

Manx Notes 576 (2022)

“OLD TOMMY CRINGLE, WITH HIS VIOLIN” *

(1899)

I perceive one of your correspondents has raised a cry respecting the Christmas Waits, urging the abolition of these Dogberries. Like all mundane time-honoured customs—such as “the Whiteboys,” “Hop-tu-naa,” and “Hunt the Wren, boys,”—it is mutatis mutandis with them. In the thirties, old Tommy Cringle, with his violin—those good old days when King Billy reigned—was an institution within himself. He serenaded Douglas with his “saw sharpener,” announcing the “Glad tidings of great joy” and the “Mistletoe bow-wow-wow,” followed by a stentorian voice, howling like a fog-horn in thick weather, enumerating the entire members of the mansion he serenaded, your correspondent would have had cause to complain in those days, but with the generation then existing, it was “Custom must be indulged with custom; if not, custom will cry.” This was always the war-cry of the ancient Manx when their rulers attempted to deviate from an ancient usage. The midnight waits at Christmas is another Pagan adaptation of the Early Fathers, but there is no true Christian, after being roused from a sound sleep in the small hours of Christmas morning, that is not tempted to anathematise his disturbers by a torrent of something more impressive than expletives.

Who try to soothe the savage breast?

The Waits!

Who neatly break the nightly rest?

The Waits!

Who blare and bray at night’s high noon,

And drive to drink the Man i’ the Moon,

By playing old airs out of tune!

The Waits!

Pseud [signed “Buggane”]. “Waif and Stray Notes.” *Manx Sun* 30 December 1899: 3a–b.

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“In the thirties, old Tommy Cringle, with his violin—those good old days when King Billy reigned—was an institution within himself.” All good things come to an end they say, and the Christmas Waits in the Island have certainly come to an end.

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