

Manx Notes 322 (2018)

“A FAVOURITE SONG WAS SUNG BY MY FATHER” *

(1892)

“An Old New Year’s Eve Adventure: A Baldwin Reminiscence” was an unsigned piece that appeared in the *Mona’s Herald* for 13 January 1892.¹ It contains mention of “[a] favourite song [...] sung by my father,” the opening lines of which were:

When the thunder boomed loud, and the storm fierce did roar,
And the mountain-like billows assailed the Manx shore,
Then the bold smuggler sailed, with his craft trim and strong,
And the well-laden lugger scudded fiercely along.
The King’s men were foiled when she left Soderick Bay,
With a cask at her main-top in vaunting array, &c, &c.

The writer goes on to mention that:

This song was as long as a clothes line, and being drawled out in somewhat the style of the Old Hundredth Psalm, by the time it was finished the greater part of the company were asleep.

A fuller version of the song is given in Joseph Train’s *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man* (1845),² taken as he acknowledges from *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* compiled by John MacTaggart and published in 1824,³ though it must be added cannot be found there.

The song relates the smuggling activities of one Yawkins, a Dutchman, who owned a lugger named the *Black Prince*, and with which he had many dealings with the Revenue and its cutters, one encounter of which forms the subject of the song. It took place not at Port Soderick but at the Manksman Lake near Kirkcudbright, where Yawkins was surprised there by two cutters:

The dauntless free trader instantly weighed anchor, and bore down between the cutters so close that he tossed his hat on one deck and his wig on the other, hoisted a cask on his maintop to shew his occupation, and bore away under an extraordinary pressure of canvass, without receiving injury.⁴

With a folkloric twist, he was said to owe his good fortune to a pact with the Devil, after whom some said his vessel was named, agreeing to tithe his crew on each

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1 Anon, “An Old New Year’s Eve Adventure: A Baldwin Reminiscence,” *Mona’s Herald* 13 January 1892.

2 Joseph Train, *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*, vol. ii, 2 vols. (Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845) 314, fn. 2.

3 John MacTaggart, *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* (London: Printed for the Author, 1824).

4 Train, *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man* 315.

passage to the clutches of Satan. Train relied on what he describes as an eye-witness and this account is detailed in a letter sent to Sir Walter Scott in 1829.⁵ The Running Trade in the Island was in large part ended with the Revestment Act of 1765, though some activity likely continued on a much reduced scale thereafter. Nevertheless, we have here an account from 1892 that at least one such song relating to the Running Trade was sung long after that activity had ceased.

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REFERENCES

- Anon. "An Old New Year's Eve Adventure: A Baldwin Reminiscence." *Mona's Herald* 13 January 1892: 2c.
- MacTaggart, John. *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia*. London: Printed for the Author, 1824.
- Train, Joseph. *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*. Vol. ii. 2 vols. Douglas: Mary A. Quiggin, 1845.



⁵ "In a letter, dated Castle Douglas, 16th May, 1829, I sent Sir Walter Scott an account of Yawkins, as related to me by an eye-witness, which he has acknowledged with his usual kindness.—See *Waverley Novels*, vol. iv, p. 374." Train, *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man* 315. This letter seemingly has survived and is NLS, MS 874/132–133.