

Manx Notes 434 (2020)

“MISS MORRISON AT THE WHEEL” (17)

SOPHIA MORRISON

“MANX DIALECT CONNECTED WITH THE FAIRIES”

(1914)

[561] The Island is full of Fairy lore. A good Manxman does not speak of fairies—the word *ferish*, a corruption of the English, did not exist in the Island 200 years ago. He talks of the Little People, or *Moojnjer-Veggey*,¹ or in a more familiar mood, of “Themselves,” *Guillyn Veggey*,² or “Lil Fellas.” In contradistinction to mortals, he calls them Middle World Men, for they are believed to dwell in a world of their own, being neither good enough for Heaven nor bad enough for Hell.

One may see these Little People in green dresses and red caps, and adorned with Fairy Lace,³ dancing o’ nights in the dark green Fairy Rings upon the grass to the music of the Fairy Fiddle⁴ and the chiming of Fairy Bells,⁵ which, if some Lil Fella tear his dress upon a *drine*,⁶ may be turned at need into Fairy Thimbles. The Fairy Flowers⁷ stand sentinel around, safe on their slender stalks, for no one dare pluck them or take them home for fear of Fairy Pinches⁸ and bad dreams o’ night. Other Little People are playing near by on the old *tramman* tree,⁹ where the Fairies’ Lugs¹⁰ invite them to ride upon the branches. Yet others are dancing on the lonely Niarbyl shore below, some hold their fairy cups in their hands, while their Fairy Bottles of amber wine¹¹ sparkle coolingly on the waves. Close at hand is heard the sound of Fairy Coopers¹² hard at work making herring barrels in Ooigh-Cronk-ny-Irree-Laa;—if it be in the month of May, happy is the mortal who has heard them, for it is a sign of a good herring season. Ever and anon a chip flies from the cave and immediately turns into a fairy ship. Thus was made the Fairy Fleet,¹³ whose tiny riding lights are shining bright in the Bay Mooar. If a fisherman sees the lights he will fish those waters and will be sure of a good catch of herring.

If you stay here till the sun rises, you may see his beams glittering upon the Memaid’s Jewels,¹⁴ and may know that Ben Varrey is protecting the shore and that no marauder dare approach. You may see the Mermaid’s Hair¹⁵ blown inland by the wind. Should you happen to see this from a boat at sea, you would speak of the protectress of the shore as *Joaney Gorm*,¹⁶ and of the Merman not as *Dooinniey Varrey*, but as *Yn Guilly Beg*, [562] for it not lucky to speak of things at sea by their shore names. Even the sea is called *Joaney Gorm*, by a fisherman on board his boat. The sun is *Gloyr yn Seihll*,¹⁷ or *Ree yn Laa*,¹⁸ and the moon, *Ben rein ny Hoie*.¹⁹

¹ Little Family. ² Little Boys. ³ *Dictyota dichotoma*. ⁴ Egg-case of *gobbag*, or dog-fish. ⁵ Blue-bell. ⁶ Thorn. ⁷ Red Champion. ⁸ Blue marks on the skin. ⁹ Elder. ¹⁰ Ear-shaped fungi. ¹¹ *Fucus nodosus*, or knobbed seaweed. ¹² Sound of waves in a cave. ¹³ Phosphorescent effects, the result of emission of light by Protozoa. ¹⁴ Sunbeams on

the ripples of the wavelets. ¹⁵ Sea spume. ¹⁶ Blue Joan. ¹⁷ Glory of the World. ¹⁸ King of the day. ¹⁹ Queen of the Night.

Sophia Morrison, “Manx Dialect connected with the Fairies,” *Proceedings of the Isle of Man Antiquarian and Natural History Society* i.9 (1914), 561–62.

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