

Manx Notes 433 (2020)

J.F. CAMPBELL ON MANX FAIRY BELIEFS (1860)

MAN

[69] The Manks fairy creed is again the same. Similar beings are supposed to exist, and are known by the name of FERISH, which a Manksman assured me was a genuine Manks word. If so, fairy may be old Celtic, and derived [70] from the same root as Peri, instead of being derived from it.

The fairies in the Isle of Man are believed to be spirits. They are not supposed to throw arrows as they are said still to do in the Highlands. None of the old peasants seemed to take the least interest in “elf shots,” the flint arrows, which generally lead to a story when shown elsewhere. One old man said, “The ferish have no body, no bones;” and scorned the arrow heads. It is stated in Train’s history, that no flint-arrow heads have ever been found in the Isle of Man; but as there are numerous barrows, flint weapons may yet be discovered when some one looks for them.

Still these Manks fairies are much the same as their neighbours on the main land. They go into mills at night and grind stolen corn; they steal milk from the cattle; they live in green mounds; in short, they are like little mortals invested with supernatural power, thus: There was a man who lived not long ago near Port Erin, who had a LHIANNAN SHEE. “He was like other people, but he had a fairy sweetheart; but he noticed her, and they do not like being noticed, the fairies, and so he lost his mind. Well, he was quite quiet like other people, but at night he slept in the barn; and they used to hear him talking to his sweetheart, and scolding her sometimes; but if any one made a noise he would be quiet at once.”

Now, the truth of this story is clear enough; the man went mad; but this madness took the form of the popular belief, and that again attributed his madness to the fairy mistress. I am convinced that this was believed to be a case of genuine fairy intercourse; and it shows that the fairy creed still survives in the Isle of Man.

J.F. Campbell, “Man,” *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. ii (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860) 69–70.

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