

Manx Notes 338 (2018)

“RE-APPEARANCE OF A MANX SPRITE”

(1847)

Not many nights since a farmer residing on the Castletown road, less than two miles from Douglas, had a field of choice potatoes dug up and carried off by some unknown agency: or at least one half of his crop was thus abstracted. The happening of this extraordinary event has given rise to a superstitious opinion in the neighbourhood, but a little amusing. Now it must be understood that the folks of the neighbourhood aforesaid are a very *christian* people, and therefore they will not steal potatoes, and therefore the crop must have been carried off by supernatural hands; and therefore it was done by the *Phynnodderee!* “Who, or what is the *Phynnodderee?*” the uninitiated reader will inquire. We will endeavour to tell them. This noted personage having been invisible for some time, and now re-appearing to do the above stated mischief, it may not be out of place to state his pedigree, and to recount some of his former freaks. The *Phynnodderee*, then, is a fallen fairy, who having outgrown the orthodox size of the fraternity of fairies, and committed some aggressions on the rights of the fairy commonwealth, was for that cause banished from fairy-land by the elfin-king. Or, according to other veracious historians, this overgrown fairy paid his addresses to a pretty Manx maid, who lived in a bower beneath the blue tree of Glentrammon; and for her sake having deserted the fairy court during the *re-hollys vooar yn ouyr*, or harvest moon, he was doomed to remain in the Isle of Man till the end of time, transferred into a wild satyr-like figure, covered with long shaggy hair, like a he-goat, and was thence called the *Phynnodderee*, or hairy one. Of this Manx *brownie* the poet might well say—

“His was the wizard hand that loll’d
At midnight’s witching hour,
That gather’d the sheep from the coming storm
Ere the shepherd saw it lour;
Yet asked no fee, save a scatter’d sheaf
From the peasant’s garner’d hoard,
Or cream-bowl pressed by a virgin-lip
To be left on the household hoard.”

This is the good quality of the sprite’s character, but like the big Buggane, and all other finite creatures, the *Phynnodderee* had a spice of mischief in him. The following is an instance of it. A farmer having expressed his displeasure with the sprite for not having his grass cut close enough to the ground, the hairy one in the following year allowed the farmer to cut the grass himself, but went after him stubbing up the roots so fast, that it was with difficulty the farmer escaped having his legs cut off by the angry sprite. For several years afterwards no person could be found to mow the meadow until a fearless soldier undertook the task. He commenced in the centre of

the field, and by cutting round, as if on the edge of a circle, keeping one eye on the progress of the *yiarn foldyragh* or Manx scythe, while the other

“Was turned round with prudent care,

Lest *Phynnodderee* caught him unaware,”

he succeeded in finishing his task unmolested. This field, hard by the ruins of old St Trinian, is from the above related circumstance called *yn lheanea rhunt*, or the round meadow, to the present day. If time would permit, we might relate many more amusing, and of course well authenticated anecdotes of this Manx satyr; but we have only space to add, that though immortal himself, he could not bestow immortality on his beloved Manx maid. She went the way of all the earth, and her bones rest in hope under the identical blue tree where her bower had stood. And from the day of her death hitherto, the bereft *Phynnodderee* has been a melancholy and disconsolate wight, more bent on mischief than formerly, as if he owed the earth a spite for robbing him of his love: and now

“You may hear his voice on the desert hill

When the mountain winds have power;

’Tis a wild lament for his buried love.

And his long-lost fairy bower.”

The question still returns upon us, whether in fact this goblin *hooked* the farmer’s potatoes as above related? Charity in the pious professions of the neighbourhood would go a great way to establish the affirmative; but certainly one consideration connected with this inquiry is worth looking at. Has it ever been established by the learned in demonology, or the curious in Manx *phynnoddereeology*, that these supernatural people feed on potatoes? Because, it is hardly to be supposed that the vegetables would have been carried off, even though they might have been dug up in mischief by the goblin, unless *murphies* are a favourite dish with these ethereal people. We insist upon it, this matter ought to be inquired into by the Archæological Society, and a report made thereon, so that farmers may know in future when their *spuds* shall be abstracted, whether to search in Manx cottages for them, or charge them to the account of the *Phynnodderee*.

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