

Manx Notes 165 (2013)

MANX CARVALS AND THEIR WRITERS (1913) *

[77] Being desirous of rescuing from oblivion any examples of the literary achievements of our Manx forefathers which may form a worthy subject of affectionate pride, and being conscious that practically the only literature in the Manx tongue consists of the old-time carols, I have of late interested myself in the discovery of unpublished carols, and in the rendering of the Fibre meritorious of the carols, old and new, in a form which may cause them to be appreciated by modern Manx folk generally. Where illustration depends largely upon quotation, opportunity for enlarging on one's subject must necessarily be restricted. I should like to say, however, that I am impressed, as was George Borrow, with the fact the Manx really have a literature—a native Gaelic literature. Some of the carols are painfully disfigured by a repulsive theology, an unmitigatedly sordid appeal to cupidity and fear; some are interesting more for their quaintness than for any literary merit they possess; but many of them display real strength of imagination expressed in real strength of language, and in occasional one of them might, if adequately translated, prove a real acquisition to the religious poetry of the world.

A collection of some eighty carols was published in 1891, at the instance of Mr J.C. Fargher, then proprietor of the *Mona's Herald*, and A.W. Moore, but it may be gathered from the preface to that book that the book does not contain all the carols extant. I myself have copies of thirty carols hitherto unpublished, and my research is far from complete; and I know that during the twenty years which have passed since the publication of Mr Moore's book manuscript carol-books have been destroyed or have ceased to be accessible.

[78] Space may permit me to offer some notes respecting authorship and dates of composition. In six cases in Mr Moore's book, the names of authors are given, but I can supplement that list a little. I have no documentary evidence that the carol "Roish ny row flaunys er y chroo" ('Before the heavens were created'), set out on p.52 of Mr Moore's book, was composed by the Rev. Thomas Christian, author of the Manx translation of *Paradise Lost*, but I am satisfied that it is so. The story of the carol is part of the story of *Paradise Lost*, and the carol contains several phrases which are exactly identical with phrases in Mr Christian's translation of Milton's great poem. The energy and eloquence of the carol make it clear that it is no plagiarism of an original, but that the same writer told his story both in a narrative and in a lyrical form. If the Rev. Thomas Christian wrote this carol, he certainly also wrote three unpublished carols I have in my possession—"Ayns flaunys ard, syn yrjey woar," "Lhig da dagh Chreestee voggey ghoail," and "She corrym rish yn laa t'ayn jiu, Haink nyn Saualtagh er y theihll." The style is perfectly similar, and there is a peculiarity in the rhyme system of "Roish my row flaunys er y chroo" (examine the

* P.W. Caine, "Manx Carvals and their Writers," *Mannin* 2 (1913), 77-79.

fifth line in each verse), which is repeated in each of the other three carols just mentioned. “Ayns flaunys ard” I consider to be the noblest poem in the Manx language. The other two are descriptions of the life and death of Christ.

William Kinrade, of Ballachrink, Maughold (1769–1854), was a carol-writer of considerable repute. He wrote “Lhig da’n slane cur clashtyn” (‘Let all the world give hearing’), set out on p.110 of Mr Moore’s book, which displays decided skill in rhyme and decided beauty of imagery. These qualities are much more marked in a longer manuscript version of the carol, which runs to 45 verses, of which only nine correspond with verses in [79] Mr Moore’s version. The date of this carol is 1817. Kinrade is obviously the “William Kermead” of “Lhig da’n slane seihll cur clashtyn rhyts, O Hiarn,” on p.211 of Mr Moore’s book, which is also a very meritorious composition. Other carols definitely assigned to Kinrade are “O Uss vriw bioee as merriu” (p.40 in Mr Moore’s book), “She corrym rish yn earish shoh” (unpublished), and “Cre’n stayd va dooinney hoshiaght” (p.34 in Mr Moore’s book). I should be interested to know the data upon which Mr Moore fixes the date of this latter carol as 1721. Four different manuscripts I have seen, and oral tradition also, describe this “Question-and-Answer Carol,” as it was familiarly called, as “Meetrit liorish William Kinrade”; and internal evidence bears out this description. Internal evidence, also, would lead one to attribute several other carols, published and unpublished, to William Kinrade.

The “Carval er Feeyn as Jough” (‘Carol on Wine and Strong Drink’), set out on p.81 of Mr Moore’s book was composed by John Lewin, sumner of Jurby, in 1836. Judging from this carol, Lewin was a devout man who objected to having teetotalism forced on him as part of his religious creed. But Lewin also composed, in collaboration with the famous Evan Christian of Lewaigue, the temperance rhyme called “Pingyn yn Ommidan” (‘The Fool’s Pence’), a translation of an English rhyme of the same name. Lewin was also the author of the ballad “Yn Ven-Ainshtyr Dewil” (‘The Cruel Mistress’), set out on p.86 of *Manx Ballads*, and “Yn Chenn Dolphin,” also in that book.

The carol set out on p.224 of Mr Moore’s book is attributed in a manuscript book I have seen to John Kerruish, of Kion-ne-Hinnin, Maughold, though I suspect the influence or assistance of William Kinrade. “My chaarjyn deyr ta ayns shoh noght” (‘My dear friends who are here to-night’), set out on p.31 of Mr Moore’s book, was written by Daniel Corlett, at some time prior to the close of the 18th century.

I thank the friends who have assisted me by lending me ms., and should feel very grateful to anyone else who entrusted me with carol-books belonging to them.

