

Manx Notes 363 (2019)

“STORIES TOLD TO THE WRITER”

A. W. MOORE

THE FOLK-LORE OF THE ISLE OF MAN

(1891)

A.W Moore's *The Folk-lore of the Isle of Man* (Douglas & London: David and Son & David Nutt, 1891) was a work of compilation and included little orally-collected folklore. What was used was marked off by Moore in the body of the work: "Stories told to the writer, which have not been committed to writing by the teller, are marked Oral." Reproduced here is that material.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019

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CHAPTER III, FAIRIES AND FAMILIAR SPIRITS

I. THE FAIRY SADDLE

[38] Once upon a time an old Vicar of Braddan was very much troubled by having his horse taken out of the field during the [39] night, and finding him in the morning sweating all over, and as much exhausted as if he had been furiously ridden many miles. In spite of all enquiries, he could never learn who had done this. But one morning, just at day-break, as he was returning home from the bedside of one of his sick parishioners, to whom he had been administering the Sacrament, he observed, just as he was passing his field, a little man in a green jacket, and carrying a riding whip in his hand, in the act of turning his horse loose into the field. On this little individual turning round, he saw the Vicar standing by the gate, on which he immediately vanished, and the saddle, which he had placed at the side of the fence was turned into stone in the shape of a saddle. It has remained there ever since, and so the road which passes this point is called "The Saddle-road" to this day. It is almost needless to state that the old Vicar's horse was never molested again.

2. THE UNFORTUNATE FIDDLER

[41] There are many stories of fairy music, of even later date than this. The most definite of these is to the effect that the music of the famous song called The Bollan Bane, or "The White Herb," a plant known to the Fairy Doctors, and of great healing virtues, was taken from a tune sung by the Fairies one evening on the mountains, which was heard by a belated wanderer, some fifty years ago.

3. FAIRY DOGS

[49] Another story about Fairy Dogs was related by an old man in 1874, who said that when a lad, he and a companion were travelling one fine moonlight night in the East Baldwin Valley, and hearing something in a gill (small glen) they stopped, and on looking about saw little creatures, like small dogs with red caps, running away.

CHAPTER IV, HOBGOBLINS, MONSTERS, GIANTS, MERMAIDS, APPARITIONS

4. THE BUGGANE OF SLIEAU WHALLIAN

[61] Another Buggane is said to haunt the precipitous mountain of Slieau whallian, whence his screams are sometimes heard; but a third fiend, of similar origin, who was formerly supposed to frequent the Gob-ny-scuit, "mouth of the spout," a small waterfall, in the Parish of Maughold, has disappeared. Terrible wailings were heard at times from this unfortunate spirit. Even the great fairy doctor of Ballawhane (Teare) had failed to lay it. But about 50 years ago a Manxman of a scientific and inquiring mind noticed on examining the rock, over which the water fell, that these peculiar noises proceeded from it only when the wind was blowing from a certain point. Further examination showed a narrow cleft in the rock below the fall through which the wind blew and caused the sound. Thus was the Buggane disposed of.

5. THE THREE-HEADED GIANT

[64] Once upon a time there landed at The Lhane a number of Danes, who took possession of that part of the Island. Amongst them was a huge monster of a man with three heads, who officiated as their parson, and who was promptly appointed by them to the Rectory of Andreas, which chanced to be vacant at that time. He soon began to extort all he could from the people, making his bands for the tithe corn three times larger [65] than was customary, and taking the "double penny" for everything. For a long time he went on in this fashion, till they got used to it, and, consequently, did not grumble so much as at first. Indeed, they rather began to like him, as he often gave them a hand at busy times, when the men were for the most part away at the fishing, and was always ready to do them a good turn. So things went on till his death, when, in accordance with his wish, he was carried to the top of Karrin, and buried there under a big cairn. A long time after this, a man who had heard about this three-headed creature from the old people, and who was consumed with a desire to see him, began to open his grave. He had not dug very far, however, when he was seized with a great pain in his back, which compelled him to leave off. He managed to get home, but in three days he was dead. Since then no one has ventured to disturb the giant's remains. They say that since the days of the giant the parson of Andreas has always had three times more pay than the rest.

6. JACK THE GIANT KILLER

[65] The title at least of the following is clearly derived from the well known English tale: There was once a poor woman who lived in a secluded glen on the eastern side of Slieau-ny-Farrane. Her husband was a fisherman, who was frequently absent from home for long periods. The wife had, consequently, not only to attend to domestic matters, but to see after the children as well, so you may be sure the boys were left to do much as they pleased. The eldest of them, Juan, was growing into a stout lad, who was always trying to do some great feat or other. Many were the battles that he and the old gander had, to see who should be the master. As he grew bigger he extended his attacks to the cattle, so that when they saw him coming they endeavoured to get out of the way of the big stick he always carried with him. In vain did his father scold him, when he came home from the fishing on a Saturday night, for he only became the more daring. At last he began to use his stick on all, whether man or beast, that he met in those parts, and he liecame such a terror that they gave him the name of Jack the Giant Killer. His great strength became so notorious that many came from Laxey side to try conclusions with him, but they were always worsted. He kept his old mother well supplied with purrs, as they called the wild swine that were formerly found in the mountains. Now, there was an old boar purr called the Purr Mooar, that had long been a terror to the district, so much so that it was not considered safe for any one to go alone over the Rheast, and through Druidale. Even the [66] shepherds with their dogs were unwilling to face him. This purr Jack determined to kill, so he armed himself with his thickest stick, and set out in search of him. After travelling a considerable distance, he made his way down to a deep glen, through which the water was tumbling amongst the rocks below the Crammag, where he discovered the boar, it being a sultry day, luxuriating in the water. No sooner did he see Jack than he raised himself up, and, with a terrible roar, rushed out upon him. Jack, nothing daunted, received him with a severe blow upon the fore legs, which caused him to roll over. Getting up again, he rushed once more at Jack, who belaboured him with many a heavy blow, but unfortunately the boar managed to inflict a deep wound in Jack's thigh, which laid it open to the bone. Still the conflict went on till both were well-nigh exhausted and faint from loss of blood, till at last Jack with one terrible blow shattered the boar's head, and laid him dead at his feet. It was with great difficulty that he managed to crawl home, and it was long before his wounds, which were said to be of a poisonous nature, healed, and, even when they had healed, he was obliged to go about with a crutch for the rest of his life. Thus was the neighbourhood rid of two troubles—Jack and the Purr Mooar—for the one was now harmless and the other dead. This feat was commemorated in the saying, "*Jack the Giant Killer, varr a vuc (ie, killed a pig) in the river.*"

7. THE GLENCRUTCHERY WELL

[90] A Story is told of a girl who was going to the Glencrutchery well for water, and met an old man, who had the reputation of being a sorcerer,¹ on her way. He asked her where she was gomg. "Going to your well for water," she said. "Is there no water in your well?" said he. She replied that there was, but that her mistress had sent her to get water from his well. He then gave her some money, and told her to take the water out of their own well. The girl took the money, which confirmed the charm, and went to the fair, which was going on that day, after fetching the water home. When she returned home in the evening her mistress asked her where she had got the water, as she had been churning all day without getting any butter.

¹ There seems to be practically no distinction between Sorcery, when deprived of the prophetic element, and Witchcraft.

8. BUTTER BEWITCHED

[91] One day a woman who was a reputed Witch, called at the door of a neighbouring farm-house when churning was going on, and asked the dairymaid for some buttermilk. Not having any, she refused and went on churning; but from that moment it was of no avail, as the butter refused to come, and she got none at all, while the Witch, who kept only one cow, took sixteen pounds of butter to sell, the produce of her dairy, which was a common event with her when the farmers near her were unsuccessful.

9. WITCH IN THE SHAPE OF A HARE (I)

[95] A hare, or rather a witch in the shape of a hare, was crossing a field and stood still to stare at a team of horses employed in ploughing, when, to the horror of the ploughman, they instantly dropped dead on the ground. Fortunately, however, he retained his presence of mind, and, remembering that what had occurred was doubtless the result of the "Evil Eye," he collected some of the dust from where the hare had stood and threw it over the horses, who were at once restored to life.

10. BLOOD STOPPED BY CHARMING

[96] A man near Laxey had the power of being able to stop any effusion of blood by a charm he possessed. On one occasion he was taunted by an unbeliever with being unable to stop the bleeding of a pig which he was about to kill. The moment the creature's throat was cut, the incantation was pronounced; but the power of the charmer was gone from henceforth.

CHAPTER VI, CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS CONNECTED WITH THE SEASONS

II. WITCH IN THE SHAPE OF A HARE (2)

[148] A suspected witch was successfully convicted in the parish of Andreas by a sportsman, who, seeing a hare crossing a field, fired and wounded it, and, when getting over a hedge to secure his prey, he found that he had shot an old woman, who was a reputed Witch.

