

Manx Notes 380 (2019)

FAIRY LEGENDS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN

(2)

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LEAVING FOOD FOR THE FAIRIES

At every baking, and every churning, a bit of dough, and a bit of butter, is stuck upon the wall, *for the little folks*. This custom still prevails very much amongst the country folks; especially up in the mountains.

Richard Townley, *A Journal kept in the Isle of Man*. Vol. i. 2 vols. (Whitehaven: Printed by J. Ware and Son, 1791) 208, fn. [1].

(2)

ST JOHN'S WORT AND THE FAIRY HORSE

Of the St John's-wort the following little notice has reached me from the Isle of Man. Peasants there say (or did say, before the incursion of visitors drove away all the individuality of the place) that, if you tread on the St John's-wort after sunset, a fairy horse will rise from the earth and carry you about all night, leaving you in the morning wherever you may chance to be at sunrise. [From "Henry Crombie, Esq. Woodville House, Isle of Man" (xiii).]

William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders. A New Edition with Many Additional Notes* (London: W. Stachell, Peyton and Co., for The Folk-Lore Society, 1879) 227.

(3)

MEETING THE FAIRIES AT NIGHT

An old man living at present in the parish of Malew, who formerly was a sailor, told me that as he was returning from his vessel which was lying in Derbyhaven Bay, he left the highroad to make his journey shorter, and proceeded across the fields. It was nearly midnight—the time when the ghosts are supposed to make their appearance—but the night was not at all dark. When he came to a certain place he saw seated on a gate, but a few yards from him, two girls, whom he very well knew. Upon remarking to them how astonished he was at seeing them out at such a late hour, they vanished; and although he searched the place very carefully, he could find no traces of them. He firmly believes to this day that they were two fairies.

Pseud [signed as “Manxman”]. “Manx Superstitions.” *The Barrovian* 3 (1880): 113–14.

(4)

THE GRATEFUL MERMAID AND THE KELLYS OF BALLADHA

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.

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

(5)

THE LOST WIFE OF BALLALEECE

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 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.

(6)

FAIRY WOMEN SEEN AT NIGHT DRESSED IN YELLOW

As to fairies, he believed they existed, and had seen them many a time—one particular occasion being at Glen Cam, on the Kirk Michael road, when he and another saw two damsels attired in bright yellow bedgowns, frisking in the moonlight on the banks of the Glen Cam streamlet.

“What Mr Tho[ma]s Crellin Remembers.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 March 1901: 3a–b, see 2a–3b.

(7)

STEALING SHIRTS FROM THE FAIRIES BRINGS HARM

A Peel man passing a thorn hedge at Greeba saw thereon one night a fine “wash” displayed, including a number of little shirts, and having a big family at home took some of the shirts with him. After he was home a pain seized him in the arm which he had used to “annex” the shirts, and a friend advised him to put them back, so as to drive away the pain. After doing so the pain disappeared.

“What Mr Tho[ma]s Crellin Remembers.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 2 March 1901: 3a–b, see 3b.

(8)

THE FAIRIES AND BONNAG

Old Manx people, when baking *bonnag*, used to make criss-cross marks on top of the loaves with a knife. My mother says that they did this because they believed that once the completed bread had been marked by steel or iron the fairies could not harm it or take the good out of it, as they might otherwise do.

Leighton Stowell, "Manx Notes and Queries: A Couple of Folklore Fragments." *Mona's Herald* 14 May 1930: 3e.

(9)

THE FAIRY CHANGLING

We spent a holiday in the south of the island in 1920, and I found amongst the books owned by the lady of the house where we stayed, an account of the myths, legends, and superstitions of the island. Being interested in these things, I borrowed the book and jokingly asked the owner on returning on it if she had ever seen a fairy. To my surprise she seriously replied, "They do live around about, but I have never seen one." Then she told me (to convince me she was right) how, as a child, she used to fetch milk and butter from a farm where lived a grown up girl who was believed to be fairy changeling. This girl could neither walk nor talk, but sat in a chair all day and was delighted whenever the village children visiting the farm would let her handle their dolls and other toys. She died at the age of twenty.

Our landlady's mother had told her that the farmer's wife, when haymaking, had taken her baby to the field and left it asleep among the hay. The fairies had come and taken the human baby away and left the changeling in its place, the changeling grew but was an imbecile. I wanted to ask dozens of questions when I realised Mrs ——— was really serious and believed the tale she told, but she suddenly grew shy (or perhaps concerned that she had discussed the fairies at all). She remembered a task in the kitchen and left me; and though I tried to get her to converse again on the subject I never succeeded.

Elizabeth Stubbs, "Manannan: The Fairy Lore of the Isle of Man," *Oldham Chronicle* 10 September 1932: 5f–g.

(10)

THE FAIRY CHANGLING

Once a mother went to the well for water, leaving the baby in the cradle. When she came back, it had been changed for a fairy child. Adopting the traditional method in such cases, she kept away from the cradle and let the child cry away. Finding that their babe was neglected, the fairies returned and took it away, and brought the proper child back.

"In Romantic Agneash," *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, 10 June 1939, 19c.

THE FAIRIES STEAL THE BABY FROM GLENDRINK

At Glendrink, the cradle was left vacant, and the baby was found half a mile away, none the worse.

“In Romantic Agneash,” *Isle of Man Weekly Times*, 10 June 1939, 19c.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2019

