

# Manx Notes 425 (2020)

WILLIAM MARTIN  
“IN THE ISLE OF MAN”  
([1887])

[186] I gathered the following folklore during a holiday in the Isle of Man in the summer of 1887. It has not, I believe, appeared in print before, except in a contribution of my own to the *Brighton Herald* 31st December, 1887.

One evening during the summer months of 1884, the driver of the mail-cart from one of the towns in the island started on his rounds to collect the mail-bags from the surrounding district in the usual manner. He was due at his destination about half-past one o'clock in the morning, but did not arrive until nearly half-past five, when he appeared dreadfully scared and agitated. Being asked to account for his delay, he solemnly related that when about six miles from home he was beset by a troop of fairies, all of whom were particularly well-dressed in red suits and provided with lanterns. They stopped his horse, threw the mail-bags into the road, and danced around them in the well-known manner usual with fairies. The poor postman struggled with them in vain. No sooner did he succeed in replacing a bag than it was again immediately thrown out. This continued until the appearance of daylight, when the fairies apparently thought it was time for them to take their departure, which they eventually did, leaving the postman in a highly nervous and exhausted state. After resting a short time to collect his scattered wits, he succeeded in replacing the mails in his cart, and reached the end of his journey without further adventures. When I made acquaintance with him some little time afterwards, he did not strike me as a person likely to fall a victim to his own fertile imagination. As for doubts with respect to his condition at the time, it can only be said that he had left the post office that night in his usual condition of sobriety, and did not appear the worse for drink when he returned. Moreover, his character for sobriety and honesty was of many years' standing.

In another part of the island I was told the following story by an old inhabitant, who stated that he knew the parties to whom it occurred and that he received the account directly from their lips. Not far from Port Erin, a village on the south-west coast, a mountain called Cronk-ny-Irey-Lhaa, 1449 feet in height, slopes steeply to the sea. On the seaward side a chapel and cemetery are situated, both of which have now fallen into disuse. Some years back, as a fishing party were sailing one night near [187] this spot, they were startled and alarmed by hearing violent and distracting cries as of someone in great distress. This was told to others of their companions on arriving at home. They, with natural curiosity, determined to sail near the same spot, and if possible discover the cause of the sounds. They succeeded in hearing them, but failed to decide their origin. One night, however, one of the party, believing that they were uttered by the perturbed spirit of someone who had died without baptism,

shouted in reply, “My she lhiannoo mac oo ta mee dy enmys oo Juan; as my she inneen oo ta mee dy enmys oo Junay.” (‘If thou art a boy child, I name thee John; if thou art a girl, I name thee Judith.’) The cries were never heard again.

Not so very long ago, so other informants told me, a female spirit, commonly known as a *lanonshaa*, frequented the island. The *lanonshaa* seems to have been a kind of unbidden familiar spirit, for it permanently attached itself to its victim, and nothing could be done to get rid of the unwelcome companion. In one case it attached itself to a big strong burly man, who was compelled to share his food with his *lanonshaa*. At other times he would place behind him the vessel from which he was about to drink, in order to satisfy its thirst. He was often seen when on horseback laughing immoderately, presumably with his ghostly companion, and throwing his hat into the air to catch it again. On some occasions he was heard carrying on conversations, seemingly with nobody. One night after he had retired to rest a party of curious boys gathered round his bedroom to catch, if possible, some portion of his solitary conversation. In this purpose, however, they were defeated, for no sooner had they got into position than the spirit informed its master, saying in Manx, “They are listening now.” “Listening, are they?” replied he. “I will give them listening.” Upon this he jumped from his bed and snatched up a stick to inflict summary chastisement upon the intruders, but the boys had fled before he could get near them. When these spirits are visible it is said that they appear as women dressed in white.

William Martin, “[Collectanea] Goblins: iii. In the Isle of Man,” *Folk-Lore* xiii (1902), 186–87.

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The British Newspaper Archive does not contain the *Brighton Herald* for the year in question, there being a gap between 1881 and 1889 in its holdings, so the original now is gone from sight and but for its reproduction in *Folk-Lore* for 1902, this piece would be lost. And then, even if the *Brighton Herald* for 1887 was still in existence, it was only by its reprinting in such a journal as *Folk-Lore* that the piece could ever have come to light.

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