

Manx Notes 124 (2011)

“MR W.H. GILL AND HIS FOLK SONGS”

THE SCRIBBLE REVIEW OF SONGS OF THE BRITISH FOLK

MR W.H. GILL AND HIS FOLK SONGS *

[5a] We have had sent to us for review by the publishers, Messrs J. Curwen and Sons Ltd. “Songs of the British Folk,” collected and edited by Mr Gill Editor of the “Manx National Songs.” We were most delighted to read the introduction written by Mr John Graham and we are certain that our readers will be interested to learn that [5b] Mr Gill has unique qualifications for the work he has undertaken, in fact, he has made a life long study of this class of music. He is a great enthusiast and is lucky to have sufficient leisure to pursue it thoroughly. Twenty years ago he made an exhaustive search for the traditional songs of his fatherland, “the Little Manx Nation.”¹ His brother, the late Deemster Gill, and a friend, the late Dr John Clague, were constantly collecting material or names of old singers and for three consecutive years Mr W.H. Gill spent his annual month’s holiday at Douglas, digging up old records for putting into suitable form for publication.

HIS LOCAL FOLK-SONGS

In his present collection which we have now before us, a much wider field has to be covered, but it began at home at Angmering and within a small radius of his house at the foot of Highdown, from which a little experimental reconnoitring lent no small encouragement to his ambitions. Mr Gill as one of the founders of the Folk Song Society, was acquainted with the literature of the subjects and the needs of other members. In the present edition he deals with twenty-seven songs which he has set to music and when we remember that most of these he has collected from local individuals who in some cases probably did not know a note of music, it is evident that the patience displayed by Mr Gill is nothing short of marvellous. On the other hand it is easy to see that he must have spent many a happy day amongst the old people listening to folk songs that had almost passed into oblivion, and if a man of leisure and musical ability had not arrived on the scene these rare old songs might have been lost altogether.

Amongst the local contributors are Mr and Mrs. Sivyer of Clapham Sussex. Mr Michael Bland of Patching, Mr Green a road labourer of Angmering and others. Space will not permit our dealing with the twenty-seven songs different songs, all of which we have played over and enjoyed. We were surprised however that “Richard of Taunton Dean” had anything to do with Sussex, Yorkshire, or Lancashire, as we

* A review of W.H. Gill, *Songs of the British Folk* (London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1917).

¹ An allusion to Hall Caine, *The Little Manx Nation* (London: Heinemann, 1891).

understood it to be an old Somersetshire song published by Chappell & Co. the music arranged by J.L. Molloy. The [6a] air and the words are very similar to one another. If Mr Gill will pay us a the compliment one day of a visit we will sing our version over to him. We are indeed glad to have amongst us such a talented musician and we hope he will be spared many years to continue this good and valuable work, although to him it's a hobby.

Source: Anon. "Mr W.H. Gill and his Folk Songs." *Scribble* 1.6 (1917): 5–6 col. a.



Songs of the British Folk is one of the rarest of titles, just ve copies in public or institutional collections are known. These copies are: (1) British Library, Printed Music, St Pancras Reading Rooms, E.1766.U.(7.) E; (2) Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Cecil Sharp House. Title page bears inked stamp of ownership, "R. J. Sharp". Personal copy of R.J. Sharp with annotations; (3) Exeter Central Library, Exeter Performing Arts, M780.I42 GIL; (4) Library of Congress, Performing Arts Reading Room (Madison, LMI13) M1740.G48. Copy listed in Library of Congress, *A Check List of the Literature and Other Material in the Library of Congress on the European War* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 284; (5) Brown University Library, Orwig Music Library, James T. Koetting Ethnomusicology Archive, Loraine Wyman Collection, 1859–1952, see Series 3, Printed Music, Box 15 / Folder 9; (6) University of Mississippi, Williams Library, Media/Music, M1738.G45 s6 1917. From the personal library of Kenneth S. Goldstein. Copy (rebound at some date) is annotated on the title page with the original owner's name in ink "E. A. White" and with the date "7/6/17" in pencil (presumably when purchased or acquired). The MNHL does not possess a copy.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2011

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PRINTED SOURCES

Caine, Hall. *The Little Manx Nation*. London: Heinemann, 1891.
Gill, W.H. *Songs of the British Folk*. London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1917.

