

# Manx Notes 448 (2020)

## THE MANX NATIONAL ANTHEM THE MANX MUSIC FESTIVAL 1907

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[8a] The competitions begin at 9-30 a.m. on Tuesday, on which day they conclude with the sight test, which begins at 8-35 p.m. There is no evening session on Wednesday, the last competition taking place at 6-35 p.m. Thursday is as usual given over in the main to choral competitions, and at the conclusion of the contests (the last of which, the four-part choral sight test, begins at 4-15 p.m.) the members of the competing choirs are requested to be in readiness for a rehearsal of Mendelssohn's "42nd Psalm," to be sung at the subsequent concert under the conductorship of Mr Acton. Other features of this concert are the solos by Miss Catherine Wylie, A.R.C.M. (soprano), and Mr Jack Robertson (tenor), the selections by Mr Harry Wood's students' orchestra, part songs and duets by successful competitors, and the first performance of Mr W.H. Gill's Manx National Anthem by the combined choir and Mr Harry Wood's orchestra. His Excellency the Lieut.-Governor, and Lady Raglan, have signified their intention of being present on the occasion, and during the course of the evening Mrs Straton, wife of the Lord Bishop, will present the prizes.

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[8a] The following patriotic letter accompanied the author's new Manx National Anthem, and finds a place in the programme:

FEBRUARY 21ST, 1907.

DEAR MRS LAUGHTON,—

I am very sensible of the honour done me by yourself and the Guild Committee in affording me this opportunity of saying a few words respecting one of the items in the programme of your Festival Concert on the 21st March.

A Nation without a National Anthem of its own is obviously an anomaly; and yet up to the present time our little Manx Nation, so unique in its history and constitution among the great Nations of the World, and enjoying all the blessings of civilization, has lacked one important possession. I mean the possession of a National Anthem exclusively and characteristically its own—not Irish, nor Scotch, nor Welsh, nor commonly Pan-Celtic—but *Manx* \* pure and simple. However, it is never too late to mend; and, though not without considerable diffidence, I have ventured with a boldness akin to presumption, to do for our Nation now, what far abler hands ought to have done long ago. Such a production must, I conceive, be constructed by a Manxman out of Manx material, and must be the sincere expression of the Manx

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\* This word missing from the original letter published earlier as {Gill, 1907 #1530}

spirit and character, which is essentially religious and patriotic. Out of Manx material? Certainly. Look at Castle Rushen! There you've got an ideal structure from the foundation to the topmost battlements. Not only is it *made* of our native rock but it *grows* as it were *out of the rock*. It will stand as long as the Island, which itself is a rock. Which thing is an allegory. Just let me explain, then, without being too technical, my *modus operandi* in constructing this Manx national anthem out of native material. The most typical of all our recently recovered Manx music is undoubtedly "Mylecharane." But tradition has so twisted and distorted the tune that nobody can tell for certain what the original "Mylecharane" was, except by a long train of reasoning and speculation. The very fact that we have two quite distinctly different types of the tune, one *minor* and the other *major*, is very significant, and I can only account for the duality by supposing that the original tune was substantially *minor*, embodying (as it probably did) some very sad, mythical, and pathetic story of the forlorn or forsaken one, which, after several verses, concluded with a bright ending in the *major*. Right or wrong, this was a happy thought. I wrote a little poem carrying out that idea, and, to my great delight, I have thus (to my own satisfaction at least) solved the problem which has sorely puzzled me for thirteen years past. Premising that I entirely renounce and apostatize my treatment of the tune and melody in the "Royal Edition," I have disposed of "Mylecharane" proper by turning it not only into a really singable form, but one such as the great singers of the day will, if I am not greatly mistaken, delight to sing, for thus treated it makes a gracious and lovely tune which can never die.

That disposes of the *minor* version of "Mylecharane." But how about the *major*? Well, I have turned that into a companion picture to the other. By a little management I have coaxed it not only into harmonic form but strictly choral form, viz., as a national anthem distinctly Manx in character and yet separating itself from the other version of the tune which is essentially a song, and one, moreover, which, to quote our old friend, Thomas Edward Brown, suggests "a depth of ineffable melancholy." Then, to utilize still further this precious nucleus or germ of *Manx material*, I have supplied verses enough to serve for two different purposes; 1st, as an anthem proper for use on state occasions, and 2nd, as a hymn for public worship to be used during the prevalence of stormy weather. In this connection I would suggest for festival use verses 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; and for purposes of public worship, verses 6, 4, 5, 8.

In the building up of this composition (I mean the music) I have added as little new matter as I possibly could consistently with good musical taste, and the result is, what I hope my fellow countrymen will consider to be, a solid and stately choral hymn that will compare favourably in force and dignity with any other national hymn in Europe, and worthy to stand side by side with, although at a respectful distance from, our justly famous "God save the King."

Our best thanks are due to Mr J.J. Kneen for his skilful translation of my verses into Manx. I should love to hear them sung by your big chorus.

While on the subject of Manx music you will all be glad to know that Messrs Boosey, of London, are now contemplating the issue of a “selection of music songs,” from their “Royal Edition,” to be offered to the public at the almost nominal price of sixpence. Having already repudiated my treatment of “Mylecharane” in that edition as unworthy and sacrilegious—in fact an artistic blunder—I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to explain how I have tried to make atonement for the same. Both the remodelled song and the National Anthem will be included in the selection.—Yours sincerely,

W.H. GILL.

“Guild Music Festival.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 16 March 1907: 8a–e.

(2)

[Long before the hour fixed for commencing the concert, the Palace was packed, there being present nearly five thousand persons. His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor and Lady Raglan, together with a large party, occupied a box immediately opposite the stage.]

[3f] During the course of the evening, the new Manx National Anthem, the words of which have been written by Mr W.H. Gill, of Abingdon-on-Thames, and the music for which has been adapted by him from traditional Manx airs, was sung with much enthusiasm by the combined choirs and the audience.

“Manx Music Festival.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 23 March 1907: 2 & 3a–f.

(3)

[8a] But the *piece de resistance* was the Manx National Anthem composed specially for the Manx people by Mr W.H. Gill of *Manx [National] Songs* fame, and sung by the combined choirs and audience standing. It was most effective, and the tune seemed to “catch on.”

“The Manx Music Festival,” *Peel City Guardian* 23 March 1907, [2]c–e & [3]a–b & [8]a–b.

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STEPHEN MILLER, RBV

