

Manx Notes 154 (2013)

“A COMPLETE COLLECTION IS MUCH TO BE WISHED FOR”

CYRIL I. PATON'S PAPER ON MANX CARVALS (1924)

Cyril Ingham Paton is best known as a Manx naturalist; he had, however, an interest in *carvals*, locally composed carols sung in Manx on Christmas-Eve in churches in the Island, and was a fluent speaker of Manx, using his annual summer visits to the Island to find native speakers in order to maintain his command of the language. As regards carvals, A.W. Moore had issued a representative collection in 1891, titled *Carvalyn Gailckagh*.¹ Paton later supplemented Moore's collection with a serialisation of carvals in the pages of the *Isle of Man Examiner* between 31 July 1915 and 20 January 1917. It is clear from Paton's diary² that they were to appear in book form: “Called on Phillip Caine. Carvals well under way. The form of the finished book not bad but not up to what it should be” [11 August 1916]. This never appeared but there was a proposal to recommence serialisation at least, though much later in 1920: “Broadbent. Carvals to continue” [1 May 1920]; “Called on Phillip Caine (he thinks that the carvals will recommence)” [12 June 1920]. If this happened, it still needs to be traced.

“Letter from Cubbon. He wants a paper on carvals for the I.o.M. Antiquarian Soc[iet]y” [30 December 1918]. This must be the start of what was to much later become “Manx Carvals and Carval Books, with Notes on some of the MSS.,” *Proceedings of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society* ii.4 (1926), 480–501 (and reproduced here). Evidently, it went through a long gestation period. Paton's work on his paper was to bring him into conflict with G.W. Wood as this lengthy passage in his diary from January 1919 shows:

Mr Wood's. No work done. Mr W. thinks that my paper on Manx Religious Poetry might possibly interfere with his book so although the connection of the two seems to me to be of the slightest (I think there are two dates given in his book wh. I have used) I wrote to Cubbon suggesting that P. Caine would supply a better paper on the carvals. If C. refuses I will then give a short paper on Carvals alone. I was rather indignant at Mr W.'s objection as it looked as if he thought that I was plagiarising from his book (to wh. of course I have access & to wh. I have contributed, I might add, a fair amount of information & work)[.] In a paper on the National religious poetry of the Island I cannot of course avoid naming books wh. are included in his work, but with the exception of the two dates above mentioned there was nothing in my paper which I had not got from books in my own possession or other sources & the fact that a man is writing a monograph on the printed literature of a country is not a sufficient reason to preventing all reference to books in that language. The strange part of it is that he cordially

¹ A.W. Moore, *Carvalyn Gailckagh* (n.p. [“Isle of Man”]: John Christian Fargher, 1891).

² Diary of Cyril I. Paton, covering the years 1905–49. In private hands.

approved of a similar paper I sent a couple of years ago to the Celtic Review although his book was then in much the same state as at present. [3 January 1919]

Wood was a Manx bibliophile, his connection with the Island being through marriage, his wife a Cregeen from Laxey. It was his library purchased after his death that was to form the core of the newly-founded Manx Museum Library. He lived near Paton, who resided in Streatham in London, and they met often, and carvals were an abiding interest of the pair, Wood having having a collection of carval books in his hands. His projected book never appeared, but Cubon's offer to Paton for a paper to be presented to the *Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society* seems to have grated Wood. As a side-note, Paton's mention of a piece by himself in the *Celtic Review* is another bibliographical piece that now needs to be traced.

It is not until 1925, that the paper is once again mentioned: "Wrote to Cubbon promising a paper of 'not more than 1 hour' on carvals" [4 January 1925]; "Wrote to Cubbon & sent him the paper on carvals" [1 February 1925]. In June that same year: "Afternoon reading & writing. Evening to Gat y whing lake & later walked to Sulby Bridge to post p.c. & a letter. The p.c. was to Cubbon who had written to know 'to what address I had sent the proof of my article' on carvals. I have received no such proof" [19 June 1925]. The proofs appeared much later: "'Proof' of my article on carvals. Cubbon wants it printed as a pamphlet with Philip Caine's paper. Wrote to Cubbon, Caine, corrected proof & addressed it to P.G. Ralfe" [23 October 1925]. As regards "Philip Caine's paper," this must be a reference to "Manx Carvals and their Writers," *Mannin* 2 (1913), 77-79, unless there is a lost publication of his to trace given, it must be said, how slight this piece from 1913 is in size. Caine was an other individual who had an interest in carvals and there are numerous mentions in Paton's diary to him that need to be gathered together and further studied.

As regards the carvals themselves,

There is a large amount of this literature, much of it unpublished, and a complete collection is much to be wished for. Considering the smallness of the population of the Island during the time these poems were produced, Manxmen may well be proud of their Gailck [*sic*] literature.

A complete collection still remains to be achieved and it is to Paton's credit that he started this by supplementing Moore's *Carvalyn Gailckagh*.

STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2013

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MANX CARVALS AND CARVAL BOOKS,
WITH NOTES ON SOME OF THE MSS.

[480] When William Kennish, ship’s carpenter, inventor, engineer, schoolmaster and poet, retired from the Navy, and settled down at Ballasalla, he occupied his leisure hours in writing those life-like poetical sketches of Manx life and character which he published in the year 1844, under the title of *Mona’s Isle and other Poems*.

In one of these, “The Manx Ilvary,” he describes the singing of carvals as he remembered the ceremony performed in his younger days at Maughold. He tells us of the rivalry between the singers, the occasional rowdy mock-applause of the more frivolous of the party, and the parched pease thrown by the women at their bachelor friends—a bad custom which must have survived to a much later date, for I well remember hearing of it in my boyhood. This is the earliest reference to carval-singing that I recollect. Later, in 1855, George Borrow, the famous philologist, came across them during a visit to the island, and recognised their value as forming a contribution to the literature of the Gael. Nevertheless, with the exception of “Drogh Vraane,” and a very good one by William Kinrade, of Maughold, “Lhig da Slane seihll cur clashtyn” (‘Let all the world hearken’), which was printed about the year 1870, little seems to have been done in the way of printing these interesting poems, until, in 1885, a few appeared in the *Mona’s Herald*. This led to Mr A.W. Moore collaborating with Mr Fargher, the proprietor of that paper, in publishing the fine collection known as *Carvalvn Gailckagh*. Eighty-five carvals, containing about eleven thousand lines, are there printed, and some five thousand more lines were published during the years 1915–17 in *The Isle of Man Examiner*, [481] through the exertions of Mr Philip Caine. There are, however, many which have never been published in any form. Almost any of these old carval books provides, on being searched, one or more unpublished carvals, or, at the very least, some new verses of carvals already printed. From the ms. books of Mr G.W. Wood, now in the Manx National Museum, and from others kindly lent to me by the Archdeacon [*ie*, John Kewley], who, in addition to the important ones in his own possession borrowed others from various friends on my behalf, I have copied out and corrected over five thousand lines hitherto unpublished. If ever a complete collection of these native Manx poems is published, it will probably contain thirty thousand lines or more.

I intend this evening to describe the contents of a few of the old mss. which I have been enabled to examine in the last few years. But first, a few words about the books themselves and about the people who wrote them.

The books, some of which are yet treasured, I am glad to say, by the peasantry in out of the way corners of the Island, are queer, dingy-looking volumes, the pages often so brown with smoke and damp that it is difficult to read the faded ink. The spelling is fearful and wonderful; “booise” (thanks) may be spelt “bweest,” “cliwe” (a sword) “clew,” but, on the whole, there is no great difficulty in understanding the

meaning, though here and there lines occur which have so far baffled me. The bindings are home-made, of rough leather or sail-cloth, or brown cardboard. The paper of various kinds, hand-made or woven, with occasionally a dated water-mark, which is useful if no better evidence of the date of the book is available. Not infrequently a book has been handed down for a number of years from one member of a family to another and contain the names of the consecutive owners.

The writings are mostly the work of that prolific author, "Anon." A name is frequently found at the end of a carval such as "Robert Kneale, 1775," but this merely indicates the name of the *transcriber* and the date of the making of the copy. On the other hand, such a statement as "mettered by John Lewin of Kk. Lonnon, Nov. 25, 1798," may be taken at its face value.

Eighteen or nineteen names of authors have, however, survived, and include several clergymen (Thomas Christian, of Marown, etc.); a sumner (John Lewin, of Jurby); a privateersman (Moore, the Tiger); a Vicar General (William Walker); another Vicar General (John Cosnahan); and several farmers (John Quirk, etc.). In that delightful book, *Wild Wales*, George Borrow commemorates the visits he paid to the birth-places of the Welsh bards, recording where each lived and [482] giving a few lines of biography. It is much to be hoped that someone may perform a similar service to the Manx Celtic poets before it is too late.

The dates of the poems range from circa 1700 to 1840 though a few may be of earlier date. I have seen one date 1646, but this is certainly an error, the poem having been composed about 1720. The great mass of the carvals are of purely national production. They were written originally in the Gailck, and have a character of their own. In fact, the only English carol I know which strongly resembles the Manx ones is the "Black Decree," dealing with the Massacre of the Innocents: there are two or three Manx versions of this carol. The first few verses of "Jacob's Ladder" are also translated from an English original, and perhaps there may be one or two others indebted to English models.

The first book I take is one that appears to have belonged originally to one Philip Faragher, and, later on, to John Howland. It is a small thick volume, 6 inches x 3H inches, roughly bound in a home-made leather cover, cut with a broad strap projecting from the back to fasten, by way of a clasp, over a button sewn on to the front of the book. The paper is hand made and stained with age, but the handwriting is plain. The dates are mostly between 1821 and 1825, but there is one date so late as 1842. The owners' names are, as usual, scattered all through the book. It contains 36 poems, nearly all Manx carvals, of which there are four thousand three hundred lines.

The first in the book is "My Vraar deyr graihagh, tar ayns shee," 8-6 metre ('My dearly beloved brother, come in peace'). It is a good paraphrase of the account of St Paul's conversion, as given in the Acts of the Apostles. A.W. Moore, in *Carvalyn Gailckagh*, attributes it to Moore the Tiger, the doughty privateersman, who also wrote the humorous Manx ballad on the futile voyage of the "Tiger" on a plundering

expedition For lack of French foemen, they took a friendly Dutch vessel as prize, and, on reaching Douglas, were, to their surprise, sent to gaol. Then comes a hymn, a translation of Nahum Tate’s “While Shepherds watched their flocks by night,” evidently copied from the appendix to the *Manx Prayer Book*. The next, though found in nearly every carval book, is interesting as it gives the name of the author, which is a disputed point. It is the “Carval Drogh Vraane” (“Carval of the Evil Women”), sometimes called “Carval Yezebel.” It is a queer poem, dealing with the evils of petticoat government as exemplified in the Scriptures. The last four verses, however, as a counterpoise deal with the *good* [483] women mentioned in the Bible. The copy in this, as in all other mss. that I have seen, has four verses not given in *Carvalyn Gailckagh*, nor in the version printed in Vol. xxi of the Manx Society’s works. I can see no reason for the note in the latter that “it has been thought better to omit them”; they represent the judgment of the sinner. The Scriptural references are given as footnotes—this is usually the case in copies of this carval and in no other that I have met with. As to the authorship, George Borrow thought that it was by the above-mentioned Moore the Tiger; Mr Philip Caine informs me that he has seen it attributed to William Kinrade, of Ballachrink, Maughold, who was the author of nine or ten carvals, “Carval Noah” amongst others. It is here stated to be “Metreit Liorish John Moore jeh Balla Cammaish Skeyl Andreas,” *ie*, metered by John Moore of Balla Cammaish, Parish of Andreas.” I know not if this is the same as the “Tiger.”

The third carval is also a well-known one, the “Question and Answer” carval on justification by faith. It is one of the long carvals—360 lines—but it is by no means a poor production. It was sung by two singers alternately, until the 43rd verse, when the two joined together and sang the last three verses as a duet, the conclusion having been arrived at that:

“My varrant ta er Yeesey,
 Eh hooar son m’annym baase,
 Soit-stiagh’sy villey-feeyney
 Er-hoilshagh dooys e ghrayse.
 Pardon ta aym ayns soylley,
 Yn sterrym ta ec shee,
 Coraa gerjoil dy voggey
 Nishbingys ayns my chree.”

‘My hope is fixed on Jesus,
 Who died my soul to free,
 Now is the vine new grafted *
 His grace is offered me.
 Pardon is now my portion,

The storm has sunk to rest,
 The glad voice of rejoicing
 Now sounds within my breast.”

* John xv, 5.

In the November number of *Mannin*, 1913, Mr P.[W.] Caine attributed this piece to William Kinrade, and this is very likely correct. Here it is said to be “Metreit by Mr Gayle, curate Kirk Bride.” I think, however, that this is a slip, and that the next carval is the one “metered” by the curate. For the two carvals following are printed as one in Moore’s copy, and the second one of the two is here given as “Meterit liorish Saggirt Gayle skeerey Breeshey.” The two divisions into which [484] Moore’s carval is here divided are: “O cre ta dooinney, quoi dys neem’s soyllagh’ eh?” (‘O, what is man, to what shall I compare him?’), and Carval Adam, “Va dooinney crooit ayns aigney glen as free” (‘Man was created pure, and free in will’). Now, we all know that:

“The grandest oul’ pazon, I’ll go bail,
 That ever was in, was oul’ Pazon Gale.”

but the name appears to be new as a writer of carvals.

The same name is given as that of the author of “Carval ny bochillyn”; “My chaarjyn graihaghr ayns credjue Crest” (The Shepherds’ Carval: ‘My loving friends in the faith of Christ’), one of the few that deal with the announcement of Christ’s birth to the shepherds. It has one verse not in Moore’s copy.

The name of another author appears to be given in the title of the next carval, “Myr va mee keayrt my lhie’syn oie” (‘As once I was lying down in the night’), which is here called “Carval Philip Ellison.” Whoever wrote it, the poem is a fine one. It belongs to a group of visionary poems of which there is a fair sprinkling in these books. The dreamer sees a soul walking heedlessly along the broad way leading to destruction. Christ meets the soul and pleads with him thus (verse 3):

“Annym voght! Insh dou ere’n fa,
 T’ou er gholl choud er shaghryn,
 Chea veih my raaidyn t’ou dagh laa,
 As veih my ghoo as annaghyn.
 Dyn smooïnaghtyn er yn raad lhean
 Nee oo leeideil dys baase as pian.”

‘Poor soul! O tell me why hast thou,
 So long been wandering from thy Lord,
 Fleeing my paths—and turnest now
 From my commandment and my word,

Unheeding that thy Saviour saith
The broad road leads to pain and, death.’

The fourteen verses which follow this one are written with much force, dignity, and deep religious feeling, Christ reminding the soul of the manifold mercies he had already received, and of the pains, labours, and humiliations which his redemption has cost his Saviour. The next seven verses are taken up with the soul’s repentance and confession, and a concluding verse says (verse 25):

“Er lhiam dy heeyn Creest magh e lane,
As hug eh lesh y strioaltagh
Myr v’eh ooilley ayns y creau
Er-son e pheccah arryssagh;
As hug eh lesh eh reesht gys thie:
Shoh va mee ‘ghreamal as me my lhie.” [485]

‘I thought that Christ stretched forth His hand
And brought the sinful wanderer in,
As he all trembling did stand
In heartfelt sorrow for his sin.
In heaven’s bright home to live for aye:
Thus dreamed I as asleep I lay.’

The carval “O shiuish chloan ta reayll fo aggle Yee” (‘O ye children [of men] who keep under the fear of God’) has in this MSS. twelve verses which are not in Moore’s copy. It is a rather dull exhortation to lead a good life. The following, which are taken from the additional verses, may serve as a sample of this class of carval:

Verse 15:

“Cur my-ner dy tappee ta mish nish cheet,
Cordail rish dty obbraghyn, ghooinney, heu er eek,
Jeant ayd ‘sy challin, lhig daue ye mie ny sie,
Hig dy chooilley ghooinney ye eek lesh y stiurt thie.”

Verse 16:

“Uss harvaant vie, ta firrinagh as just
Er leeideil dtny vea ayns graih as giastylls,
Nish bee uss bannit choud as vees oo es mayrn
Gys dty gherjagh veayn hig-oo stiagh ayns gloyr y Chiarn.”

‘Behold my coming is no more delayed,

According to thy works thou shalt be paid
 (Thy works which in the body thou hast done),
 As labourers are paid at set of sun.'

'And thou, O faithful servant, who for me
 Hast led thy life in love and charity,
 My blessings shall for aye on thee be poured,
 And thou shalt share the glory of thy Lord.'

In almost all the carval books one or two English poems are given. There are three in the present book, one of them being the old carol, "A virgin unspotted the prophet foretold." I have met with one book in which the whole collection is in English (date about 1840), and I may say in passing that it is as well, when examining the Manx mss., to make a note of such English ones as occur. It is of some interest to know what English carols were current in the Island in earlier days, and one or two that I have met with appear to be little known in England now-a-days.

The "Carval Israel," otherwise known as "Carval Joseph," seems to have been a very favourite one; it is included in this, and in most other collections. It is a paraphrase of the story of Joseph as told in Genesis. Another—rather a poor one on the death of Christ, is said to be by the Rev. John Bridson, Rector of Bride. It is "My chaarjyn she jiu jiu yn laa" ('My [486] friends, to-day is the very day'). If, however, Moore is correct in giving the early date 1726 to this carval, we will have to assume that the ascription of authorship here given was intended for the preceding English carval, "My dearest friends and brethren in the Lord." Anyhow, Mr Bridson appears to be, like Gale, hitherto unknown as a writer of carvals.

There are other carvals, but of no very special interest, so we will pass on to another book.

"Peter Moore, his carval book," written in the year of our Lord, 1833. It has cardboard covers, with rough leather stitched round the edges—back leather. Same paper and watermark as the last book; evidently home bound; size, 6 inches by 7&quarter; 233 pages of writing. There are twenty Manx carvals, one English carol, and an English hymn. The first important poem is "Carval Susannah," the story of Susannah, and of Daniel's cross-examination of the false witness, taken from the Apocrypha; 35 verses. It begins, "Chaarjyn, tar-jee ny sniessey dou" ('Come near me, friends'). The versification is rather laboured, but the story is fairly well told. According to William Kennish, there was another carval taken from the Apocrypha—namely, one on Bel and the Dragon, which was composed and annually sung by a crusty parishioner who had some small grievance to avenge on the parson of Maughold. Kennish mentions it in a footnote to his poem, "The Manx Ilvary." The misdeeds of the priests of Bel were supposed to be applied to the local clergymen! I had long been seeking this carval without success, and was much

pleased when, a few weeks ago, Mr Philip Caine very kindly sent me a copy of three carvals previously unknown to me, one of which appears to be that to which Kennish refers. It is true that there is no mention of Bel's priests, nor do I think that it was written for the purpose stated. But it is a Maughold carval on the evil priests mentioned in the Bible, with a few verses at the end about the good priests. In fact, it is a close imitation, both in scope and in meter, of the one on evil women, which we had in the last book. Possibly the irate farmer added the verses on the priests of Bel and adapted the rest to his own purpose.

To come back to the book we have in hand, passing over several carvals of lesser importance, we find a fine poem on Christ's atonement and second coming, “Ayns Adam va shin faagit mooie” (‘In Adam we were condemned’) a copy of which is given in *Carvalyn Gailckagh*. The metre, which is unique in the carvals, and the general style, remind one strongly of that most beautiful elegy, written by Thomas Cottier, of Ballamenagh, on the death of John Cain, Ballaskyr, who died June 15th, 1839; the one beginning, “O vraar, t'ou scarrit voym son traa” (‘O brother, thou art parted from [487] me for a time’). The late Miss S. Morrison had a few copies of this elegy printed in leaflet form by Messrs Palmer, of Peel; one of these copies is now in the Museum Library, Compare the following:

From the Carval:

“Dy Leah hig Creest hooïn reesht veih niau,
Ny ainleyn giall vees ei dagh laue
Marish nooghyn bannee;
Bee dagh unnane jeu *dress* ayns giall
Lesh garmadyn vees feer gloyroil—
Gootit orroo ec Jee.”

‘From heaven shall Christ again descend
And angels bright His steps attend,
Blessed saints around Him stand
Clad is each soul in spotless white,
Their garments shed a glory might—
Gifts from the Lord's own hand,”

From the Elegy:

“Cre'n caghlaa mooar ta ayns dty stayd!
Kionfenish Yee ta'n cronney ayd
Marish ny flaunyssee;
T'ou rea rish seaghyn, pian as baase,
Dy bragh cur moylley son y ghraise
Ta stow't ort liorish Jee.”

‘How great a change is in thy state!
 In God’s own presence ‘tis thy fate
 With heavenly hosts to be;
 Thou’rt rid of sorrow, death and pain,
 And givest thanks that not in vain
 God gave His grace to thee.’

A variant of the first verse of this elegy, I may remark in passing, is cut on a headstone in Arbory churchyard. On reading the two poems, one feels pretty sure, though there is no direct evidence, that they were both by the same author, and that Thomas Cottier should be added to the growing list of our carval writers.

Our old friend, the “Question and Answer” carval, is, of course, contained in this mss. I mention it a second time because this copy has one or two lines (in verses 10 and 38), which are in Moore’s English version, but do not appear in his Manx copy.

“Lhig da’n slane seihll cur clashtyn” (‘Let the whole world harken’). A very imperfect copy of this beautiful carval is given in *Carvalyn Cailckagh*, but the 360 lines which we have here were published in the *Examiner*, September 16th, 1916. Moore, however, has five verses which are not in this [488] copy. The whole (400 lines) comprises the longest carval I have seen, yet it is of good quality throughout. The same version as here given was also printed about 1870, at the end of a scarce Manx pamphlet, recording a humorous conversation between Mannanan Mac-y-Leir and an old Manx woman, on the top of Snaefell. Those who are interested in Manx music may note that the tune called by Dr Clague, “Mish ta’n Billey Roauyr,” is most likely that to which this carval was sung. The first line of the second verse (almost blank in Moore’s copy) reads, “T’eh mysh ny biljyn reurey” (‘He is digging about the trees’), which is probably the line which has been corrupted into Dr Clague’s title. The carval was written, accoring to the pamphlet mentioned above, by “William Kinrade, of Ballachrink, near the Renabb, ... Maughold, ... died A.D. 1854, in the 85th year of his age.”

“Myr va mee smooïnaghtyn dy dowin er Jee” (‘As I was meditating deeply upon God’), is one of those horrible rhymes which, like the Welsh “Sleeping Bard,” translated by George Borrow, seek to terrify the sinner from his evil ways. This type of composition, fortunately, forms but a small portion of the Manx carvals, though it has sometimes been stated that gloomy threats of the sort predominate in them; a belief perhaps due to the impression made by such as were written in this vein:

“O jeeagh drogh-yantee *draggal* gys y varr
 Cheet gys y Vriw dy ghoail nyn mriwnys chair
 Tra bare-lhieu chea, as nuirin ghoail myr reih
 Ny cheet dy chlashtyn *sentence* cairagh treih.”

‘O see the lost, forced to the bar to come
Before their Judge to receive their righteous doom
Rather they’d flee Hell’s burning pains to hear
Than list the dreadful sentence they must hear.’

For the honour of Manx carvals, I am glad to say that the joys of Heaven are by far the most commonly employed incentives to a good life, and samples like the above are rare, but, as they do sometimes occur, I have not thought it justifiable to omit all mention of them, as I should like to do.

Of all the MSS. books that I have seen, the following one is, I think, the most important. It is one of those which were lent to me by the Archdeacon. It is a thick duodecimo volume, 6 inches by 3&threequarters; by 2; the covers are of light brown cardboard sewn over a sailcloth back. The name of the first owner was John Bridson, of Portabella, not far from Arragon-Mooar, in Santon. The dates range from 1790 to 1797. The greater part of this book is taken up with carvals properly so called, but there is a section which is composed of hymns, and four more hymns are contained in other parts of the book. Though [489] the hymns do not strictly come under the description of carvals, I hope that I may be pardoned for a short digression concerning them. The section which is dated “January 30th, 1790,” consists of thirty hymns and one metrical psalm. All of them appear to be translations from English originals, though I have been unable to trace more than eighteen of them. They include hymns by Watts, Wesley, T. Olivers, one by Cowper, and two by Bishop Ken. I was astonished to find that no less than twenty-six were not in any hymn-book in the Manx language that I have seen, and I have examined all except that published by Daniel Cowley, of which no copy seems to be known at the present day. This hymn-book is known to have been printed previous to 1795 (a note in the hymn-book of that date states that certain hymns were taken from it), and it was also mentioned in *Feltham’s Tour*, 1798) as having been published by Cowley. It seems quite possible that we have in the present MSS. a copy of some of the hymns in the lost book. Bishop Ken’s “Morning and Evening Hymns” and the metrical psalm, were translated by the Rev. T. Corlett, (who also translated a number of Bishop Wilson’s sermons into Manx) and had been printed as a pamphlet in 1785. If the newly found hymns are not from Cowley’s book, they may be some referred to by John Wesley, in a letter dated 1789, published in *Mannin* some years ago, from which we learn that he put a stop, or tried to do so, to a proposed Manx hymn-book. The following may serve as a specimen of these hymns:

“Booise as gloyr dy vow gys Jee
Oltyn Chreest trog shiu nyn gree.
Son dy vel shin foast er-mayrn

Booise as gloyr dy row da'n Chiarn."

'To our God give thanks and praise
Christians! hearts and voices raise
For the life He grants us, sing
Thanks and glory to our King.'

We now return to the carvals. The first one is on Noah and the Flood:

"She lurg da Joe ny Ghloyr ren croo, Yn seihll ..."
(‘After the King of Glory had created the world.’)

It is merely the account of the Flood as given in Genesis, put into rhyme without much originality; there are four verses not given in Moore’s copy, and many variations.

“Shiuish ashoonyn, tayrn shiu er-gerrey don” (‘Ye nations, drawn near to me.’) This is not in Carvalyn Gailckagh, but [490] a copy was printed in the *Examiner*, in 1916. It opens with an exhortation not to regard the place where they were met together as an inn; probably a reference to the rowdy proceedings which, as we have seen, sometimes took place on the Oiel Verry. After referring to the death of St Stephen, and the ascent to Heaven of Elijah, the poem turns suddenly to the Revelation of St John—so suddenly as to suggest that some verses must be lacking in this copy—and thence wanders away to exhortations to good living, the shortness of this life, and the joys that are beyond the grave. This is by no means in, the first rank of the carvals, but there are some good passages in it. The chariot coming for Elijah, for instance:

“Yn chariot haink, as beign da'n dooinney goll
Ayns bodjal dorraghey ren ny cabbil shooyll.”

‘The chariot came; away the prophet passed,
O'er darksome clouds the horses galloped fast.’

The “Carval yn Noo Paul,” already mentioned as having been attributed to Moore the Tiger, comes next. There are many verses here which are not in A.W. Moore’s book, making the story much more complete.

“Carval Yoseph” is, of course, in this collection. It is in nearly all these MSS., and must have been highly popular in its day. There is a verse in it which is not in all copies, in which Joseph claims the power of “divining.”

“My chaarjyn deyr jiu er veiteil” (‘My dear friends who have met together today’). Moore has a very imperfect copy of 28 verses. There are 10 more verses here, and an additional 14 verses in one of the MSS. in Mr Wood’s collection. The subjects of the poem are repentance, forgiveness, Heaven, and Hell.

“Myr va meeronsagh fud Goo Yee” (‘When I was searching in God’s Word’). A version of this fine carval has been printed in the *Isle of Man Examiner*, September 2nd, 1916. It is a vision of the broad and narrow ways, founded on the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In general character, as well as in metre, it reminds on of the carval “Philip Ellison.” The sleeper sees two roads before him, and a narrow gate above which was written, “Seek and thou shalt find; seek to open and thou wilt get thy earnest desire,” etc. He is stirred up to take this road, led by the Gospel, but in pressing through a crowd he is wearied by his sins, and faints. On looking round, he sees himself to be on a broad road with a great crowd of mockers. He strives to get out of the crowd. The Evangelist calls him back to read [491] the title over the gate of the road he is on. “Flee from the wrath to come,” he reads, “a friend is before thee who will take off thy burden.” He repents, prays for guidance, and:

“Yn Ayr hene haink my whail lesh shee,
As gerjagh jeean haink or my chree.
Mac Yee niee voym my pheccaghyn,
Quoi gheayrt e uill deyr er my hon,
As chyndaa ad t’er shagheryn,
Cur lesh ny kimmee ass y *dungeon*.”

‘Then God the Father brought me rest,
And peace and comfort filled my breast.
Whilst Jesus washed my sins away,
Who shed His blood my debt to pay,
And turned back those who erst did roam,
Bringing the pardoned sinners home.’

“Myr va mee, charjyn, lhaih ‘syn Ghoo” (‘As I was reading, my friends, in the Word’). This is the “Carval Nebuchadnezzar,” a most misleading title, for three verses only out of the 53, deal with that monarch. It is not contained in Moore’s collection, but a version was printed in the *Examiner*, in August-September, 1915. The first 28 verses are occupied, in a rambling fashion, with events taken from the Old and New Testaments. The remainder of the poem is a lamentation of the wickedness of mankind in general.

“O Annym dooisht! dooisht ass dty chadley trome! (‘O soul, awake! awake from thy deep sleep!’) This poem, which was first published in the *Examiner*, November, 1916, from a copy found in one of Mr Wood’s carval-books, is of an unusual character. The soul is admonished to take flight through the universe, increasing its knowledge of God’s works, until, having arrived at Heaven, it can let down its wings and meditate on the difference between Heaven and Earth. This takes up eight verses, and the remaining seven are composed of an eulogy of Heaven.

“Dty hooill lesh fakin cha jean dy bragh gaase skee,
 Ny foast dty chleaysh lesh kiaull ny flaunyssee,
 Ooilley dty vian as dt’aigney vees jeant-magh
 Lesh dagh nhee millish ‘s dagh nhee eunyssagh.”

‘Thine eye with seeing ne’er shall sated be,
 Nor shall the heavenly music pall on thee:
 Celestial pleasures which shall never cloy,
 With all things sweet, and all that gives thee joy.’

Carval MacStroialtagh. “Chaarjyn, lhaih mee jeh dooinney aeg, Nagh row goll dys y cheeill” (Carval of the spendthrift son. ‘Friends, I read of a young man who would not go to church.’) Moore has two versions of this visionary piece. It [492] is one of the poems of the “broad road” type. The soul meets, on the broad road, with evil spirits, who claim him as their prey, appealing to his own conscience as judge. Conscience condemns him, but, on appealing to Christ for aid, he is rescued by Mercy and Peace, who come flying to rescue him.

“Nish Myghin lesh e skianyn sheaylt,
 As Shee ayns slane cordail,
 Haink ‘whail yn annym boght dy Leah,
 As ren eh e hauail.”

‘Now Mercy, with his wings outspread,
 And Peace to aid him came,
 Swiftly that wretched man to meet,
 And saved his soul from shame.’

Whereupon he awakes and leads a better life for the future. This carval is, as we shall see later, probably of very early date.

“Roish my row flaunys er my chroo
 Ny ainleyn sollys kiaddit ayn.”

‘Before the heavens were created,
 Or bright angels formed therein.’

This is a carval summarizing *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s great poem was paraphrased into about 4,000 lines Of Manx, by the Rev. Thomas Christian, of Marown, and published in the year 1796. In the title the work was said to be “selections” from the

poem, but this is understating the facts. It is a fine paraphrase of the whole. The carval we are now considering is not only a summary of *Paradise Lost*, but it contains lines taken almost word for word from Christian's *Pargys Caillit*, or *vice versa*. Amongst others, the following may be cited:

From verse 4, describing chaos:

“Dowin fegooish grunt, as ard gyn baare,
Lhean neesht gyn oirr as liauyr gyn kione.”

‘Deep without bottom and high without top,
Broad, also, without margin, and long without end.’

Compare this with *Paradise Lost* (Manx Society, Vol. xx), page 54:

“Ta'n dowin gyn grunt, ard te neesht gyn baare,
Liauyr fegooish kione, as fegooish mean as oirr.”

‘The deep is without bottom, high is it also, without top,
Long without end, and without middle nor margin.’

[493] Or, compare verse 9, describing the creation of the angels:

“Myr ‘syn glen oie vershin my-ner
Ny aileyn haney t'er nyn skyn
Lossey dy gennal ayns yn aer
As lieh-my-lieh cur soilshey hooïn,
Dagh rollage ... Mooar as beg,
Ta lane lesh soilshey bee mayd ayn.”

‘As on a-clear night we may spy
The brilliant stars above our head
Merrily twinkle in the sky;
As turn about their light they spread,
These stars all ... great and small,
Are full of the light we see them shed.’

With *Paradise Lost*, page 54, where the same creation is thus described:

“Myr ayns oie aalin ta shin cur my-ner
Ny cainlyn sollys lossey ayns yn aer;
Paart beg, paart mooar, cur soilshey er dagh lane

Rere towse y phooar ta Jee er n'eeasaght daue
 Foast ooilley sollys Tossey lleh-ny-lhey
 Chioee freayll nyn reill yn dooghys t'ad jeant jeh.”

‘As in a cloudless night we may espy
 The brilliant candles flashing in the sky;
 Some small, some great, on every hand they shine
 As God has gifted them with power divine,
 Yet each one brightly gleams in its own way,
 Keeping the natural laws imposed for aye.’

Now this carval was written before 1793, and *Pargys Caillit* was not published before 1796, and I think that the Rev. Thomas Christian was a poet who had no need to plagiarize from a carval. The probability is that he had written this carval, and probably *Pargys Caillit* also, by 1793. There are several other carvals possibly written by him, one of which we shall come across by and by.

Carval mychione Cheet Creest: “Yn oyr t'er hayrn shin cooidjagh jiu” (Carval about Christ's coming: ‘The cause that has drawn us together to-day’). Not published. The authors, for there are two of them—Robert Leece and William Skillicorn—remind their hearers that they have not met merely for pastime, and beg them to consider the sacred origin of the feast. Some who could be named in that church were pulling each others hair, and tormenting those who were praying:

“Son paart v'er jeet ayns shoh dy chraid
 As paart trooid cliaghtey cloie as sport,
 Fer tayrn for alley gys yn olk: [494]
 Myr shoh ta earroo mooar nyn vud
 Nagh vel cur geill
 Dy lhaih sy cheeill,
 Ta'n reamys shoh currit da'n eill.”

‘For some have hither come to mock,
 And some through custom sport and play.
 One draws another to ill deeds:
 Thus there are many here to-day
 Who little heed
 What here they read;
 This licence to the flesh they cede.’

“O s'maynrey yu stayd v'ee nyn chied Ayr
 Tra v'eshyn crooit ayns jalloo Yee.”

‘O happy the state of our first father
When he was created in the image of God.’

This is an unpublished carval. The first five verses are on the fall of Adam, and the remaining 15 on Christ’s life on earth. It is written in six-line stanzas, consisting of three couplets. The following may serve as an example (verse 10):

‘Ve’h niee yn lourane, soilshagh’ ny doail—
As foast v’ad gra ta ayn y Jonyl.
Agh ‘smooar va e erreish dauesyn as dooin,
As sthll v’eh prayll son e noidyn.
‘Smooar va e vyghin as ereish.
O moyll’-jee ennym Yeesey Creest!’

‘He lepers cleansed—the blind He healed:
They said He Satan’s powers could wield.
For them, for us, His love was great,
He prayed for those who did Him hate.
Great was His mercy and His love:
O praise the name of Christ above.’

“O shiuish Chreesteenyn t’ayns shoh er veiteil” (‘O ye Christians who have met here to-day’), is also unpublished. It is rather a commonplace composition on salvation and the Day of Judgment. A few pages further on we find one more worthy of mention.

“Roish my row yn seihll shoh crooit” (‘Before this world was created’). A version was published in the *Examiner*, in July, 1915. It has been suggested that it may have been written by the Rev. Thomas Christian. It will certainly bear comparison with his other work. The author begins his poem with the creation, the fall of man, and Noah’s flood. He then [495] draws the inference that all evils are the result of sin, and that, if all did what they knew to be right, wars would be turned to peace, health and plenty would be in every house, etc. The following two verses, the latter of which is unpublished, will show the style of versification (verses 18 and 19):

“Erson nyu grogh-yannoo ta shin
Laadit cha tromme fo corree Yee;
In berehagh soiagh beg jeh’n voght,
Ta’n seyr freayll fo ny laboree
Myghin as chyminey ... Er feiy-ny-cruinney
Faggys jarroodit ec dagh dooinney.”

“Agh foast ta gerjagh cour y boght,
 Son my t’eh laadit mvass ayns shoh
 Bee eh chyndaait gys fea as shee,
 Boggey ‘as maynrys ayns seihtl noa
 Yn boght ta imlee ... Ta meein ayns cree,
 Ta’n bannaght giallit da ec Jee.”

‘Because of our ill deeds are we
 So heavy burdened ‘neath God’s frown,
 The wealthy men despise the poor,
 The freemen keep the labourers down.
 Pity’s forgot ... in every spot,
 Almost by the whole world, I wot.”

‘And yet there’s comfort for th’ oppressed,
 If he be laden here below
 All will be changed to peace and rest
 In that new world he then shall know.
 The humble poor, ... if he endure,
 God will provide a blessing sure.”

Before turning to the last mss. which we will examine this evening, there is a carval from one of Mr Wood’s books which cannot be passed over. It will be found in the book which was written—i.e., copied—by Robert Kneale, in 1792. Moore has a very imperfect copy, but his “Tra ta mish jeeaghyn er yn yrjid heose” has only 48 verses. A copy mentioned in the preface to the Manx Society’s xvi. volume, is there said to have 65 verses. Robert Kneale’s copy has 64, but Moore’s has two verses not here given, so a complete copy has 66 verses. The author was the Rev. Thomas Allen, Vicar of Maughold (born 1702, died 1754), the last of the five of that name who held that vicarage in succession. The date (1758), given in the Manx Society’s volume is obviously incorrect, and Moore’s date (1728) seems probable. The poem opens with Adam’s fall [496] and condemnation. Adam, bemoaning his fate, calls on Mercy for help:

“Cre vel oo, Vyghin, v’ayms un cheayrt voish Jee?
 Cre vel dty huyr, dty charrey millish Shee?
 Vel Cairys slane, as Firrinys goaill niart?”
 Nagh vel eu fockle dy loayrt er my phaart?

‘Where art thou, Mercy, God once sent to me?

Doth thy sweet sister, Peace, my presence flee?
Do Truth and Justice ‘venge God’s broken laws?
And say ye not one word to help my cause?

Mercy, thereupon, pleads with the Almighty for Adam, but is opposed by Truth and Justice. Peace now intervenes on Adam’s behalf, and a jury of the four is assembled to discuss the case. They find no conclusion; but Christ decrees that one pure from all sin should take Adam’s place, and on all four protesting that no such man had ever been found, Christ takes man’s nature upon himself and thus reconciles the demand of all. The poem is written with much dramatic force, and reminds one strongly of the conversation between Mercy, Peace, Truth, and Righteousness, in the 18th section of *Piers the Ploughman’s Vision*.

Some months ago, the Archdeacon very kindly sent me a carval-book for examination, which he had received from a parishioner who was intending to give it to the Manx Museum. The Archeacon wished me to go through it before it was presented, to see if any unpublished or otherwise interesting carvals were contained in it. The ms. was of no great antiquity, having been copied in the year 1859, but the writer, Philip Corkill, states that the contents were taken from old carval-books. The pages, of various kinds of paper—blue, white, hand-made, and woven, number over 300. Scraps of atrociously bad Latin are scribbled here and there between the carvals. The total number of lines is about 2,600 Manx, and 660 English. Of the Manx, nearly 1,100 lines have never been published, though I already had about 140 lines from a previously examined ms., and 100 lines in English were also new to me. Two of the poems seem to be of some importance. The first is a grim dispute between a disembodied soul and its body lying in a grave, as to which was responsible for their joint perdition.

By a curious coincidence, a few weeks before the ms. reached my hands, Miss Gilchrist, of Lancaster, wrote to me asking if I knew of any such poem in the Manx language, as she suspected from a tune that had been sent to her, that a poem on the subject had at one time existed on the Island. I sent her a copy with a literal translation I understand that [497] it will appear in a forthcoming Manx number of the *Folksong Journal*. I have seen nothing like it in any other carval. Though necessarily grim, it is written with such force, earnestness, and restraint, that it rises far above the “brimstone and hell-fire” type which I mentioned just now. It begins:

“Myr hie mee dy lhie roym oie dy row,
She ashlish honnick mee ‘syn oie
Seaghyn mooar hug eh ayns m’aigney,
Trimshey trome as brishey chree.”

‘One night as I lay on my bed

A fearful vision I did see
 Heavy grief, a troubled mind
 And breaking heart it brought to me.'

The sleeper sees a soul escape from Hell, and, pursued by a troop of demons, run to a graveside. There the soul bewails its lot and upbraids the body, which has brought it to such a pass, enumerating its misdeeds while the two of them were joined together. The body replies that their joint condemnation is just, and that the soul should have restrained the body, instead of egging it on to ill deeds.

“Yn challin volliee [*sic*] v’ayns yn oaie
 Dansoor eh magh lesh ard-ghlare,
 ‘Dys niurin sheese my ta shin er shooyll
 Cha vel veg ain nish agh nyn giare.
 Ta mee goaill rish dy ren shin peccah
 As arrys traalhisagh ve goit,
 Agh rieau peccah dy jagh shin mysh
 Hug oo ayn dty aigney as dty slane *consent*.”

‘The mouldering body in the grave,
 With a loud voice, replied again—
 “To Hell together, if we wend,
 We have deserved eternal pain.
 I do acknowledge we have sinned,
 And mortals should in time repent,
 But when we went to do ill deeds,
 Thou, Soul, did’st give thy full consent.”

The soul still blames the body, which was too strong to be turned from its ways. And calling out a despairing farewell “until the day of Judgment come,” it is seized again by the pursuing demons. The dreamer then awakes:

“Shoh va *condition* yn annym treih,
 Yn ashlish honnick mee ‘syn oie:
 Seaghyn mooar hug eb ayns m’aigney,
 Trimshey trome as brishey chree.”

‘Thus did I leave this wretched soul
 In the night vision I did see.
 Heavy grief, a troubled mind,
 And breaking heart it brought to me.’

[498] The second carval, which is the last I shall deal with this evening, is interesting partly from the authorship attributed to it, and partly because it mentions several old customs. Otherwise, it is, I must acknowledge, rather a doggerel production. According to Philip Corkill, who, it must be remembered, copied the poems from older MSS., it was “Bilt by doctr Walker 1646 and coppied by thomas Stephn of Ballaugh in 1760.” “Bilt,” I take it, means constructed or composed. Now the only Dr Walker possible is William Walker, L.L.D., who shared Bishop Wilson’s imprisonment in Castle Rushen, in 1722. Nevertheless, I think that the attribution of the poem to William Walker is probably correct. The copy is very corrupt, and it is to be hoped that sooner or later some other more satisfactory text will turn up. It is chiefly on the Christmas festivities, but it rather jumps from one subject to another and in places is downright obscure, blemishes which some more perfect copy may remove.

The following points may be of interest:

From verse 4:

“Ny bee shiu myr va’n scollag aeg
Nagh row goll dys yn cheeill.
Va’n scollag aeg er shaghryn
Cha jinnagh eh goaill coyrle,
Agh huill ayns raaidyn Mac Stroailtagh
As yeear Reyn peccoil.”

‘Nay, be ye not like the young man
To church who would not go.
The stripling strayed from the right way,
He no advice would heed,
But walked the Prodigal’s sad path
In sinful thought and deed.’

This is a clear reference to the carval beginning “Chaarjyn lhaih mee jeh dooinney aeg” (‘Friends, I read of a young man’), which we had in John Bridson’s book, and it shows that that carval was well known previous to the year 1729.

Verse 6:

“Ayns fiddleryn as caartyn neesht,
As gooashlaghey nyn Yee,
Ceau daa laa yeig ny Nolllick
Myr shoh dy chooilley oie.”

‘We fiddle and we play at cards,
At times we church attend;
During the twelve long days of Yule
Each evening thus we spend.’

[499] In those days the Christmas holiays lasted from Christmas Eve to the “Little Christmas” (‘Yn Nolluck-beg’) and during those 12 days no work which was not absolutely necessary was supposed to be done. Speaking of the Church:

Verse 7:

“Nagh flaunyssagh yn shilley eh
Er dorraghys ny hoie!
Yn chainle ayns shoh ve er sollys,
Coyrt moylley as gloyr da Jee.”

‘It is a heavenly sight to see,
In the darkness of the night,
The congregation praising God,
Their candles burning bright.’

This is probably a reference to the candles, often three-branched, carried by the carval singers.

Verse 8:

“Lish gee, gin, as lesh leggadyn
Nee mayd yn feailley reayll.”

‘With feasting and with valentines
Thus will we keep the feast.’

On the last day of the Christmas holidays, a master of ceremonies was appointed, who chose partners for the men for the coming year, using the following form—of course, in Manx: “Listen and hear and give heed. N. and M. are valentines (‘leggadyn’) for this year, and longer if they be agreeable. Praise and joy, peace and plenty to them,” etc.

Verse 9:

“My nee oo fo laue Aspick goll
Yiow gioot yn Spyrriyd Noo.”

‘If you are confirmed [lit.: go under the Bishop’s hand]

You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’

A canon was passed by the Manx Church, in 1704, regulating confirmation. No unconfirmed person could in this period be married without a special dispensation.

Verse 18:

“Agh yn poosey casherick
Ta sarit dooin ec Jee,
Yn fiddler vees goll toshiaght roin
Dy hroggal seose nyn gree.” [500]

‘But holy wedlock did our God
To Adam’s race ordain.
The fiddler will before us go
Our spirits to sustain.’

In Waldron’s time (1726), the tune called “The black and grey” was always played before a wedding party on the way to church. Dr Walker seems to consider a wedding such a depressing ceremony that the hearts of the spectators—or perhaps those of the principals—had to be kept up by the fiddler! The fiddler having been brought into the poem, we see him in the next verse arousing the household on New Year’s Day.

Verse 19:

“Cre’n bannaght mooar hig onrin
Ayns toshiaght yn vlein noa!
Yn fiddler cheet roish yn laa
As briaght vel shin bio.
As gyllagh lurg yn ennym
Ooilley yn lught-thie,
As lhieeney dy chooilley annym jeu
Lesh eunyssyn dy ghraih.”

‘What blessing will the New Year bring?
Before the day shall break
The fiddler will come to the door
And ask if we’re awake.
He one by one the household calls,
Each name he knows full well,
And makes the hearts of every one
With love and joy to swell.’

His fee is paid the next day. His wife, “with face neat and clean,” we are told, turns up to ask for it, and gets a “... cut brawe d’eill ny tortys mooar dy feeyn” (‘a good cut of meat or a good gift of wine’), for an offering or for his hire.” She will leave the place with a grateful heart, after blessing the cattle and the calves, and will go home well laden.

Before I close, I would say a few words about the carvals in the English language, which may be found scattered through the MSS. On the whole they do not come up to the Manx standard. Some are mere Christmas hymns, or well known carols. Occasionally one meets with an unfamiliar carol, which, one feels sure, is an importation, but which one cannot trace on the mainland. I have one in mind which has a refrain,

“I love: all men because I know
That Christ has loved me.”

[501] Of the genuine carvals in English, one, possibly the finest example of doggerel in the English language, seems to have had a long life, for I have seen it in a MS., dated 1771, and in a second one dated about 1830. It begins:

“All Christians I pray now attend,
A worthy poem I have penned.”

The name of the author is, unfortunately, lost, but it is to be hoped that he was not annoyed by unkind critics, as another carval writer appears to have been, who complains (in Manx) that the audience “whisper and pass judgment on those who sing.”

To sum up: I do not know of any very early reference to carvals, but the custom of singing them on Christmas Eve seems to have been well established before the latter part of the 17th century, and is very likely much earlier. They constitute a decidedly national and popular literature, and though there is, as was to be expected, a proportion of rubbishy doggerel amongst them, the average quality is decidedly good, and sometimes shows a high degree of imagination. The subjects are not confined to, or usually deal with, the Nativity, though biblical narratives of some description are common themes. Many are visionary in their setting. Many deal with the joys of Heaven, and a few with the terrors of Hell.

There is a large amount of this literature, much of it unpublished, and a complete collection is much to be wished for. Considering the smallness of the population of the Island during the time these poems were produced, Manxmen may well be proud of their Gailck [*sic*] literature.

Source: Cyril I. Paton, “Manx Carvals and Carval Books, with Notes on some of the MSS.” *Proceedings of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society* ii.4 (1926): 480–501.