

Manx Notes 102 (2008)

“THE RIGHT THING TO DO ABOUT THE MANX PROVERBS”
HENRY JENNER’S ADVICE TO G.W. WOOD

BOSPOWES, | HAYLE, CORNWALL. [embossed]

16 Sept. 1915

Dear Mr Wood,

After you had gone it occurred to me that the right thing to do about the Manx proverbs of which you spoke would be to give Latin translations of those of which an English version would be undesirable. There is no great harm likely to be done to anyone who knows Latin by reading such proverbs, and one never knows what bearings on folklore, manners and customs &c. there may chance to be in proverbs of that sort, so that it is a pity to lose them. What Gibbon (I think) calls “the decent obscurity of a learned language” would be quite sufficient to make it unnecessary to keep the book locked up.

I greatly enjoyed our talk yesterday and the bringing back of the memory of 40 years ago. I am seriously considering the idea of doing present day statistics of Manx. The ideal would be, no doubt, the half century, only will there be any Manx or me left 10 years hence?

With our united kind regards | Yours sincerely | Henry Jenner.

Source: Letter from Henry Jenner to G.W. Wood, 16 September 1915, MNHL, MS 10439.



G.W. Wood had an interest in Manx proverbs, having published a lengthy piece on them in *Folklore* in 1894.¹ Quite how he made his collection is unclear. From this letter it would seem that he was preparing his collection for publication in book form and had encountered an issue familiar with collectors in this period, material that was deemed (by them) to be bawdy or obscene.² Even in 1915, Jenner is advocating that nineteenth century fallback position, the printing of the forbidden item in Latin, as

¹ G.W. Wood, “On the Classification of Proverbs and Sayings of the Isle of Man,” *Folk-Lore* v (1894).

² Kenneth S. Goldstein, “Bowdlerization and Expurgation: Academic and Folk,” *Journal of American Folklore* 80.318 (1967). See too, George Legman, “Misconceptions in Erotic Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore* 75.297 (1962), George Legman, “Unprintable Folklore?: The Vance Randolph Collection,” *Journal of American Folklore* 103.409 (1990).

“[t]here is no great harm likely to be done to anyone who knows Latin by reading such proverbs.”

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2008

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRINTED SOURCES

- Goldstein, Kenneth S. “Bowdlerization and Expurgation: Academic and Folk.” *Journal of American Folklore* 80.318 (1967): 374–86.
- Legman, George. “Misconceptions in Erotic Folklore.” *Journal of American Folklore* 75.297 (1962): 200–08.
- . “‘Unprintable’ Folklore?: The Vance Randolph Collection.” *Journal of American Folklore* 103.409 (1990): 259–300.
- Wood, G.W. “On the Classification of Proverbs and Sayings of the Isle of Man.” *Folk-Lore* v (1894): 229–74.

