cows will never fall sick." Now, mother was frickened, because she knew father would never go to the bother of putting up new troughs; so when he came home she told him what the fairy woman said, and he got angry and said he was not going to do it. Well, the cows grew sick, and mother cried and persuaded him, and at last, after some days, he went and turned the cows' heads where the tails were, and everything went on terrible well.

FAIRY REVENGE.—Some years ago, well, I'm thinking it was shortly after I met William Teare, a friend, a very nice young woman got married to a farmer, and he had a good dale (deal) of money, so he went out often with her, but he was not half such a nice body as herself, not so generous; she was so ready for helping everyone. Well, one day he takes her for a walk, and they had not gone very far on their road before they met a *little man all with crooked legs* and clothes all in rags, who asked for a sixpence, so the woman puts her hand in her pocket, but finds her purse was left at home at her, so she asked her husband, and he turns so nasty to her—"No," says he, "do you think I have nothing to do but put my hand in my pocket?" and he turns the old man off. "Well, good day to yer both, and may my curse be on you and yours for your unkindness; and you will see." The woman was terribly frickened; when she came home she told one of the women what had happened to her, and looked so bad. "Don't take on," says the farm servant, "he can't do no harm, its only his jaw. Why din'ed, (did not) yer give him yer handkerchief, I have heard that is as good as money?" Two years passed, and Annie got her first baby; and, dear me, when he came he had dreadful bad legs, worse than the little beggar man. Well, they tried and tried no end of cures, but the child staid weak in its legs—and she *have* five sons and three girls, and every one of the boys were crooked, and the girls quite straight. Yes, an' they're saying all the boys were made so because their father had been so stingy;

and if they had left the first boy's legs and not broken them after God once made them, the other sons would have been quite right. I know this is to be true, because she was quite an auld friend."

NIGHT HORSE.—Yes, theer's *night horses*; a man was tellin' me he was for riding one, and it is quite true, *bekase* I know the man very well, and he would not be for tellin' me a lie, at all. One night he was comin' home, and he was fellin' very tired—its like he could scarcely go on much further—an' just as he was turning round the corner of the road, near by *Christian of Milntown*, he *seed* a fine horse, a terrible beauty of a horse, and he gets quicker like in walkin', and soon gets near to it; the truth, there was no one near about, and the horse was main and beautiful, and theer was a splendid saddle on, so he jumped in theer saddle and the horse flew oft wid' him like mad just, and he was thinking surely he would be home soon, when the horse it gives an awful leap right up in the air, an' he *was* frickened, but gives a *regular* plump on the *airth* (earth) again, and, sudden like, he finds himself kicked on to the growand (ground); he got up middlin' quick, but theer horse was gone, and he said it wearnt one of our horses at all he had been ridin' so easily, but a night-horse.—Yer know we have *night*-men, too, big fellars, and they wear no clothes on them. Many years ago, when I was a lump of a girl like our Kitty theer at one of the farms, cloas (close) where I was livin', a night-man used to come every night and grind the corn for the farmer; he was a terrible big chap, and so awful strong, yer never saw the like; one day the farmer was thinkin'. "Now the *couth* (cold) was comin' he would give the fellow some clothes," and his wife made the clothes, and in the evenin' the farmer put them dowan (down) so that he could see them; in he came, and surely he seed them clothes, and cathin' hould *on* them, he muttered some- thing, and puttin' on theer clothes, he went away and never came back again.

They are not for mindin' the fairies much now, at all, not like they used to be; in the auld times a woman would never leave her baby in the cradle, without puttin the *tongs in the shape* of a cross on the cradle.

(FROM BALLACAINE, JURBY.)

FAIRY MUSIC.—The fairies at Ballacaine were very mischievous. They did not even respect old age, and used to play such abominable pranks on one of the oldest men on the farm, that no wonder he was cross. You can just fancy the poor old man going tired to bed after a hard day's work, and then to be suddenly awoke, while just dozing off, buy the horrible sound of *cronk*, cronk, for the *fairies were putting the strings of their fiddles in order*. One night, being damp, the strings were worse than usual; so was their *cronk*, *cronk*, Poor old man! No sleep again for him to-night. A bright though struck him; should he humour them. Pool old fellow, although his limbs were stiff with rheumatics, he hobbles out of bed, feeling very cold, begins dancing about, saying in a cheery tone, "Play away, my little fellows; I am dancing. They played for some time, and did not leave off until the old man was fairly done

for. Then they made a polite bow, and for an instant a clear light filled the barn, where the old man slept, and the next minute fairies and fiddles all disappeared, and the old man fell into a beautiful dream, and was never disturbed by fairies. So you see good humour got the best. If he had stormed, he might have stormed to his dying day, and never been any the better for it.

FAIRIES BANISHED.—The old lady, after drawing our stools near a nice fire, began, with growing excitement, to tell of the fairies antics. She was a servant at Ballacaine, when it was not half as big as it is now. When the sun set the *fairies* used to scamper about in the rosy light, and they wore *green hats* and *gaudy red fancy dresses*, and nobody would go out after dark for fear the fairies would catch them and turn them into fairies like themselves, for they said these fairies were mortals transformed into fairies. At last they bothered the farm servants so that the master complained of their stupidity, and told them to leave a good supper spread for the fairies, and in an undertone to himself:—"I'll soon polish them off." The night draws near, and the farm servants are busy getting their supper. At last the clock strikes twelve. Everybody, we will hope, is in the land of dreams; then hush—the sound of small feet begins to go it, pat, pit pat. The large farm kitchen is filled with beautiful little spirits, who poke their little impertinent noses into the jugs, into everything they can see. Then the supper arrests one more greedy than curious, and the little things think it would be best to satisfy their hunger before they begin their midnight revelry. While all this is occurring the canny master is working his brain how he will best rid himself of these sprites, for to his miserly disposition, supper every night was a great expense, so was broken crockery, because, if no supper was set, in the morning a terrible spectacle met his gaze—smashed cups and saucers, the coal scuttle overturned, and lots of sundry misfortunes. At last a deadly thought entered the master's mind—if he could only startle them in the midst of their supper, get a large beer barrel and tumble them all in, hammer them down tight, and then roll them into the sea. How happy he felt as he looked at them munching away, muttering to himself—-"Eat away, my little men, for the fishes will get a good meal when I get you." They had nearly finished, so he crept upstairs and got one of the strongest servants men up, ordered him to get a large barrel, and when they were in the midst of their munching, gently rolled it in. The fairies expected no treachery. Oh! the agony of the poor sprites, for the big monster of morals rushed in and caught ever so many in his hands. All of them shared the same fate, they were packed up tightly and rolled into the sea, and the farmer and all the occupants of old Ballacaine never more were troubled with fairies, and *that is the reason* we don't see any fairies now."

After eyeing me suspiciously, "was I making fun of the good people." No, not a smile lurked in the corner of my mouth. Satisfied that I was not laughing at her, the old dame drew her stool close to mine, took a long breath, and lowering her voice to a whisper, began her tale of the fairies that come from the sunset land.

SUNSET FAIRIES.—"Long years ago, I cannot remember rightly the exact time, but it was when I was a young girl, Ballacaine was not the big house it is now; no, no, everything is changes since those days. One evening, just as the sun was setting, and the clouds had turned quite red, signs of a fine day, I was leaning out of the window looking at the sunbeams through the trees, when, as true as I am here, some *little tiny things*, *dressed in little green jachets and red caps*, with one of *our hen*'s *feathers stuck in the side*, and they *had wings too*, were playing on the sunbeams. Well, my breath was nearly gone, withholding it for so long, for do you understand, man, if they had once seen my eye on them they would 'a *flown* up the sunbeam, and I should 'a lost sight of them. 'Good gracious,' says I, 'they are the good people from the sunset land.' Dear me, the pranks they played was something terrible; one little fellow, with bright, bright eyes, hung on the tree bough and kicked his tiny legs about, till the little gawk gave the fairy queen such a bang right on her lovely crown. I thought he would be killed, they kicked him about so. One took a ride on a twig, and I cannot for the world of me tell all the capers they were up to. Missis' voice, calling Mary, stirred me up. I am for thinking the fairies must have heard, for they opened their wings and flew up in to the sky. At six I went to milk the cows, the *craters* were calling and calling, and some bad fairies nipped my arms fearful, so that, *dear the me*, the pain was terrible—I was for letting go the milk can. When I got home the Missis gave me some *salve* to put on; it is a cure for fairies. Yes, man, I can feel their nips now." And the poor old woman stroked her arm with her hand, and looked very frightened when I arose to go—her daughter coming in, however set her mind at rest.

(FROM NEAR PORT ERIN)

SALT.—"This old woman was coming home at night and she heard *great music*. It was a very lonesome place, and she was so delighted to get company she ran as hard as she could after them—length of the road—till she got tired, and she at last got near them, and they said, 'Good night, mother!' Well she stood, she knew that they *wern*'t *right people*. They asked her to see what she had in the basket. 'Will you part with some of it?' and she said 'Yes' and she broke one of the cakes and put it on the hedge (*she could not see anyone, only hear the voice*). They asked. 'Did you put salt in it?' for if she did they could not touch it. And as she did not, they said, 'Since you have been so kind, you will always get bread in your chest.'"

(FROM BALLACREGGAN, NEAR PORT ST MARY)

"On Hollintide Night get a herring from your next door neighbour—but your must steal it out of the barrel. Then, come in, roast it on the pipe of the bellows, and eat every bit of the bones, the head and eyes, and go to bed backwards, and you *will dream of your husband*."

A poor man's sickened, and was left for dead. The witch doctor was sent for it, and he told them to throw a *quilt* over it or hay, and in ten minutes it rose, ate, and got up.

Cure for the Nightmare.—Get a holed shell or stone, and put a string through the hole, and tie it to the bed, and it will go away.

The old fairy Doctor Teare declared he would not move 12 o'clock at night till cock-crow for the love of his life or anything.

Charm:

"Ringworm white, Ringworm red,
I command thou wilt not spread;
I divide thee to the east and west
To the north and to the south,
Arise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

New Moon.—"He looked at the moon and was silent. He blessed the moon, he blessed *him*. He never had a sore, ringworm, or gather."

At Cregneish, in the south, a mother never leaves her baby before putting the tongs or the poker over the cradle, nor the man his wife in child-bed without placing the drawers over the bed.

At the Mell Feast they dress a *straw man* and put it in a big jar, and hand it round the board, and make merry.

Source: Karl Roeder, "Manx Folk-Lore, 1882 to 1885," *Yn Lioar Manninagh* i.xi (1892): 323–28.

This is Karl Roeder's second known published piece on Manx folklore.[1] As evidenced by the title, the material was collected between 1882 and 1885. Again, the items are drawn from both the North and Southsides of the Island. The length of the material is longer than previous, and a variety of styles employed in presentation. Roeder when recording narration attempts to reproduce the Anglo-Manx dialect of the period, in other passages though he makes use of Standard English. It is likely, however, that he recorded his material in Standard English and then rewrote selected passages from his notebooks in elaborated form as dialect *vignettes* of Manx country life.

Stephen Miller
Vienna, 2007

[1] See the previous note for the first.