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MANX NATIONAL SONGS (1896)

THE MANX SUN REVIEW AND CORRESPONDENCE

(1897)

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1. “[We have a ...].” *Manx Sun* 9 January 1897: 4*.
2. Unsigned [later reply signed as “The Writer of the Review”]. “MANX SONGS WITH ENGLISH WORDS, selected from the M.S. collection of the Deemster Gill, Dr. J. Clague, and W.H. Gill, and arranged by W.H. Gill, (London: Boosey and Co., 1896.) MANX BALLADS AND MUSIC, Edited by A.W. Moore, M.A., with a Preface by the Rev. T.E. Brown, M.A. (Douglas: G. and B. Johnson, 1896.)” *Manx Sun* 16 January 1897: 8*.
3. Rev. T. Talbot, “Mr Talbot on our Review of *Manx National Songs*, *Manx Ballads and Music*.” *Manx Sun* 30 January 1897: 5c–d.
4. “Notices.” *Manx Sun* 6 February 1897: 4*.
5. Pseud [signed as “The Writer of the Review”]. “*Manx National Songs* and *Manx Ballads and Music*.” *Manx Sun* 13 February 1897: 5a.
6. Rev. T Talbot, “Mr Talbot’s Reply to our Reviewer.” *Manx Sun* 20 February 1897: 8f.
7. ———, “The Discovery of ‘Fin as Osshin’.” *Manx Sun* 10 April 1897: 3a–c.

(1)

We have a notice of the recent publications of *Manx National Songs* with English Words, by Deemster Gill, Dr J. Clague, and W.H. Gill; and *Manx Ballads and Music* by A.W. Moore, M.A., in type, which we are compelled to hold over until next week.

(2)

MANX SONGS WITH ENGLISH WORDS, selected from the M.S. collection of the DEEMSTER GILL, DR. J. CLAGUE, and W.H. GILL, and arranged by W.H. GILL, (London: Boosey and Co., 1896.) MANX BALLADS AND MUSIC, Edited by A.W. MOORE, M.A., with a Preface by the Rev T.E. BROWN, M.A. (Douglas: G. and B. Johnson, 1896.)

Few greater pleasures are the lot of the reviewer than the reviewing of a really good work—a book interesting in its subject and workmanlike in its style. We have no

hesitation whatever in declaring that both these requirements are abundantly fulfilled in one of the two volumes before us. That such is not the case in both instances is entirely due to the sadly mistaken views on “collecting” held by the compilers, who are not, unfortunately, content with giving to the world the fruits, pure and simple, of their industry, gleaned no doubt with painstaking intelligence. With long experience we can safely add we have never previously met with a more painful instance of the art of the “improver,” than is displayed in the first of these two books, the very title of which is utterly misleading. Sad to relate, nothing is sacred to the modern reformer. He will as readily re-trim and “adapt” an old ballad as he will pull down, in order to “renovate” the ancient parish steeple. It is a pitiful fact that the hand of Iconoclast is ever hovering near, and like a destroying angel, withers all he touches. A more forcible example of this has probably never been afforded than in the first of these two books, edited by the Messrs Gill, from whom Manx people have a right to expect better things. In the case of both books the editors set out with an exactly similar object, namely to collect the old Folk-songs of their fathers. They do this with the avowed object of gathering these fragments from a dying past and handing them on to future generations; truly a laudable object and all honour to those who will honestly and faithfully do such work. There is no higher business for man than to make his fellow men happy and the happiness and joy of peoples are to be found best expressed in their national ballads; the joys and sorrows, the loves and games, the defeats and triumphs, these are the real life of every nation and by no people on earth are these characteristics exhibited in stronger degree than by the sons and daughters of Ellan Vannin. In the case of the Messrs Gill they have utterly and ignominiously failed to attend to the elementary rules which should be observed by collectors and this failure compels us, with pain, to condemn their book as a thoroughly unsatisfactory, meretricious publication and an unnecessary interference with a subject we wish the authors had not touched, or touched not with sacrilegious hands.

That this criticism is neither unfair nor unwarranted the most cursory examination of Messrs Gill’s book will prove to demonstration. In the preface the book is stated to be “the first practical outcome” of a project “to collect and preserve from oblivion [...] the national music of the Isle of Man.” Let us for a moment examine this very extraordinary “first practical outcome.” The compilers inform us, and we know the statement to be substantially true, that a few old people retain the words and tunes of an ancient Manx music but that they are somewhat reluctant to sing the songs of their forefathers lest they should be received by the rising generation with a lack of proper reverence. We devoutly wish the “old people” had effectually shown this reluctance when visited by the Messrs Gill for they truly inform us further as the results of their collection that “the songs in this volume are given as showing one form into which the originals maybe developed.” It is further stated again that for various reasons the Manx words of the songs are not given, one of these reasons

being that “many are unfit for publication.” A tolerably extensive knowledge of the subject compels us to revolt against this statement for with the exception of some half-dozen or so ribald rhymes, which under no circumstances could be called “Manx Songs” there is not a word of truth in it. “For various reasons” (we are again quoting from the book) “the English words are in no sense translations [...] have no connection with the original themes.” Verily a strange collection of “Manx Songs.” Instead of giving a translation of the well-known words to the air “Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey” a new set, not nearly so pretty as the translation of the original afforded, is supplied, and is stated to be written by W.H. Gill, who has also written words “suggested” by the original Manx ballad of “Mylecharaine,” a name which is not even correctly spelled. We are not told whether the originals are “unfit for publication” as so many others are said to be. We have many instances in the book of this busy meddling and peddling “improving” spirit. Thus we have no less than nine or ten of the “songs” in this book of “Manx National Songs” written by Mr Gill, and they can all, without injustice, be safely classed as of the most mediocre, wishy-washy description. We have not the smallest objection to Mr Gill or anyone else writing songs—if they are songs—but we have a very decided objection to parting with money for a book of “Manx Songs” which are neither Manx, National, nor yet songs. Again, song writers of fame, some of whom never saw the Isle of Man, are dragged in to do duty in this book, such for instance as James Hogg, the “Ettrick Shepherd[,]” Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Tom Hood, even the venerable and worthy Dr Watts of “busy bee” fame. Verily the Messrs Gill and Clague are anxious to stand in great company. The result of this mixture of things Manx and things not Manx that we have the finest hodgepodge imaginable, and this combined, with the amount of stirring the mixture has had would do credit to a concocter of Christmas pudding. Scotch ballads, such as “When Maggy gangs awa,” and English religious poetry, as “Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber,” are jumbled side by side with newly manufactured verses for “Mylecharaine” and “Illiam Dhone,” and to crown their egotism the compilers have labelled the book, in all the glory of gold letters, “Manx National Songs.” Room is found for songs of other nations, but a truly Manx piece such as “Hop-tu-naa” is denied admission altogether. Surely the propriety of things was never more grossly outraged. Messrs Gill and Clague may, without objection, collect and publish their own effusions, weak and ineffective as in this book they show themselves, but in dealing with the heritage of ballads, which have come down to our age, we have a right to protest against mutilation and against inclusion of new “songs” with what is old and genuine.

The compilers have treated the music not less unmercifully than the words. An examination of many of the scores will convince any Manx singer or instrumentalist that these are not the tunes he has known and loved. For proof of this let any reader try the well known air of “Mylecharaine” or “Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey.” The collections in the volumes of the “Manx Society” and the “Mona Melodist” are

known to be incorrect, but it is evident in the case of those volumes that the editors of the music did their best, however mistakenly, in their day and generation. They at any rate did not wilfully alter by endeavouring to “improve.” Except in one or two instances, and with these exceptions the renderings as there given are infinitely more true than is the case with the book under notice. According to Messrs Gill they have succeeded in gathering no fewer than two hundred and sixty local melodies, a sufficiently alarming statement to any faithful student of the subject. But we have no hesitation in declaring our belief that the greater portion of them would be found to have no possible connection with the Isle of Man. We cannot but think Mr Moore comes nearer the truth when he says “Careful inquiries have been made in every parish in the island with reference to those acquainted with old tunes” and yet the result of those inquiries is that he can publish only some forty-five tunes. If the number of known carol airs, etc., be added to these it will at once be found Messrs Gill’s statement of “two hundred and sixty local melodies” is an obvious exaggeration. Fortunately their book contains only some fifty airs, and as many of these have been so “transposed” and “improved” and “adapted” we are thankful there are no more of them.

We have no desire to write a single harsh word respecting the work of any one anxious to preserve memorials of the old Manx life, but we must seem express our regret that the Messrs Gill and Clague have taken a business for which they appear to be no way qualified. They promise a “largely extended selection of the melodies for the pianoforte,” but unless the work is more carefully done, and with an absence of the “restoring and improving” spirit, we would be glad if it could be transferred to more competent hands to perform. Such books as the one before us may serve, in the absence of better, to pass an hour in English drawing-rooms, where Manx songs are not known, but let the aim of the compilers of such be clearly stated so that Manx people may assiduously avoid books they do not want.

In the second of the two books named at the head of our list we have a work of a very different character. The fruit of Mr Moore’s labour is worthy of all praise. This is a real Manx book—Manx in subject and in treatment, in illustration and in printing—it is a credit to all concerned in its production. By fidelity to the ancient Manx words of the ballads, by careful translation of these, and by the carefully transcribed music, the book is, and is likely to remain, the most generally interesting book that has been published concerning the island. Every person who is at all interested in the island or in music should hasten to secure a copy or this valuable work, and we can promise pleasure of a very high order will be derived from the perusal of it. We believe Mr Moore has gathered up for the pleasure and profit of generations of Manxmen yet unborn all that is now ever likely to be gleaned of the ballads, and their music, of the Isle of Man. We confess to a feeling no less of surprise than of pleasure in handling the book. By great industry the collection has been so carefully made that probably nothing in the nature of a song or ballad has

escaped notice, and, as a consequence, we have here no less than seventy four distinctly Manx pieces. These are classed in various sections as mythical, semi-historical and historical, children's songs, customs and superstitions, love songs, patriotic ballads, nautical ballads, and an unclassifiable miscellaneous. Under each of these headings we have, with the utmost accuracy so far attainable, the original Manx of each ballad and on the opposite page a literal translation without any attempt at English rhyme or metre. Had this been done the effect would have been to spoil the primitive simplicity of the songs. It could not, while retaining the full sense of the original, be made into good English metre, and it would certainly ruin the telling effect of the original Manx. It is much to be thankful for that while Mr Moore has removed, and rightly so, obvious corruptions, and has restored the original completeness he is not a "restorer" anxious to work in something of his own creation: something which never before belonged to the ballads.

With the exception of a few written by jolly Bishop Rutter, who, fittingly, lived in the early days of the Merry Monarch, Charles II, the words of most of these songs have come down to us only from the latter portion of the eighteenth century. We have little doubt that the horribly severe Church discipline of Bishops Barrow, Wilson, and Hildesley allowed by the Methodist revival, covering altogether a period of close upon two hundred years, did much, if not everything to stifle the naturally lively sentiment and tendency to occasional innocent enjoyment found in all Celtic people. No doubt during this disciplinary period much of the early ballad poetry died from pure neglect, combined with clerical intolerance; and we cannot doubt that by these occurrences, together with the almost total lack of education among the people, the store of musical enjoyment has been materially reduced.

As might be anticipated from a northern people, the songs are rugged in their simplicity. They have not the linked sweetness long drawn out such as is commonly found in the poetry of southern climes. They contain little of the passionate, but much of the homely. This is especially the case with the love songs where prudential considerations are often as well attended to as the billing and cooing side of an engagement; and, happily, this characteristic is not absent in these days. "Don't marry for money, but go where money is." Love ill supplies the place of bread and cheese. The section of love songs, however, contains much innocent humour, and is one of the most interesting portions of the book. As a sample of original and translation we select a verse or two from "Arrane Sooree," a "courting song":

Dooiney-Aeg:

Graa: my graih as my garjagh,
 Nish lhiggys oo me stiagh,
 Son dy voym's agh un oor
 Jeh dy heshaght villish noght.

Ven-Aeg:

Few royd voish yn unniag,
Fow royd ta mee dy graa,
Son cha jean-ym lhiggey stiagh oo,
Ta fys aym's er ny shaare.

Dy bragh, ny dy bragh, guilley,
Cha bee aym's ayd son ben,
Son cha vell mee goll dy phoosey,
My taitnys hene vys aym.

Dooiney-Aeg:

Hug ee eisht yn filleag arree,
As haink ee sheesh my whaail,
Lesh phaagaghyn cha graihagh,
Myr shoh renshin meeiteil.

Va ny creeaghyn ain cha kenjal,
Lesh yn gerjagh va ain cooidjagh;
Nagh geayll shin rieu lheid roie,
As scoan my nee shin arragh.

Translated as follows:

Young Man:

Saying: My love, my comfort,
Now do thou let me in;
Could I but have one hour of
Thy company to-night?

Young Woman:

Get away from the window,
Get away, I tell thee;
For I will not let you in,
I know better than that.

No, never; no, never, young man,
Will I be thy woman;
For I'm not going to marry,
My own pleasure I will have.

Young Man:

Then she throw her shawl o'er her,
And came down to meet me
With kisses, oh, how loving!
This way we did meet.

Our hearts were so mellow with
Our mutual pleasure;
You never heard such before,
And you scarce will again.

The historical songs include our old favourite “Thurot as Elliott” and the place of honour is occupied by “Fin as Oshin,” that is “Fingal and Ossian,” which carries us back almost to mythical times. It is curious that the only known written copy of this semi-historical piece should have lain buried amongst the treasures of the British Museum for more than one hundred years until discovered by the industry of Mr Moore. Had there in those early days been a Manx museum the M.S. might have found its rightful home and instead of lying so long forgotten it might have been possible to recover other portions of it. Now, alas, it is too late.

How delightful it is to turn over songs we were accustomed to sing in our youth and to find them in all their pristine beauty; songs we sang long years ago or which our mothers sang for us in rocking us to sleep. Here there are lots of them. The section of children's songs contains all the old favourites and is not the least interesting part of the book. “Ushag veg Ruy,” “Juan y Jaggad Kear,” “Red Top-knots,” and others not less well known.

Among the songs of customs we have of course “Mylecharaine.” We are glad that at last an authoritative transcript of the original of this song is before us, together with a faithful translation. It may now be hoped that there is an end to the foolish spellings and very extraordinary translations we have seen for many years past issued, we regret to say, by Manx as well as English ignoramuses while some supposed rhyming translations have, at times, been simple outrages upon common sense. Now that the thing is, once and for all, done properly, we hope those having occasion to sing or quote the words will use the version given in this book. “Hunt the Wren” and “Hop-tu-naa” are equally good. Among the fishermen the nautical ballads will be especially appreciated, particularly those on the “Loss of the herring boats,” “Voyage of the Tiger,” and “Arrane y Skeddan.” It would occupy more space than is at our disposal to bring out each song specially worth notice because of the beauty and crispness of the translations or the explanatory notes freely inserted wherever necessary, but for a final example we must cite “Ny Kirree fo Niaghtey.” We have carefully compared Mr Moore's version with some half-dozen others now before us and in no instance is more careful treatment displayed than in this song. It has a

beauty as a pastoral ballad which may be easily obscured by thoughtless transcribers but here the rendering is all that can be desired.

We have left ourselves little room to deal with the musical pages of the work, but there need be no hesitation in saying the airs are as we have heard them sung, and know them to be. With the exception of obvious corruptions and interpolations we can observe there are, happily, no “improvements,” and as we desire the old, and not something new, we are glad that beyond giving the old, old songs in all their purity of tone Mr Moore and his co-adjustors have attempted nothing more. We are pleased to observe this is definitely stated in the introductory preface. Mr Moore informs us he has allowed no preconceptions as to what might have been intended to enter into the question, but has simply set down the airs as heard from the lips of the singers and that a “prettified English presentation” has been sternly avoided. That this part of the work has been performed by competent hands will be apparent by the mention of the names of Miss Wood and Mr Colin Brown, a good authority on Celtic music.

The Introductory Prefaces by the Editor, and by the Rev. T.E. Brown, M.A., whom we are glad again to welcome afford pleasing reading, and a great deal of valuable and interesting information concerning the historical evolution of the songs and music, information hitherto obtainable only in scattered books, combined also with such original research.

We must not close without a reference to the manner in which the book is produced by the publishers, the quality of paper and beauty and clearness of print, Messrs Johnson deserve warm thanks. The printing is carefully worked and enhances the credit the same firm earned for their share in the “Manx Note Book.” The binding is such that those desirous of doing may have the book re-bound to individual taste. As if to add a crowning glory to a book already handsome in appearance, we have a number of very beautiful illustrations by Mr J.M. Nicholson. So pretty are they indeed, and so carefully reproduced that we are filled with a desire for more, and would have been glad had there been double the number. Mr Nicholson has also designed the strikingly handsome title page. Where all is good it is difficult to choose but for ourselves we place among the best the sketches of Mount Karran in Sulby Glen, the entrance to Peel Castle, and that to “Ny Kirree fo Niaghthey.” All the tail-pieces, small though they be, are remarkably clear and effective. Upon examination of the book, we are confident readers will agree with us that to all concerned in its production, the very heartiest thanks are due. The book is reasonable in price, cheap even, and so we have the greater reason to commend it to all lovers of the old Manx Ballads and music and to hope it may have the circulation it deserves.

(3)

MR TALBOT ON OUR REVIEW OF
“MANX NATIONAL SONGS,” “MANX BALLADS AND MUSIC.”

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE “MANX SUN”]

SIR,—In common with other person whom I have met, I read in your issue of the 16th, the review of the two recent publications whose titles stands at its head, viz.:—*Manx National Songs with English Words* by Deemster Gill and associates, and *Manx Ballads and Music* by Mr A.W. Moore, About the reviewer’s remarks to the first I should like to say a few words, and in regard to the those on the second, perhaps many.

On my observing to a friend when the review was quite fresh, that the reviewer’s remarks on “Manx National Songs” were severe, his reply was, “Not a bit more severe than it deserves”; and “so say we all,” I think, who take an intelligent interest in what is *Manx and National*, and who are themselves wont to use these words in their natural and colloquial significations, And I think also that all of us of the same class who have no money to waste, and yet are disposed ungrudgingly to spend a little, and even more than a little on a production of genuine literature, echo, and will continue to echo the reviewer’s words, “We have a decided objection to parting with money on a book of “Manx National Songs,” which are neither Manx, National, nor yet Songs,” and to give his words further application; the hardship in book-buying of course consisting not only in being allowed before purchase is made to examine the production to see whether it answers to its pretensions, but in having no redress, beyond complaining. And surely no purchasers of the book in question could have got a much if any better notion of its contents from its title, than as many fish in a tank into which a little water is allowed to trickle could have of the motions of the tides. N.B.—It was really charming to me to learn from a report of the “Grand Concert of Manx National Songs” on the 7th, that, for some reason undisclosed, of the six singers of the ten solos of the evening no one was a Manx woman or Manx man in the strict sense of the term.

The reviewer’s remarks on “Manx Ballads and Music”, by Mr A.W. Moore, are highly laudatory. On reading them I was soon incited to underlined certain words referring to him. For instance, “By *fidelity to the ancient Manx words* of the ballads, by careful translation of them,” etc. And, again, “*We have*, with the utmost accuracy so far attainable, *the original Manx* of each ballad, etc. I underlined them, feeling that if Mr Moore had acted as is stated, he had amended his conduct since the issue of *The Book of Common Prayer in Manx Gaelic*, as a translation made by the Bishop Phillips, of 1610, the first volume of which appeared in 1893, and which appeared not in Phillisian Manx, but, especially as regards the spellings, in Mooreian Manx, and so as effectually to efface a characteristic Welsh aspect of the Bishop’s work.

Reading on till I had got about half-way through the reviewer's criticism, I was fairly pulled up on reading as follows in regard to the ballad which stands first in the book: "The place of honour is occupied by 'Fin as Oshin,' that is Fingal and Ossian, which carries us back almost to mythical times. It is curious that the only known written copy of this semi-historical piece should have lain buried amongst the treasures of the British Museum for more than one hundred years until discovered by the industry of Mr Moore."

Now, whether the said ballad is a "semi-historical piece" or not; whether it "carries us back almost to mythical times" or not; whether it is the "*only* known copy" of an assumed original; and whether if there was an original it was genuine or not, are all points on which some day I may have something to say. But as regards the alleged discovery by Mr Moore of the said piece "Fin as Oshin," for which the reviewer can find some support in Mr Moore's own words in *Manx Ballads and Music*, p.xvii, and in *Manx Note Book*, ii. 80. I may say a little now. Two recognised principles amongst honourable literary men being that *truth* is the one object of historical study, and *suum cuique* a point of honour, in the entire absence of evidence from both the reviewer and Mr Moore as to the time, manner, and other circumstances of the alleged discovery, the reader may feel at perfect liberty to regard Mr Moore as no more the discoverer of the said piece than the discoverer of Jupiter.

I have for long years observed that men who make real discoveries on which they justly pride themselves, do equally in regard to manuscripts as to the physical sciences, archæological explorations, etc, show themselves to be as proud of informing the public about the *when*, the *how*, and the *where* of making them as of the discoveries themselves. These are all points on which in the present case we await disclosures, if the discovery, as alleged, was made by Mr Moore. *Suum cuique*.—I am, sir, your truly,

T. Talbot.

Douglas, January 28th, 1897.

(4)

MANX NATIONAL SONGS, &c.—Our reviewer's reply to Mr Talbot will appear next week.

(5)

“MANX NATIONAL SONGS” AND
 “MANX BALLADS AND MUSIC.”
 OUR REVIEWER’S REPLY TO MR TALBOT.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE “MANX SUN”]

Sir,—The exigencies of my business are such as to leave me little time for private affairs, especially for desultory newspaper correspondence. Yet I cannot permit Mr Talbot’s letter on the questions names above to go unanswered, I thought and expected I had done with the questions of the two books recently published on the National Ballads of the Isle of Man, and of which I wrote a review for the *Manx Sun*. I honestly set down my opinions on the respective merits of the two books in question. I recorded my protest against the manner in which the money had been drawn from my not heavily-laden pocket for payment of the Messrs Gill’s book of Manx National Songs, a book which in any or every possible sense is untrue to its name; and on the other hand finding, in my own judgment at any rate, that Mr Moore’s book is a good book, a real Manx book, and a book honestly worth the money charged for it. I have not hesitated to say so. What more does Mr Talbot want? But he is nothing if not critical, so let us see what his criticism amounts to.

He says he observed to a friend that my remarks on the Messrs Gill’s book were “severe.” Of course they were, and they were meant to be so, but not more than their case necessitated or deserved, and I am glad to hear Mr Talbot’s “so say all of us” in this connection. But who is Mr Talbot, to talk of “severity.” I shall never forget the most happy, deserved, and conclusive castigations Mr Talbot has from time to time dealt out in language only too rarely used, to modern walkers of “ancient history.” Who can forget his righteous, not to say riotous, indignation, against Mr Spencer Walpole, and Bishop Stratton for their version of the ancient history of the Island, against all, indeed, who have ever written upon, or about, the subject. His very virile language has often exceeded anything known to the present writer during a long course of reading and review-writing. I do not complain; on the contrary, I say, all honour to him for his honesty of purpose. But there is no room for him to say anything of my “severity.” I am delighted with his side remark that of the six singers of the ten solos in the Messrs Gill’s “Grand Concert of Manx National Songs” not one singer was Manx in the strict sense of the term. The remark is entirely in keeping with the Messrs Gill’s book, and it is “Talbot-ian.”

But besides being courageous, Mr Talbot ought to be fair—sometimes. He claims for himself that *truth* (the italics are his own) should be the one object of historical study and straightway, without the smallest examples of error being shown, he attacks the bona-fides of Mr Moore and of my own review. Now, I agree with him as to the value of *truth*, but let it be truth all round. If Mr Talbot has nothing to show

of the untruth either of Mr Moore or the reviewer, and he most certainly does not give the smallest particle of evidence, then his letter need not, and ought not to have been written. Mr Talbot has laurels enough to his credit, and hitherto he has worn them with becoming dignity and grace, without endeavouring to depreciate the honest and diligent work of others. He questions my statements that Mr Moore has given faithfully the ancient Manx words of the ballads, with careful translations, and instead of honestly acknowledging my statement to be true, or branding it a lie, if untrue, as I am sure he would have done had there been room, he goes off at a tangent on to the Manx Prayer Book, with which I, and my review, had nothing whatever to do, and which is not in question.

Mr Talbot questions what I describe as the “discovery” of the only known mss. of “Fin as Oshin.” As to the discovery: When an object of any kind is utterly lost to those most interested in the said object, lost so completely that even the existence of the object is forgotten. What then? America was known and peopled by the Northman centuries before Columbus, yet this colonisation died and was forgotten. Will Mr Talbot deny that Columbus discovered America? The mss. in question was so completely lost or forgotten that until Mr Moore discovered it no one knew of its existence. Such finds are commonly spoken of, in the literary world, as discoveries. Will Mr Talbot deny this to be a discovery? Mr Moore does not claim to have discovered Jupiter—the simile is Mr Talbot’s—when he does we shall know how to regard his claim.

As to its being “the only known written copy.” Mr Talbot questions this statement, but again, he does not deny the truth of it. If he does know of another copy let him inform the world of it and I am sure we will be glad of his news. In the meantime I am in the right in describing it as the “only known written copy.”

I say that “Fin as Shin” carries us back almost to mythical times and again Mr Talbot questions though again he is careful not to deny. If it does not allude to “almost mythical times” perhaps Mr Talbot will tell us what the time really is, or if there was a time at all. At present he neither denies nor affirms, but only questions.

Whether the original of “Fin as Oshin,” is, or is not, genuine is a question I studiously avoided. I have an opinion on the question, but at present do not consider my opinion sufficiently matured to publish it. But as I have several times examined the mss. I may close with a few words about it. It is contained in a volume marked “Collections relating to Gaelic Antiquities and Language,” and the location of the volume in the British Museum is MSS.II,215. the volume contains seven mss., and of the only two—the second and the last in the book—relate to the Isle of Man. the seventh mss. is a collection of Manks songs, entitled “Songs in the Manks Language, with English versions.” There is not the slightest information as to who transcribed the songs, which are “Eubonia’s Praise,” “The Little Quiet Nation,” “Scarlett Rocks,” and one “Oran Ghavil,” which I think Mr Moore does not mention when in his introduction to “Manx Songs” he makes some remarks on this mss. All four are given

in Manx and English. In addition there is “Mollechurane, an old Manks madrigal,” and an un-named piece in two four-line verses, commencing “Sfeer nah nee my doghunta mannoonids moghrey.” Neither of these two are translated, and I think the latter one is not in Moore’s book.

The full title of the other Manx mss. is “Fin as Oshin, or, Fingal and Ossian, a Manx heroic poem with English translation and notes, as also an original letter upon this subject from Peter John Heywood, Isle of Man, October 25th, 1789.” There are one or two peculiarities about the letter written by Heywood in his account of the fragment of “Fin as Oshin.” In the first place, the person to whom the letter is addressed is not named, and there is no means of finding out for whom it was intended. Mr Moore says it “was sent by Detester Heywood to Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, and was by him deposited in the British Museum, together with four other ballads in 1789.” But this is not so; the portion of the volume of mss. in question which was sent to Thorkelin is the preceding mss., the first in the book and which has no connection with the Isle of Man. Mr Moore is also mistaken in saying that the volume containing these mss. was deposited by Thorkelin in the British Museum in 1789. As a matter of fact it was purchased for the museum from Professor Magnussen, in July, 1837, as I am informed by the keeper of the mss. department and the volume itself, indeed, bearing an inscription to that effect.

In the next place the date of Heywood’s letter at present reads October 25th, 1789, but bears, in the year, very evident marks of having been altered, whether by Heywood himself I cannot say. The character of the writing is, however, consistent with the period, circa 1789.

It is somewhat curious that Heywood remarks in the letter that “Fin as Oshin” was taken down from the lips of a “very antient woman, several years ago, when the first edition of Fingal appeared by Macpherson.” Also that it was taken down by a “Revd clergyman of my acquaintance,” whom he does not name. Now, the first edition of Macpherson’s *Ossian* was published in 1762, so that supposing the 1789 date of Heywood’s letter to be the true date on which it was written it is evident that the fragment of “Fin as Oshin” was kept by Heywood for some seven and twenty years before he sent it to his now unknown correspondent, and we do not know from any other source that he ever, before or afterwards, made known to anyone that he had such a fragment of antiquity in his possession.

Let me sum up these points. This piece was taken down, say about 1762, from a “very antient woman” not named, by a “Revd clergyman” not named. Twenty-seven years later the fragment was sent to someone else, not named. We practically lose all knowledge of the thing from 1789 to 1837, in which latter year it finds its way to the British Museum. Clearly Mr Moore discovered it there and was the first to make it known. But there is a great deal to be learned about its genesis and travels, and I should like to see the question thrashed out, say by Mr Talbot—and I know no one more able for the business, or more discriminating—or some one else with more

time to devote to the question than I can give. My proper functions in this world are—first, to glorify God; second, to attend to my business so that I may maintain my family in a proper manner. These two objects almost entirely absorb my time and energies, leaving only a very little space for private pleasures, such as the discussion of Manx literary and historical questions, in which I am, however, deeply interested, and of which I have read much, and, I trust, learned something. I must, therefore, ask you to excuse my further publicly discussing this question, on account of want of time and opportunity.

One more point and I am done. In the review of the two song books there is an error evident to me on looking the article over. Instead of saying, as I did, the mss. of “Fin as Oshin” had laid for more than 100 years in the British Museum, I should simply have said the fragments had been written more than that period, for, as I point out above, the Museum did not acquire the mss. until 1837.

THE WRITER OF THE REVIEW.

(6)

THE DISCOVERY OF “FIN AS OSSHIN”
INTERESTING NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE POEM
BY REV. T. TALBOT

Sir,—From the trite but seasonable remark that all of us are not at all times in even middling health, I pass to sundry remarks on a subject which in sundry aspects was recently brought into your columns; to wit, a poem in Manx whose name is given as “Fin as Oshin.”

1. In the ms. department of the British Museum are a number of papers put together in the form of a volume, now and long known and recognised there as “Add ms. 11215,” the verbal abbreviations denoting the particular collection of manuscripts to which the volume belongs, and the figures its number in that collection. Together they form an entry in the margin of the catalogue which any one who searches it, and finding described the whole or any portion of the volume will find there and must use in applying for the volume, and using will get it. One portion of the contents of the volume consists of a few connected papers associated with this Island, being (a) a poem in Manx headed “Fin as Oshin,” etc. an English version, and notes to both; and (b) a letter with note thereto dated “Isle of Man, October 25th. 1789,” and signed “Peter John Heywood”; all which were sent to some one whose name does not appear, and which may be called as a whole The Heywood Papers.

2. It is now more than 21 years since the existence in that volume of those two papers was made known to some persons in this Island and to many elsewhere, which came about thus. In November, 1874, “Henry Jenner Esq., of the ms.

Department: British Museum”; a gentleman who took an interest in the various dialects of the Celtic language addressed a letter to each of the insular clergy relating to the existing amount in his parish of spoken Manx, and in the following April visited the Island to make larger enquiries. On returning to London he prepared a paper, more of the nature of a report than of research, on “The Manx Language: its grammar, literature, and present state,” and read it on June 18th, 1875, at a meeting of the Philological Society. In the same year it appeared in that Society’s printed *Transactions* Part i, pp. 172–97, and also from the same type in a pamphlet of 26 pp. for author’s use; copies of both the volume and pamphlet being now before me. There can be no question that copies of the pamphlet bearing “With the Author’s kind regards” on the cover, were sent to person in this Island, “the Revs J. Qualtrough, W. Kermodé, and R. Airey, Vicars of Kirk Arbory, Maughold and Michael,” being named in its closing paragraph, with thanks “for the exceeding kindness and attention with which they received me, a perfect stranger, going among them with no sort of introduction, save a common interest in the Manx language.” The copy of the pamphlet before me is one of those Presentation copies which came into my hands about 1881, and I have no doubt there is, at least, one other copy about of like character.

The special interest of the pamphlet at the present time, and for the purposes of my letter, is that Mr Jenner informs us in it of the existence of the poem *Fin as Oshin*, though without so naming it. he gives its story, refers to a Scotch prose story like it, and says that a letter from one Peter John Heywood accompanies it. But not only so. He states precisely the “Collection and number of ms.” in the British Museum which contains it, a great help to those who might wish to see it. But let us have his own words as far as we need at present to use them. Alluding to the fabling about the learning of this Island in ancient times, as received here from “the full-blown romance” of Hector Boetius of 1526, Mr Jenner writes:

The only composition now known that may possibly belong to a shadowy period is a single fragment written down *in the year 1789, by one Peter John Heywood*, from the recitation of an old woman in the parish of Kirk Michael, and now forming part of a collection relating to Celtic matters by Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, preserved in the British Museum (Add. ms. 11215). This fragment is a real Ossianic poem. It related how Orree, the enemy of Finn McCumhail, was a prisoner in Finn’s house, and how the women of the household on a day when Finn had gone a hunting, tormented Orree by tying his hair down to the ground as he lay asleep, and how he in revenge set fire to the house and burnt them all, and was promptly punished by Finn by being torn to pieces by wild horses.

I have put a few words in italics to take occasion to note that they do not accord in their teaching with Heywood’s letter, which is that the poem was taken down by a clergyman about 1762–63, who about the same time gave him a copy. I quote the passage as evidence that, as existing in a pamphlet printed in 1875 and presented by

its author to a clergyman in this Island, a knowledge of the existence of the poem has been here for upwards of twenty-one years, and that it has been a very simple thing for an owner or reader interested in Manx “literature” to obtain a copy of it and accompanying papers, by availing himself of the information of its exact place in our National Library, which Mr Jenner places kindly at his service.

3. I am not aware whether one of the earliest possessors or readers of the pamphlet,—as we may feel morally certain were those indefatigable collectors of things Manx, Mr R. Moore, of Peel, and Mr Harrison, of Rock Mount—obtained a copy of the poem, etc. when it came to his knowledge. I should feel no excitement were I told that either of these gentlemen did. Either could easily do it through a hack in London who possessed a B.M. Reading-Room ticket. A short letter like this would fetch the lot in a few days; there being no enquiry or search to make; nothing to do but to ask for the ms. and write away:

Snuggery, Isle of Man

1875.

Dear Hack,—Br. Mus, “Add ms. 11215.” Poem in Manx about Finn and Oree, with letter from Peter John Heywood—Copy exactly, as usual.—Faithfully yours,

4. Now for a bit of personal narrative. Having known for some years of the poem and later through the above-mentioned copy of the pamphlet, on spending a few days in 1885 at the B.M. Reading-room, I resolved to apply for the volume containing them, and got it—got it, as in my boyhood we used to say, “as easy as fun.” There was no need to speak to any official there, to say nothing of a consultation with him about it, as though he could give me assistance; no need of opening, to say nothing of searching a catalogue. I knew all I needed to know before I left home. On one of the small tickets of green paper provided there for applying for mss., I wrote in the proper column “Add ms. 11,215,” and lower down the date, my name, and number of my seat. The ticket being put into its appointed place, and an attendant soon fetching the volume from its known site in the ms. department and handing it to me, it was mine to use, if I willed to retain it, till the close of the reading day. The poem and letter, of course, turned up in it as Mr Jenner on his professional credit had intimidated they wold. As regards myself, I saw and used what (as one of my objects) I left home to see and use, and it would be simply false to allege that I discovered anything, and something worse than false to say that I pretended to do so. On returning the volume, I received back my ticket, “cancelled,” which, preserved with some scores of others used in previous years, is now before me, and bears date “May 4, 1885.”

5. And now to pass to Mr A. W. Moore and the reviewer of his latest book. As professedly “copied from the MS in the British Museum,” Mr Moore printed the whole of the Heywood papers in his *Manx Note Book* for April 1886 pp. 80–84, and part of them in his *Folk-lore of the Isle of Man* 1891, pp.10–13, and *Manx Ballads and*

Music 189, pp. xv–xvii, and 2–5; all being accompanied by introductory notices. On first printing them, he set his inventive faculty to work, and it has been at work on the occasion of each reprint, so that now a goodly stock of inventions exists. The reviewer reproduced some of them on Jan. 16th, and in his letter of Feb. 13th in part only retracted them, in both review and letter, assuming that all persons here are and must have been ignorant of the said papers and of everything relating to them, except as far as he and Mr Moore have been or may be graciously pleased to teach them, all which makes it seasonable to bring under remark the inventions referred to.

The first set of inventions is that which is mainly formed of the materials (I do not say the teaching) of Mr Jenner's brief account of the poem, and is contained in the following passages relating to its history, especially from Oct. 25th, 1789, Mr Jenner, however, affording no materials for its claimed discovery by Mr Moore himself, except such as he used, but does not write. On mentioning Peter John Heywood in an account of "the Heywoods" in *Manx Note Book* ii, 69, after saying, against evidence, that "he was a man of considerable culture and literary tastes," he writes, "It is to his correspondence with Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, that we owe the preservation of probably the oldest Manx Ballad in existence." He refers us onward to p.80 where, in his "introductory notice," he writes, "Nearly a hundred years ago, the following poem with four others, in Manx, were deposited in the British Museum by Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, among a large number of Celtic MSS. which he had collected ... 'Fin as Oshin,' as far as can be ascertained, has never been mentioned by any one since Professor Thorkelin's time, and was entirely lost sight of till discovered by the present writer. It is a fragment of a fine heroic poem, truly Ossianic in character; and may confidently be pronounced to be the oldest poetical composition in the Manx language." Let us note particulars:

First.—Knowing nothing of the person to whom Heywood sent the poem with his letter, but finding Mr Jenner naming "Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen," as having owned the collection of mss. of which the poem is a "part," what does this historian of the poem do? He borrows the Dane, and writes, "It is to his (Heywood's) correspondence with Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, that we owe the preservation, etc," not a fragment of evidence of any "correspondence" being given. Can evidence be invented, and thus Thorkelin be made to appear unquestionably as receiver from Heywood of both letter and poem? Now, the beginning of Heywood's letter in the British Museum ms. is thus:

Isle of Man, Oct. 25th, 1789.

Dear Sir,—Several years ago, when the first Edition of the Poems or Final and Ossian by Mr McPherson appeared, a Revd Clergyman of my acquaintance, &c.

It will be observed that no name of the person addressed is placed above the "Dear Sir"; nor does such name appear in any part of the letter or of the papers which accompany it. The name of the addressee can be conjectured only. Well, what does

Mr Moore do? On professedly printing the letter as “copied from the ms. in the British Museum,” he prints the beginning thus (see *Manx Note Book*, ii, 81):

Isle of Man, Oct. 25th, 1789.

To Professor Thorkelin.

Dear Sir,—Several years ago, when the first Edition of the Poems or ‘Fingal and Ossian’ by Mr McPherson appeared, a Revd Clergyman of my acquaintance, &c.

Now, not to dwell upon the studied perversion of “the Poems of Fingal and Ossian, by Mr McPherson,” into “the Poem of ‘Fingal and Ossian,’ by Mr McPherson,” as if the Scotch genius had written a poem bearing the same title as the Manx parson had given to one, what can be thought of an individual who, morally certain that the interpolation will be unknown, inserts a name not in the original letter, says that it is “copied from the ms,” and, keeping up the mean device for ten years, asserts in his *Manx Ballads and Music* (p.xvii) that the letter “was sent by Deemster Heywood to Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen”!

Second. Having in that gentlemanly way put the letter and poem into the possession of the Dane, and knowing nothing of how or when they found their way to the British Museum, he again uses the Dane, alters Mr Jenner’s “preserved “ (used in reference to twenty-two years ago), into “deposited,” and changing the position, etc, of other words to make them fit, writes “Nearly a hundred years ago the following poem, with four others in Manx, was deposited in the British Museum by Professor Thorkelin, of Copenhagen, among a large number of Celtic MSS, which he had collected.” And, after the lapse of ten years, he, in his *Manx Ballads and Music*, p.xvii, asserts of the same Professor and poem that it “was by him deposited in the British Museum, with four other ballads, in 1789.” Now, were there no direct proof that this deposit story is pure invention, and were it even proved that the recipient of Heywood’s letter and poem was the very Dane himself, his nationality, his academics position, and the alleged time of making the deposit—dropping them as soon as they came into his bands like a hot potato—all combine to show it. The writer of the review, however, says of the MS. volume which contains the letter and poem, and I have no doubt correctly, as he has made special enquiry on the point: “As a matter of fact is was purchased for the Museum from Professor Magnusson in July 1837, as I am informed by the keeper of the MSS. department, and the volume itself, indeed, bearing an inscription to that effect.”

Third. Having got the poem to the British Museum by the use of Mr Jenner’s Dane, Mr Moore proceeds to inform us what befell it there. Its history is pitiful, if not over-luminous with evidence. According to the negative testimony of unnamed declarants it spent there an almost centenarian life unmentioned and unseen, until at some at time, and in some way as yet undisclosed, Mr Moore discovered it. He says, as we see, “*Fin as Oshin*, as far as can be ascertained, has never been mentioned by anyone since Professor Thorkelin’s time, and was entirely lost sight of till discovered by the present writer.” And in his *Manx Ballads and Music*, p.xvii, after mentioning

the year 1789, he writes, "As far as can be ascertained, *Fin as Oshin* has never been mentioned by anyone since that time until discovered by the present writer"; the marvel of marvels being how under the conditions of never having been seen or mentioned for a hundred years he himself, of all people, happened upon it! But the mystery is at once solved on the reasonable supposition that he borrowed the next bit of Mr Jenner's materials—the instructive and helpful "Add ms. 11215";—got to see the poem in the same way as other people, and, not aware that other people were in the secret of the pamphlet, magnified the sight into a self-laudatory "discovery,"—a discovery which has neither the dignity nor the integrity of a "mare's-nest."

Fourth. Knowing nothing whatever about the age of the poem but what may be gathered from Heywood's letter, and having done his best to efface by alterations any archaic marks it may bear under the piddling pretence of amending its cacography, the "discoverer" invents a minimum age for it. Taking Mr Jenner's, "The only composition (in Manx) now known," etc.; and "This fragment is a real Ossianic poem"; by inversion, padding and changing "only" into "oldest," the thing is done. And so we read, "It is a fragment of a fine heroic poem, truly Ossianic in character, and may confidently be pronounced to be the oldest known poetical composition in the Manx language"; his "Mannanan Beg Mac y Leirr," with modern improvings which affect not its supposed cacography only, being credited with bearing the weight of 390 years, from which, however, due respect for literary truth might safely cut off the first figure. But other considerations than that of comparison enter into the question of the poem's age.

Fifth. Let us now look at the poem in Manx as printed, in comparison with it in ms. According to the letter of Heywood, he held a copy of the poem for 26 years or more, and the poem did not exist as written until after the appearance of the first edition of McPherson's *Ossian* (1762–68). His account is that it was then reduced to writing at Bishopscourt by one of two clergy there on its being sung—three-fourths probably being merely recited—by a "very ancient woman" of Kirk Michael; that the two clergy were engaged there in revising and correcting a translation of the Scriptures into the Manx language who, being probably the Revs M. Curghey and P. Moore, were the two most capable of the clergy for that work, and we may suppose for the other also; and that his copy of the poem was given him by one of them shortly afterwards. If, therefore, the poem as taken down differed in spelling from the attempted system of uniform spelling adopted in printing Manx at that time, it may justly be considered as made to differ with the object of either giving a due representation of the "old Dame's" vocal utterances, or of conferring on the poem a more or less archaic look, and in either case worthy of being printed, if printed at all, according to the ms. Well, on printing the poem what does Mr Moore do? Without a word of warning to the reader, and indeed telling him that the poem is "copied from the ms. in the British Museum," he in the *Manx Note Book* ii, 82–83 printed it (without its head-ing) as shown and sufficiently shown by its first few lines:

Hie Fin as Oshin magh dy helg
 Fal, lal, lo, as fal, lal, la.
 Lesh sheshaght trean as moddee elg,
 Cha row un dooinney sloo ny keead
 Coshee cha bieu cha row ny lheid
 Lesh feedyn coo eisht, etc.

Now, let us take for comparison the beginning of the poem as, according to my own copy, it appears in the MS.:

FIN AS OSSHIN, OR, FINGAL AND OSSHIAN;

A MANKS HEROIC POEM.

Hie Fin as Oshin magh dy helg,
 Fal-lal-lo, as Fal-lal-lo;
 Lesh shessiaght treean as moadee 'elg,
 Cha row ayn Dooiney sloo ny keyad,
 Coshee cha beaue cha row ny lheid;
 Lesh feedjyn cooh esht, etc.

So that, as Mr Moore prints (chorus excepted), the spelling, etc, is altered to the extent of a full third of the words. It is hard to say whether it seems greater vanity in him to claim to know better how the Manx of rhymes should be spelt that were taken down more than 130 years ago, than the cleric knew who is said to have taken them down; or to withhold material from a critical reader who would like to judge for himself whether there is anything in the style archaic or not, by his predetermining that there is only bad spelling. The opinionativeness shown, however, in persistently writing the name of the redoubtable warrior-poet "Oshin," despite all England, Ireland, Scotland, and even the cleric himself, is well worthy of being met with an ever-ready *Ugh!*

Sixth.—Let us now look at another matter—the extent to which, as alleged by Mr Moore, old poems of the class of "Fin as Oshin" were known and sung in this island as late as 1762. After quoting some words of Bishop Barrow about the absence of printed and written Manx in his day, Mr Moore writes (*Manx Ballads and Music* p.xv): "It would thus appear that whatever native ballads there were then in existence were handed down solely by oral tradition; and they were probably numerous, as we have evidence not only that as late as 1762 was the ancient ballad of "Fin as Oshin," which is given below, well-known, but that other ballads connected with these heroes, with Cuchullin, with 'Farghail, the man with the terrible eyes'; and with Lhane-jiarg, who had 'the bloody red hand,' were commonly sung." We are referred for evidence of all this to "Letter of Deemster Peter Heywood, *Manx Note Book*, vol. ii. pages 81–82." Here we have further proof of mere assertion resorted to make this Island appear as an area of, so to speak, old bardic literature. Now, in Heywood's letter there is no "evidence" whatever that in this Island either the said "Fin as Oshin" was "well known" or what are called Farg-hail and Lhane-jiarg were

“commonly sung,” Heywood, moreover, not using the word Lhane-jiarg, but Lhaue-jarg, which has the sense of “red hand,” while the Lhane-jiarg, into which it is changed, has no sense at all. Heywood says absolutely not being about the knowledge or singing of any ballad by anybody living at the period when the two clerics are said to have interviewed the “very ancient woman” but what relates to her only; while that she even sung or knew the one ballad ascribed to her was seemingly to the clerics and confessedly to Heywood when told of it, a matter of surprise. The extent, moreover, of her knowledge of any ballads is not alleged as going beyond the one she is said to have recited and about Cuchullin, the Farg-hail and Lhaue-jarg of Heywood’s letter not being mentioned as ballads at all, but simply as the names of characters (both occurring in Macpherson’s *Ossian*, vol. i), and all that is said of the “old Dame” in relation to them is that she perfectly remembered” their *names*.

It is pitiful that a poem, curious in itself and the reputed circumstances of its original discovery, should not, on being printed, have been allowed to appear as it is in the MS, and without a fictitious history attached to it. Truth is worth speaking for against the inventions and conceits of an ambitious sciolism.—Hoping for a little more space in your columns next week, I am, sir, yours truly,

T. TALBOT.

Douglas, March 30th, 1897.

*

STEPHEN MILLER

VIENNA, 2015

