

Manx Notes 528 (2021)

“TRELJAH”
“OLD MAY EVE”
(1922)

In olden times, so I've been told,
On May Eve witches did unfold
Some wondrous feats of skill—
Old Beelzebub with all his crew
At midnight roamed the Island through,
To wreck or mayhap kill.

Such things as fairies and bugganes,
Phynodherees and tame *dbrollanes*
Our forefathers had met;
And witches into hares would change,
And ghost would walk within close range—
These tales we can't forget.

Before the sun set in the West,
Before the witches prowled in quest
Of prey to cast their charm.
The cows were safely housed in shed,
The sheep within the wicket led
Wherein could come no harm.

The witches' supernatural power
Was strengthened with the midnight hour
When turned the eleventh of May;
And woe betide the folk who slept
With *smiologh* left unburnt, unswept.
Oh! they would rue the day.

Rank *Bolough* strewn along the floor,
A Roman cross above each door
Held some mysterious power,
To counteract the witches' spell;
No evil plot could ever dwell
With cross or *Bolough* flower.

The young folks hastened to the brows.
 In sheltered spot applied the fuse
 And set the gorse alight—
 With silver piece placed in the gun,
 Expectantly stood every one
 To watch the witches' flight.

For in the gorse 'twas said they hid—
 Through blaze and smoke they made a bid,
 A daring bid for life;
 Alert and keen the youthful swain
 Would shoot! a piercing cry of pain—
 Then eagerness ran rife.

Next day the news would spread around,
 Of blood marks traced along the ground
 Close to a cottage door,
 Wherein a woman lay in bed
 Shot in the thigh; 'twas truth they said—
 Her annual flight was o'er

The ancient customs, Manx revere,
 And will relate from year to year
 While unbelievers grin—
 A thorough Manxman born and bred
 Will still remark, and shake his head,
 “Aw 'deed, there's queer things in.”

TRELJAH.

M.A. Watterson [as “Treljah”]. “Old May Eve.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 19
 May 1922: 3b.

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M. Annie Watterson, *née* Quirk, wrote under the name of “Treljah,” and her poem here is a companion piece to another of her poems, “Harves” from 1921, reproduced as *Manx Notes* 429 (2020). For more about her, see Arthur Moore, “[Arthur Moore’s Island Notebook] Meet a Manx Author,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 1 May 1958, 6b–e.

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