

# Manx Notes 451 (2020)

## “THE SO-CALLED ‘MANX NATIONAL ANTHEM’”

(1907)

SIR,—I read a few days ago in some of our Insular papers that the new Manx National Anthem was sung on Tynwald Day for the first time at a Government function. One paper says that it had an “excellent reception,” and I read in the *Herald* that the “spirit with which the British joined Manx to sing the anthem was inspiring to thrill; words as well as music, inspired.” They had a revival, it seems, in Church on Tynwald Day, under the inspiration of the new anthem. That was very wonderful, and very desirable. But I venture to say, sir, that that “excellent reception under the spell of inspiration of both music and words was by the ‘powers that be’ and a few of the elect who were admitted to the function in the church, who did not, in any way, represent the community of the Island,” and I wonder what authority or power had our rulers to adopt and use a song which purports to be a National Anthem without, in some way, consulting the nation before doing so. As a Manxman, I cannot allow the so-called anthem to become National without very strongly protesting against it, I find no fault with the music. It is the poem that I am going to criticise and reject so far as I am concerned. If it came to us as a patriotic song, well, then, I would take no notice of it, but when it comes bearing the title of the Manx National Anthem we must see that it is worthy of the name before accepting it. I have nothing against the author. I don’t know him, and know comparatively nothing about him. I don’t want to hurt his feelings. However, if he is to become a great poet he must be prepared, like all great authors, including poets, to pass through the scorching fires of criticism to reach the high pinnacle of fame. In order to criticise this poem, in my own way, I shall review it verse by verse.

Verse 1:

O land of our birth,  
O gem of God’s earth,  
O Island so strong and so fair;  
Built firm as Barrool,  
Thy throne of Home Rule  
Makes us free as the sweet mountain air

What are we to understand by the second line?—“O gem of God’s earth.” Is it that the rest of the planets and spheres belong to the devil? “The” should take the place of “God’s” in my opinion. The last three lines. Here we have a throne established as firm as Barrool—“A throne of Home Rule.” A democratic throne, the reverse of being true to fact, and an insult to our gracious and worthy King.

V. 2:

When Orry the Dane,  
In Mannin did reign,

'Twas said he had come from above;  
 For wisdom from heav'n  
 To him had been giv'n  
 To rule us with justice and love.

In this we have a King recognised, a deity, but it is Orry the Dane of long, long ago, and not King Edward VII. In the second line there is the word "Mannin," a Manx word. Why did the poet mix Manx with English, and especially when there is a Manx version. We find the word twice in the Manx version, and very properly, too.

V. 3:

Our fathers have told  
 How saints came of old,  
 Proclaiming the Gospel of Peace;  
 That sinful desires  
 Like false Baal fires,  
 Must die ere our troubles can cease.

This verse, with its false Baal fires, in my opinion, is too weak to stand criticism.

V. 4:

Ye sons of the soil,  
 In hardship and toil,  
 Who plough both the land and the sea;  
 Take heart while you can,  
 And think of the man  
 Who toiled by the Lake Galilee.

The first three lines are not true to fact. The sons of the soil do not plough the seas now-a-days, as small crofters did 50 years and 100 years ago. Let everything new, even an anthem, be up to date. The last three lines, unworthy of criticism. The author finds this Island too small for his poetic gifts, and he has gone away to the Lake of Galilee.

V. 5:

When fierce tempests smote  
 That frail little boat  
 They ceased at His gentle command;  
 Despite all our fear,  
 The Saviour is near  
 To safeguard our dear Fatherland.

The poet, standing on the shore of the Lake Galilee, watches the frail little boat in a storm, and the men who had toiled by Lake Galilee standing in her, giving the "gentle command," at which the storm ceases. That was very wonderful and we cannot blame poets for bursting forth into verses over the greatness of the miracle.

In the last three lines the poet has got hack to our fatherland again. Three good lines, despite their connection with the "frail little boat."

V. 6:

Let storm-winds rejoice  
And lift up their voice  
No danger our homes can befall;  
Our green hills and rocks  
Encircle our flocks,  
And keep out the sea like a wall.

The last three lines: to compare the strength and stability of our green hills and rocks to that of a wall makes them very insignificant and weak.

V. 7:

Our Island thus blest,  
No foe can molest,  
Our grain and our fish shall increase;  
From battle and sword,  
Protecteth the Lord  
And crowneth our nation with peace.  
The first two lines not true to fact.

V. 8:

Then let us rejoice  
With heart, soul, and voice,  
And in the Lord's promise confide—  
That each single hour,  
We trust in His power,  
No evil our souls can betide.

I would let this verse pass, unscarred, were it not that I have wounded the others. I may just say that in my opinion, there is too much crowded into the second line, and that it would be better if it read: "With heart and with voice" than "With heart, soul, and voice."

I can nothing in this poem, sir, that entitles it to become our National Anthem. Indeed, in my opinion, it has no merit to become even a patriotic song. I should like to have seen and heard the great men of our Island on Tynwald Day under the inspiration of these verses, singing with heart, soul, and voice. It had been as good, nay, better, than a play. When the King visits our Island again, of course the "powers" will have to pay him the honour due to him, and they will have to show their loyalty to him by singing the new Manx National Anthem. And won't it be grand for His Majesty to hear them singing with inspiration:

O land of our birth,  
O gem of God's earth,  
O Island so strong and so fair;  
Built firm as Barrool.  
Thy throne of Home Rule,

Makes us free as the sweet mountain air.

And then, the next verse:

When Orry, the Dane,

In Mannin did reign, &c.

Won't it be a surprise for His Majesty to learn that ours is a throne of Home Rule, built firm as Barrool, and that we are free from being under his Government as "the sweet mountain air." What will he do, I wonder? Will he let us enjoy our sweet Home Rule freedom, or will he send a squadron of his battleships and bombard our Island, and take our sweet Home Rule freedom from us by force, and make us cringe at his feet, confessing his sovereignty? Let us hope however, that he will treat us as a simple and weak-minded people, and allow us to still enjoy our sweet Home Rule freedom in blissful stupidity.

LHEMMEYDERFAIYR.

July 10, 1907.

Pseud [signed as "Lhemmeyderfaiyr"], "[Letter to the Editor] The So-called 'Manx National Anthem,'" *Mona's Herald* 17 July 1907, 4g.

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