

# Manx Notes 427 (2020)

AGNES HERBERT  
THE ISLE OF MAN  
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## CHAPTER XI CUSTOMS PAST AND PRESENT

Nice customs curt'sy to great Kings.  
*Henry V.*

Stick to your journal course: the breach of custom  
Is breach of all.  
*Cymbeline.*

[195] It seems to me that in essaying a chapter on a few of the customs, past and present, the dress of the old-time Manx peasantry would make a good beginning. Being a woman, the sartorial aspect of anything naturally appeals to my mind. It *is place aux robes* with me every time. I can remember two decades ago going so very often to watch the local *fiddler*, weaving the undyed fleece, which was *keeir* (dark brown) of the *loghtan* (native sheep) into woollen cloth. He lived in Surby, near the little chapel, and manoeuvred his primitive loom in a tiny thatched cottage, working away, early and late, through the year. Not many, if any, home weavers are to be found in the island to-day, but in bygone times the weaver was a concomitant of every village. The dress of Manx villagers was invariably of this *kialter*, or woollen homespun, fashioned into trousers, coat, and waistcoat for a man, and into a baggy petticoat, called *oanrey*, [196] dyed red or blue, for a woman. A home-spun linen jacket forerunner perhaps of the ubiquitous blouse of to-day went with the useful skirt. Footgear also was home-manufactured. Waldron thus describes the primitive covering which did duty as a shoe: "Small pieces of cow's or horse's hide at the bottom of their feet, tyed on with pack thread, which they call carranes."

Stockings without feet, *oashyr-voynee* and *oashyr-slobbagh*, must have added to the already overwhelming discomfort of things. *Oashyr-voynee* was just a stocking leg, with a bit of twine at each side to fasten beneath the foot, and *oashyr-slobbagh* was extravagantly lavish in a sort of continuation flap which covered the instep, and looped round the big toe!

Manxmen affected a cap arrangement, and the women wore sun-bonnets or mob caps. Early in the nineteenth century buckled shoes and knee breeches came to the isle—brought across, doubtless, by some local Beau Brummell and also a fearsome tall hat, perpetrated by home milliners, made from rabbit skins. One representative

old Manxman in Port Erin wore this weird headgear, summer and winter, up to fifteen years ago. As children we used to call him “Old rabbit-skin hat.” He seemed a mysterious relic of the past to us, a something to be greatly feared.

The 26th December, St Stephen’s Day, *Laa’l Steaoin* in Manx, is the date set apart for the celebration of one of the strangest rites in Manx history. It has been the custom from the recesses of remote times to “Hunt the Wren,” a practice not, as is well-known, [197] entirely insular. The wren, held sacred through all the rest of the year, was hunted from early dawn of Laa’l Steaoin by various parties of boys armed with sticks and stones, who chased and harried the little brown birds until at last each band of lads secured a piteous feathered corpse, which was immediately placed amidst a mass of evergreens and gay flaunting ribbons wreathed about a pole, and carried from house to house, the while the “wren boys” chanted in rough and ready fashion these verses, set to the old Manx air which follows. The music was given by Barrow in his *Mona Melodies*, in 1820, and has been used in Man as the sacrificial song for generations.

#### HUNTING THE WREN

We’ll away to the woods, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 We’ll away to the woods, says Richard to Robin;  
 We’ll away to the woods, says Jack of the Land;  
 We’ll away to the woods, says every one.  
 What shall we do there? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 What shall we do there? says Richard to Robin;  
 What shall we do there? says Jack of the Land;  
 What shall we do there? says every one.

The following lines, which for brevity’s sake are not given in full, are chanted the usual four times over, in the wearisome repetition of the previous verses.

We will hunt the wren, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Where is he, where is he? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 In yonder green bush, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 I see him, I see him, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 [198] How shall we get him down? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 With sticks and stones, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He is dead, he is dead, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 How shall we get him home, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 We’ll hire a cart, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Whose cart shall we hire? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Johnny Bill Fell’s, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Who will stand driver? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Filley the Tweet, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He’s home, he’s home, says Robin to Bobbin;

How shall we get him boiled? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 In the brewery pan, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 How shall we get him in? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 With iron bars and a rope, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He's in, he's in, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He is boiled, he is boiled, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 How shall we get him out? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 With a long pitchfork, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He is out, he is out, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 Who's to dine at dinner? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The King and the Queen, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 How shall we get him eat? says Robin to Bobbin;  
 With knives and forks, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 He is eat, he is eat, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The eyes for the blind, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The legs for the lame, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The pluck for the poor, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The bones for the dogs, says Robin to Bobbin;  
 The wren, the wren, the king of all birds;  
 We have caught St Stephen's Day, in the furze;  
 Although he is little, his family's great;  
 I pray you, good dame, do give us a treat.

As the Manx boys invariably pronounce the last word "trate," the assonance is preserved. Wren also they get to "wran."

[199]

Hunt the Wren

[reproduction of the tune from *Manx Ballads and Music* (1896)]

[200] "If they can catch and kill a poor wren before sunrise," writes Colonel Townley in 1789, "they firmly believe it ensures a good herring fishery," and all the historians appear to agree that the practice had this central idea as its objective. At every house visited a feather would be left for luck, in return, of course, for largesse; and this feather was considered an effective security. Shipwreck, witchcraft, evil-eye, and the like had no fears for the carrier of the wren's feather. In the dim twilight hours it was the old custom to bury the piteous little plucked body of the tiny bird in a corner of consecrated ground, amid a scene of solemn lamentation, which was immediately followed by an orgy of games and general rejoicings.

For many years now the whole performance has been enacted in wrenless fashion—"Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark. I have only once ever seen a wren suspended from the gay sad pole, and that twenty years ago. The play-acting "Hunt the Wren" parties still go about the villages of the island; but in ever-lessening numbers, haphazard, like the May Queen nuisances in some parts of England, and

signs are not wanting that the whole ancient practice is falling into desuetude. Nowadays we are all too clever to believe in the efficacy of a wren's feather as a protection against anything. The pendulum has swung to the philosophical "Kismet"; to the cynical "If you must be shipwrecked you must, and there's an end o't."

The old, old story of the wren conquering the [201] eagle in open flight, and thus obtaining sovereignty of all the birds, has been told in the Manx to the children for many ages. The Manx mothers of olden days used to say that the great competition was held in Mona, and nowhere else at all. Representatives of the feathered tribe came from every land, and all the betting was on the champion of the eagle species. He never doubted, of course, but that he could fly the highest, and sailed up and up to the sun, to the gate of Heaven itself. Then, completely tired, unable to ascend another inch, the splendid bird triumphantly proclaimed himself king over every winged creature. Suddenly a little humble wren, concealed 'neath the great feathers of the lordly eagle, sped from the soft hiding place, higher and higher, farther than sight could follow. Chirruping loudly, the small brown bird cried out that he and he alone was the monarch of the air.

The Manx do not acknowledge, as so many nations do, the kingly dignity of the wren in the name they give him. We do not even know the exact meaning of his Manx title, "*Dreain*," though in Kelly's Dictionary the derivation is suggested as *Druai-een*, "The Druid's bird."

Another prevalent custom in Man was memorized just before Christmas, when the quaint mummers, called locally the "White Boys," used to come round and "mum" energetically, and I am told that this performance, which has for its *raison d'être* the glorification of St George of England, still continues in some parts of the island. The lads at Port Erin never [202] could manage the pronunciation of the letter "w," and called themselves in consequence the "Quite Boys." How we children revelled in their entertainment! The greatest actor in all the world could not have charmed us half so much as the primitive histrionics of our gardener's boy, playing the King of Egypt, demanding in resonant tones, overlaid with a strong Manx accent, "O dochter, dochter, is there a dochter to be foun'? Who can cure Saint Gurge of his deep and deadly woun'?"

"Wound" pronounced to rhyme with "found." The dramatis persona of the tragicomedy were decked out very much after the haphazard fashion of the "Wren Boys," only with more dabs of white about them. White cardboard hats, strangely reminiscent of a mere common or garden bandbox, crowded with scraps of ribbon and holly leaves, crowned the energetic heads. Paste-board swords, if nothing more stalwart was forthcoming, clanked (of course, you had to pretend a lot about the clank) against the agile white-trousered legs, and spotless shirts, adorned with odds and ends of Christmas decoration variety, completed the taking outfit. Only one of the players departed from the general scheme, and he wore unrelieved black, raven-

like and dolorous, even to face and hands. He was the “dochter,” the invaluable Æsculapius who was called in to “cure St Gurge of his deep and deadly woun’.

Very sheepishly the “White Boys” trailed into the big kitchen, which had been cleared for the occasion, and the entertainment commenced. First of all, [203] “Sambo” weighed in with explanatory prologue. No relation to the dusky physician, he is called “Sambo” just to make things more difficult. He played comic relief, laugh-maker, jester, Touchstone to the whole affair, which was not lengthy, and ended in a complete triumph of St George over all enemies. Then solemnly the “White Boys” in Rushen, whatever they did elsewhere, walked, with martial tread and slow, round and round the room singing at the top of their lungs: “God bless the master of this house, likewise the mistress too, and all the little childer-en that round the table go, that round the table go.”

Supper followed, and after a more lasting reward the well-graced players went off to enact St George for someone else.

All Hallow’s Eve, *Oie houiney* as the Manx call it, was the day for another visitation from another company of mummers, this time in *Hog-annaa*, a short piece of elusive mysterious rhyming. Again our gardener’s boy—one man in his time plays many parts carrying a wand overbalanced by a weighty turnip at the tip, led the company, who sang, or, more properly speaking, shouted, this extraordinary doggerel, the meaning of which we, as children, never even grasped by the outside edge:

“*Hog-anna*—This is old Hollantide night,” Edward, the deputy gardener, asserted in strident tones, dwelling unmercifully on the double “a.”

“*Trolla-laa*—The moon shines fair and bright,” the junior cobbler of the village returned, in non-contradictory spirit. [204]

“*Hog-annaa*—I went to the well,

*Trolla-laa*—And drank my fill;

*Hog-annaa*—On my way back,

*Trolla-laa*—I met a witch-cat;

*Hog-annaa*—The cat began to grin,

*Trolla-laa*—And I began to run;

*Hog-annaa*—Where did you run to?

*Trolla-laa*—I ran to Scotland.

*Hog-annaa*—What were they doing there?

*Trolla-laa*—Baking bannocks and roasting collops.

*Hog-annaa*—*Trolla-laa!* If you are going to give us anything, give it us soon, Or we’ll be away by the light of the moon—*Hog-annaa!*”

This strange archaic custom is now almost, if not quite, dead in the island. Of myself, I cannot pretend to explain its meaning, if it has any, or its significance. I always just accepted it as one of the strangely fascinating delights of being a child in Manxland. At one time the whole thing was said in the native tongue.

Our greatest living authority on the history and customs of the Isle of Man, Mr A.W. Moore, explains *Hog-annaa* thus: “The words of the chorus *Hog-annaa, trollalaa*, are probably identical with *Hog-manaye, trollalay*, the words of a Scotch song which is sung on New Year’s Eve. In France, too, there is a similar custom and word, as “*En basse Normandie les pauvres le dernier jour en demandant l’aumosne, disent Hoguinanno.*” As to the meaning of this word *Hog-annaa*, [205] *Hogmanaye*, or *Hoguinanno*, we may venture to suggest that, supposing the Scotch form to be the most accurate, both it and *trollalay* are of Scandinavian origin, and refer to the fairies and the trolls. We know that on this night it was considered necessary to propitiate the dwellers in fairyland, who, with the Phynnoderees, witches, and spirits of all kinds, were abroad and especially powerful. We may, therefore, translate *Hog-manaye* into *Hogga-man-ey* “mound-men (for) ever,” the fairies being considered as dwellers in the *hows* (or *tumuli*, or green mounds)—and *trollalay* into *trolla-a-la*, “trolls into the surf.” The fairies, who were considered the most powerful of these creatures, being thus propitiated, would then protect their suppliants against the reSt”

Christmas Eve in Mona sees everyone attending the Oiel Verrey service in the nearest parish church. All over the island this feast of carol-singing is celebrated every year. From time immemorial *Oie’l Verrey* has been kept. These entertainments—for such, indeed, they were in olden times—exploited the Manx “carvals,” descriptive chants, which went on and on into the wee sma’ hours, wearing out the parson, who left early. Everyone who attended brought a candle, so that the lighting arrangements were not dimly religious, but glaringly irrelevant. Anyone who liked could sing a *carval*, of home manufacture or otherwise, and the service ended in an orgy of peathrowing and sounds of revelry by night. I cannot, of course, recall the real uncorrupted variety of Oie’l Verrey, the wild, riotous carval singing of long ago. The custom has [206] resolved itself of late years into orderly carol singing by the choir and congregation. It is still a great festivity. Not for worlds would I, in the days of my youth, have missed the universal Christmas appeal for eventful deliverance—the stirring “No-hell! No-hell!” an unconscious paraphrase of the gracious Noël into which everyone tumbled. For my own part I always thought it was “No-hell!”

In 1855 George Borrow spent some time in wandering about the Isle of Man, and, being acquainted with Scotch Gaelic, together with a smattering of Manx, he had little difficulty in making himself understood by the people. Winning the confidence of the rough peasants of the time, he was shown much of the representative literature, examples of the *carvals*—the word is, of course, a corruption of carol—which were composed, he tells us, for recitation in the churches, by people who thought themselves endowed with the poetic gift. The sacred manuscripts were kept in the archives of the poet’s family, and some of the grimy, smoky, time-stained booklets trace back through the years to distant ages.

A collection of Manx carvals has been published. They are fascinating in their weirdness, and deal with a wide range of biblical subjects. One of the most interesting is the carval of the Evil Women, a cynical record of all the ill-conditioned feminines who darken the pages of the Bible. This quaint bit of literature is said to be the swan song of a redoubtable smuggler who lived in the eighteenth century.

The old-time love of carval singing and carval manufacture [207] in Man may be ascribed, I think, to the influence of the Franciscans of the thirteenth century, a small number of whom established themselves at Bimaken in Arbory. The followers of St Francis of Assisi were the originators of carols, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that they were the evolvers of carols. The originals were there to be pirated, skeleton scaffoldings of weird ballads, and primeval folk-songs, and under the skilful manipulation of the Grey Friars the primordial chants ceased to be as ballads, and rose from the smoking ashes in the bloom of religious themes which were sung before the altars.

The literature of the old-time Manx, such literature as they had, as George Borrow among others observed, was all in manuscript form. No printed book in the vernacular has come to light bearing a date earlier than 1699. "There is nothing either written or printed in their language," wrote Bishop Barrow in the ecclesiastical records in 1663. Therefore it can be imagined what excitement and thankfulness greeted the translation and publication of the Bible. For the first time many of the islanders became really familiar with the Scriptures, and no longer depended entirely on oral teachings.

The harvest festival of long ago, once so great a feature in Man, is moribund, and the name *yn mbeillea*, or colloquially the *Melliah*, harvest-home, is now only perpetuated by the harvest supper. Perhaps the modern "reaper" slew the old romantic custom, cut with a keen knife-edge the strange usage handed down [208] to us from distant years. The Melliah died as the labour-savers entered the fields.

All the harvest of a holding would be garnered save a little compact patch of waving barley or shimmering golden corn. The workers, their toil well-nigh finished, gathered to see the taking of the Melliah. Quickly a queen was chosen from out the band of gleaners, the prettiest and the youngest of them all, and with straight sheer cut of the sickle her majesty swept away the last of the harvest. The golden ears fell among the stubble, with the queen of a day smiling and blushing over the spoils. "The Melliah's took!" rang out across the green valleys. "The Melliah's took!"

From the few cut ears, the last bunch of the harvest, was then fashioned roughly a semblance of a tiny woman, with a face—which was beautiful or plain according to the imagination—made of the upstanding grains, and loose crinoline-like garment of flowing stalks. *Baban yn Mbeillea*, doll of the harvest, was then carried with much fun and merriment to the farmhouse, and set on the high mantelpiece in the kitchen to remain until ousted by another straw effigy next harvesting.

When “Himself” came through the gate into the harvest field to watch or work, he was bound by the reapers with ropes of straw, and held captive until a small forfeit tax was paid. This, I remember, was an elastic practice extended to ordinary visitors. I was often caught in the *sugganes* as a child, but my ransom, I’m sure, was “not worth,” which is the Manx way of expressing inadequacy.

[209] In the evening the Melliah was kept up with much more spirit than it is today. There was feasting and revelry, *jough* (home-brewed beer) to drink, and plenty to eat, for “Himself” was a generous provider. Games of all sorts amused the company, always the *laare vane*, the white mare. This indispensable part of old-time rollicking was a make-believe horse’s head, very make-believe indeed, contrived of wool, a bit of home taxidermy which would not have deceived a mouse. The laare vane could open its mouth, when the engineer-in-charge beneath, a lumpy bulging personage very much hampered by the tripping-up proclivities of a too-long enveloping sheet, touched the spring, and snap! snap! went the snowy equine head. That was all it did. All it was meant to do, just snap aggressively at the harvesters, who had to rush at the rather inane effigy and turn it out of the room.

In these days of each man for himself, a Manx lover dispenses with the once necessary *dooinney-moyllee*, or praising man, until recent years a *sine quâ non* in insular love affairs. He was a sort of go-between, whose pleasant duty it was to murmur sweet nothings to the lass, and impress upon her what a wonderful impossible-to-match-elsewhere husband was hers for the taking. The dooinney-moyllee had also to persuade unwilling parents to countenance the match, and take charge of a girl in the absence of her betrothed. Very often the proxy courtship led to changes all round, and the praising man stepped into the other fellow’s shoes.

I am not quite sure whether *Ping-jaagh*, or the toll [210] of the “smoke penny,” would be described as a custom or a compulsory usage. It was a tax levied on every house or hovel boasting a chimney, which was collected by the parish clerk as a perquisite. In far gone-by days Manx cottages possessed no chimneys. The smoke from the *chiollagh*, or hearth, a simple affair enough, composed of a few rough stones a-heap with smouldering peat, or turf, as it is called locally, went out through a hole cut in the thatched roof. With the advent of the assuming chimney the smoke tax came in. There is an old yarn of a cottager Dalby way, whose new chimney refused to play the game at all. Carrying away the smoke was the last idea it had in the world. It received it and politely returned it. Bunches of gorse lit beneath the fractious funnel did no good; it simply would not do its work.

Into the grey pall came the parish clerk, John Robbat.

“You’re wantin’ the penny, iss lek?” demanded the incensed peasant.

“An’ quat for?”

“For the chimney the smook goes up,” answered John Robbat, “Is’t forgot at you?”

“There’s chimney, here’s smook,” waving his arms amid the fog,



“Do thee bes’, and my gough, thou’ll get all the pennies thass in!”

The ancient law authorizing the yarding of servants, a system of insular press-ganging, has long been repealed. This quaint usage consisted of the laying a straw by the general sumner across the shoulders of the impressed, with the words: “You are hereby Yarded for the service of the Lord of Man, in the house [211] of his Deemster, Moar, Coroner, or Sergeant of Barony.” Servants refusing to comply with the command to serve in one of the privileged establishments were imprisoned and kept on meagre allowance “till they yielded obedience to perform their service.” The name of the yarded one was given out next Sunday at the parish church. The family treasure of any farm might be wrested at any minute, but the servants of certain people, as for instance all members of the House of Keys, were immune from compulsory service.

There was also in the fourteenth century an Act which forced the services of unemployed agricultural labourers. These vagrants were “made liable,” and, if they refused to serve, had to “suffer punishment till they submitt.”

The sumner of a parish was an occupied individual. During the time of Divine service it was his duty to stand at the door and “whip and beat all the doggs.” The bridle, one of the old-time punishment horrors, was also the peculiar care of this worthy. The invention, intended for the terrorizing of evil tongues, was a contrivance which went round the head, fastening behind, and held in position a cruel bit of iron which forced the tongue of the unfortunate wearing it flat with pressure. Waldron, who lived in Man in 1720, wrote of this rough penance a punishment frequently meted out by Bishop Wilson: “If any person be convicted of making a scandalous report, and cannot make good the assertion, instead of being fined or imprisoned, they are sentenced to stand in the Market-place on a sort of scaffold erected for that purpose, [212] with their tongue in a noose of leather, which they call a bridle, and having been thus exposed to the view of the people for some time, on the taking off this machine they are obliged to say three times: ‘Tongue, thou hast lied.’”

Stocks were in vogue in Man, as also the pillory, and the odd punishment called the wooden horse. The Statute of 1629, which governed this stern reprisal, a sort of rough cure by the hair of the dog that bit you, laid it down that: “Whosoever shall be found or detected to pull Horse Tayles shall be punished upon the Wooden Horse, thereon to continue for the space of two hours and to be whipped naked from the waist downwards.”

Stealing “mutton, sheep, or lambe” was a “fellony in like manner to death,” and the theft or damaging of bee-hives was regarded with the same seriousness.

We can only learn of the happenings of other days from tradition or ancient records, and this must be my excuse for such constant quotation. In the writings of Bishop Wilson we hear of “many lawes and customs which are peculiar to this place and singular.” There is one of striking dignity, a proceeding going back to Saxon times. The prelate records that “the Bishop, or some priest appointed by him, do

always sit in the great court along with the Governor, till sentence of death (if any) be pronounced; the Deemster asking the jury (instead of “Guilty or not guilty?”) *Vod fir-charree soie?* which, literally translated, is, “May the man of the chancel sit?” If the foreman answers in the negative, the Bishop or his substitute [213] withdraws, and the sentence is then pronounced on the criminal.

Of all weird old customs, full of the fierce sad glamour of the time, the Act which justified a man by the oath of others, a purgation smiled upon by the Statutes of 1665, strikes us to-day as the strangest of all the sombrely strange usages of Manxland. It was an enactment which made it possible for the living “without bill, bond of evidence” to claim an unacknowledged debt from the dead, provided that the claimmaker “shall prove the same upon the grave of him or her from whom the debt was due with lawful compurgators according to the ancient form; that is to say, lying on his back with the Bible on his breast and his compurgators on either side.” This imaginative old custom, “one of our best lawes (the nature of that people considered, vizt., the oath for swearing on the grave, in case where there is not specialty,” as Bishop Phillips wrote in 1609, has something of the simplicity of totally untutored peoples about it. It reminds me—reminds me very strongly—of a quaint little story of superstition, not a custom, wherein the grave—most doleful of “sets”—formed the necessary stage background for a telling drama in a country very far away from Mona’s Isle, a land of limitless space and desolate mournful silences, Alaska. A withered old native, with face furrowed into deepest lines which Time can plough, played Chorus for me by a flickering fire, beneath a sky of deepest blue, dotted with a wreath of silver stars.

The mighty chief of a settlement of Innuits, the [214] most numerous of any tribe allied to the Eskimo, who inhabit the Bering Sea-coast from Bristol Bay to the mouth of the Yukon River, had just died, and the two likeliest men of the little colony squabbled between themselves for the reversion of power. They were of an age, and with equal claims. Both maintained that the old chief ever meant to bestow his all on either of them, both laid claim to the piles of skins lying in the chief’s *barabora* in readiness for the advent of the fur trader, both seized the dead man’s *bidarka* and spearing outfit, and last of all, perhaps most important of all, each young man swore that their late Headman had bequeathed his daughter, a veritable belle Inuit, to his successor in the chieftainship. The tribe took sides, and championed one cause or the other, and as to the young lady, she was of “How happy could I be with either were t’other dear charmer away” variety. A way out of the impasse had to be found, and the wisest patriarch in all the tribe sat in judgment. Let the two would-be chiefs lie out on the new-made grave one after the other, on nights to be chosen, with two witnesses, or, as the Manx Statutes would call them, compurgators. Then would the wraith of the departed, brooding round his sepulchre, announce his desires. Legatee Number 1 tried the gruesome plan, and lay down between the

wooden paddles, relics of strenuous days, set at the head and foot of the frozen grave, marks to show above the snow-line, for the Innuits like not to walk over their dead.

Before the wraith had time to really consider the [215] matter, if indeed it happened to be in the vicinity that night at all, the vengeful spirits who live in the Nunatacks, or peaks, which are to be seen hi the heart of the opalescent glaciers, descended with tempestuous wings, and carried off the—perhaps—residuary legatee with his compurgators, leaving nothing but the shell wherein life had been lived. There the tribe found them next morning, frozen stiff, each with a smile on Its face. So look all who are smitten by the Immortals from the Nunatacks. The natives say that no man can look upon the internal wonders of the ice-palaces and survive. And so the would-be chief Number 2 succeeded without the necessity of wrestling with justice upon a frozen grave. The furs were his, the light bidarka fashioned from the skins of hair seals, the belle of the settlement also. But— there is a but. All triumphs are defeats. This one was no exception to the rule. The old InnuIt who spun the yarn wrinkled yet more his wrinkly face as he told of the new chief spending the latter part of his honeymoon in trying to inveigle the ice-spirits into taking him away also! Because he was so eager they would none of him. Just like the real people of the world.

Am I writing the text for a colour book on Alaska or on the Isle of Man, you ask? Forgive me, for the moment I had forgotten. I am nearly “through,” as the Americans say, with the Manx customs, and as you know when a writer nears the end, he is always allowed a page or two in which to moralize, to point conclusions, to make comparisons.

Transgression of the ecclesiastical laws, and wrong-doing [216] of many kinds, was followed by a committal to do rigorous penance, on pain of excommunication. Bishop Wilson describes the severe enactment of his time as “primitive and edifying. The penitent clothed in a sheet, *etc.*, is brought into church immediately before the Litany; and there continues till the sermon be ended; after which, and a proper exhortation, the congregation are desired to pray for him in a form provided for that purpose; and thus he is dealt with, till by his behaviour he has given some satisfaction that all this is not feigned, which being certified to the bishop, he orders him to be received by a very solemn form for receiving penitents into the peace of the church.”

Excommunicated persons who did not correct the error of their ways, and appeared more or less indifferent to the attitude of the church were imprisoned, and “delivered over, body and goods, to the Lord’s mercy.” This was the formula of excommunication used in Man in olden days:

“For as much as your crimes have been so great, repeated, and continued in so long as to give offence to all sober Christians, and even to cry to Heaven for vengeance. And you having had sufficient time given you to consider of the consequence of continuing in them, without any visible or sincere remorse or probability of reformation. Therefore, in the name of our Lord Christ and before this

congregation, we pronounce and declare you, —, Excommunicate and shut out of the Communion of all faithful Christians. And may Almighty God, who by His Holy Spirit has [217] appointed this sentence for removing of scandal and offence out of the Church and for reducing of sinners to a sense of their sins and danger, make this censure to all good ends for which it was ordained. And that your Heart may be filled with fear and dread that you may be recovered out of the same and power of the Devil and your Soul may be saved, and that others may be warned by your sad example not to sin nor continue in sin so presumptuously.”

Customs relating to the “first foot,” or *qualtagh*, are much the same in Manxland as in England. The *qualtagh* of New Year must be dark, preferably of masculine gender, and should never make the mistake of calling at a house empty handed.

*Oie Ynnyd*, Shrove Tuesday, saw the pancakes made for supper, and upon Good Friday, *Jy-beiney chaist*, it was the old-time custom, in vogue until to-day, for young people to gather limpets for boiling as the time of the tide permitted. We often involved ourselves in this odd practice, although we had no special predilection for the shell-fish after we had got them. The edible seaweed, *dullish*, was also a feature of the Good Friday harvest from the sea. Every iron implement in a household was studiously avoided, and a stem of *cuirn*, or mountain ash, *anathema* to fairies, supplanted the family poker.

Agnes Herbert, *The Isle of Man* (London: John Lane, 1909). Chapter xi, “Folklore,” pp. 169–83. Chapter xi, “Customs Past and Present,” pp. 194–217.

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This follows from the previous *Manx Note* 428, and again it features material drawn from personal observation, especially of a performance by the White Boys. There too is a valuable note about the *laaire vane*, the white horse, making its appearance at the *Mbelliah* of old.

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