

Manx Notes 106 (2009)

“THAT PATRONIZING HALL CAINE—
WORDS, WORDS WORDS & SKINFLINTY”

KARL ROEDER WRITES TO SOPHIA MORRISON (1908)

MC 17: 6: 08.

Thanks for letter. I deeply lament the death of my old friend Farquhar, he was a very disappointed man & was very shappily¹ served by the Manx people who ignored him, amongst them that patronizing Hall Caine—words, words words & skinflinty. If he would have in any way [*erased*] been encouraged, he could have done an enormous lot with his immense knowledge of Manx ways life & folk-science & language. I have done my best, but found the same wretched fast petty jealousy & indifference & had to fight every inch & not coming nearer my aims. the MS Manx Aesop of Farquhar I presented to our Reference Library here, to see it as least in safe hands & ‘also my MS Manx placenames’ the Examiner is not likely to repeat its experiment for a second part of the Fables! ~~Either~~ There is no sale & Broadbents dont want to loose good money; even the Manx N & Queries are to a large degree unsold. & I am sick of doing any more & wasting my energy. Fancy songs in Anglo-Manx dialect, nicely & gingerly served seem to prosper better. I had an enormous material of Manx plant names & lore, compared with the Irish, Gaelic, Manx Welsh, but altho’ appealing for practical help to those who might have helped, never got assistance or encouragement & so have put the matter aside ‘these last 10 years’ along with many other Manx things. I wish D^r Clague success; he knows some few things, but not enough. Farquhar got also sick of things Manx, although they pestered him & pumped his brains out. Raglan is not likely to help, he only goes in for show things, castle-restoring, Kermodé is Pasha in his own right, claiming the privilege of light & leading—let him lead—in his image. If of any use to you, always command.

Yours sincerely CR!

You might send me 2 copies of Sat Times with Farquhar notice in it.

¹ It reads so in the original but the reading must be *shabbily* in order to make sense. A case of word blindness on Roeder’s part.

Source: Postcard from Karl Roeder to Sophia Morrison 17 June 1908, MNHL, MS 09495, Sophia Morrison Papers, Box 8. The transcript is a diplomatic one.



The background to Roeder's comment about Hall Caine—"that patronizing Hall Caine—words, words words & skinflinty"—goes back to letters exchanged between the pair in 1898.¹ Roeder has sought Hall Caine's support that year to write about Edward Faragher to boost the chance of raising a subscription list in order to support him living at Cregneash. Faragher was still fishing at Kinsale, seemingly his only source of income. In a letter from 18 June 1898, Caine had written:

I have read the poems with pleasure; but while I think they show a good deal of sensibility & poetic feeling, to certain homely states of emotion, I do not think they are sufficiently remarkable as literature to warrant any special attention. In fact I do not think the public would consider me justified in writing about the author as one who merited individual recognition on the score of his gifts apart from his many excellent personal traits.²

The irony of this passage is that while wildly popular and successful as a novelist in his lifetime, no one now reads Hall Caine and is unlikely ever to do so.³

Roeder here is close on raging at the indifference that he feels towards his work: Faragher had translated all 313 of *Aesop's Fables* from English to Manx and a selection had appeared in 1901.⁴ The publisher, Samuel Broadbent was unwilling to finance a further selection. Roeder's column, "Manx Notes and Queries" had been gathered together in 1904,⁵ after having first appeared in serial form in the *Isle of Man Examiner*. Even that was not selling. "I am sick of doing any more & wasting my energy." He then goes on to write: "Fancy songs in Anglo-Manx dialect, nicely & gingerly served seem to prosper better." This must be a reference to *Manx National Songs* (1896)⁶ though the songs there appeared in plain English but the gist is clear.

¹ Reproduced in full in Stephen Miller, "'This true son of the soil': Hall Caine and Edward Faragher (1889)," *Manx Notes* 31 (2004).

² Letter from Hall Caine to Karl Roeder, 18 June 1898, Manchester Central Library, Manchester City Archives, M277/12/1-59.

³ That said, there has been a (slight) interest in him due to his neglect. See, David C. MacWilliams, "The Novelistic Melodramas of Hall Caine: Seventy Years On," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 45.4 (2002). For a biography, see Vivien Allen, *Hall Caine: Portrait of a Victorian Romancer* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). A review is J.O. Baylen, "Vivien Allen, *Hall Caine: Portrait of a Victorian Romancer*," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 42.3 (1999).

⁴ Charles Roeder, ed., *Skeeahyn Aesop* (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1901).

⁵ Charles Roeder, *Manx Notes and Queries* (Douglas: S.K. Broadbent, 1904).

⁶ W.H. Gill, *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).

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VIENNA, 2009

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