

Manx Notes 323 (2018)

“MISS MAGGIE KELLY’S STORIES”

(1900)

The *Mona’s Herald* in 1900, published a series of three articles under the title of “Fairy Stories and Folk-Lore of Manxland,” which were the *précis* of a lecture recently given in Bath by a Mrs Wheatcroft, “a lady who frequently spends her holidays in the Isle of Man.” Presiding over the evening was Canon Quirk, formerly the incumbent at St Thomas’ in Douglas, and so the source for the *Herald*. Reproduced here is the material recorded from Margaret Kelly (“Miss Maggie Kelly”). She is mentioned in A.W. Moore’s *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896), where she was the source for Elizabeth Graves of a family anecdote of the naval engagement off the Island’s coast between Thurot and Elliot in 1760 (xviii). In the 1891 census she was enumerated as a housekeeper, aged 22, born in Peel, and residing at 10 Mona Street, Peel with Caesar (53), her father (a widower), who worked as a joiner, born in German, and her siblings, Katie (12); Hilda A. (9), both born in Peel (*Census Enumerators’ Book* for Peel 1891, RG 12/4683, fol. 13, sch. 108).

Three stories from Margaret Kelly appear, the second about the visit of William Gladstone to Peel being just that, but the first and third relate to Manx folklore. The first is about how the Kellys of Balladha came to be safe from drowning due to one of her ancestors returning a stranded mermaid to the sea. The third story was later better known by appearing in Sophia Morrison’s *Manx Fairy Tales* (1911), under the title of “The Lost Wife of Ballafletcher.” Whilst Kelly’s name does appear acknowledged in the Preface, she is likely the source of the tale for Morrison.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018

FAIRY STORIES AND FOLK-LORE OF MANXLAND

“Fairy Stories and Folk-Lore of Manxland (i),” *Mona’s Herald*, 2 May 1900, 5e–f.

“—— (ii),” *Mona’s Herald*, 9 May 1900, 5d.

“—— (iii),” *Mona’s Herald*, 16 May 1900, 5a–b.

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MISS MAGGIE KELLY’S STORIES

[5e] An interesting person I met at Peel, was a Miss Margaret Kelly, who had many delightful reminiscences, when you could get her to relate them. This is one of her stories:

“It was many, many a year ago that one of my ancestors, a Kelly, of Balladha, was walking on the shore of his farm, and he spied a beautiful lady reclining upon the beach; he went up to her, but she said: ‘Do not, I pray you, touch me, but, out of the goodness of your heart, get a long pole, and push me back into the sea, for that is my

home.’ He did so, and as she rested on the crest of the wave, said in a loud voice: ‘For your kindness and help, I promise that from this day, henceforth, not one of your blood—not a Kelly of Balladha, shall ever find a watery grave.’ And then she floated away over the waves, playing a golden harp, and from, that day not one of our family has ever been drowned.”

This is her description of the late Mr Gladstone’s visit to Peel: “He walked over the Dalby mountain from Port Erin, and arrived into Peel in his shirt sleeves, with his coat on his arm, accompanied by one of his sons, a clergy-man. They landed into a mean little shop, and bought a pennyworth of biscuits, and a bottle of ‘pop,’ not a very dignified proceeding for such a distinguished man. The men about the Quay said he was very mean and shabby. I rushed over the hill, and was in the Castle when he arrived and heard him speak. He just uttered the sentiments of my heart: ‘Every Manxman and Manxwomen should be proud of their beautiful, ancient cathedral, and especially Peel folk, who should do their utmost to have it restored to its former grandeur.’ I then went over the hill, and met him on the Railway Station, and shook hands with him, and that was the last I saw of the G.O.M.”

Another story of her great-great-grandmother is rather interesting: “There was great rejoicing in Ballaleece when a son and heir was born, but their joy was soon turned into mourning, for Mistress Leece had vanished out of her bed, and could not be found. The house was searched from attic to basement, high and low, stables and barns, but no Mistress Leece could be found; so they knew she had been ‘tuk’ with the fairies, and Leece mourned bitterly. The boy grew apace, and the years went on, and Leece took unto himself another wife. One night, he was standing thinking of his fairy bride, when suddenly she appeared, and said: ‘For all the love you ever bore me, get me away from these tormentors, as my life is miserable, and I promise never to disturb your present happiness.’ So he promised. She said: ‘Seven nights from now I will visit this place. Get the barn swept clean; not a straw must be left in it, and the two great winnowing doors must be left open, and we’ll all ride through. I shall be the thirteenth rider, and pull me off my horse. Remember, you must not tell a soul, or I shall be lost!’ The days went on, and there was never such a cleaning and scrubbing of a barn before or since, and everybody wondered what was going to happen. The night arrived, and Leece was on the watch. He heard the distant bark of dogs, cracking of whips, and the thundering of the horses’ hoofs on the hard ground. Nearer and nearer they came; then into the barn came dogs, horses, and their merry, merry riders. Now for the thirteenth! Leece was ready with outstretched arms. On her horse, sat his lovely young bride of long ago, as young as lovely as ever. He shouted: ‘At last, Ellen! At last!’ ‘I am undone, and lost for ever,’ she cried. ‘Look under the sieve, and listen. You are the last Leece of Ballaleece—no son, no Leece, shall ever inherit a foot of it.’ With that she rode away. He had told his wife, who, not wanting a younger bride in her place, put some straw under the sieve.” Moral: Never tell your wife.

And the years went by, and young Leece grew strong and handsome. He went to the shoemaker's one day, and finding them at dinner, he proceeded to the garden until the meal was over. As he did not return, the shoemaker went out to look for him, and found the last of the Leeces stretched dead upon the garden walk—took by the fairies! (I have given this story in Miss Kelly's own [5f] words, and she firmly believes in the truth, of it.)

“Fairy Stories and Folk-Lore of Manxland (i),” *Mona's Herald*, 2 May 1900, 5e–f.

