

Manx Notes 168 (2013)

THE MANX FISHERMEN'S EVENING HYMN ITS ORIGIN TRACED? (1926) *

[2c] The smoke-grimmed manuscript carval books which up to a few years ago were to be found in many Manx homes contained not only numerous original compositions on sacred subjects written in the Manx language, but not a few similar productions in English, handed down both in writing and on the lips of singers for many generations, and in some cases wedded to native airs. Some of them may have been home-made, and are certainly the work of unlettered men, redeemed them from absurdity by their quaintness and their simple piety; but others were demonstrably imported from England, and may be compared with known originals. In some cases they must be of great age, and are most valuable specimens of early folk-verse. In a later generation, a considerable number of hymns of Wesley and Watts were translated into Manx, and later still, when the "camp meetings" of the Primitive Methodists came into vogue, hymns from the "small book" compiled by Hugo Bourne and William Sanders were sung to native airs, and a few of them received the testimonial of being translated into the language most familiar to the worshippers. "The Good Old Way," known to many Manxfolk of the present generation, is a case in point.

Reference has already been made in this journal to the publication in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* of a large number of Manx airs gathered from the collection of the late Dr Clague, and reproduced, with most illuminating exposition and commentary, by Miss A.G. Gilchrist, one of the best-known living authorities on folk-song throughout the British Isles. The whole of the last three numbers of the Society's Journal has been devoted to the preservation of these Manx airs; the first number contained a selection of the secular tunes, with scraps of the accompanying ballads, the second related to the carols sung in Manx, and the third, which is newly published, reproduces the Manx tunes sung to English carols and hymns, and also gathers up, in a series of "Last Gleanings," further information on all branches of the subject which has come to hand since Miss Gilchrist commenced her task. Throughout the work Miss Gilchrist has had the assistance of several well-qualified local students—the Archdeacon of Mann, the Misses Morrison, Miss Mona Douglas, and Messrs C.I. Paton, P.W. Caine, and W. Cubbon—and has been collaborated with on the musical side by Miss Lucy H. Broadwood, editor of the Folk-Song Society's journal, and on the philological side by Mr A. Martin Freeman.

* P.W. Caine, "The Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn," *Isle of Man Examiner*, 3 September 1926, 2 col. e & [continued foot of] col. f.

THE QUAIN'T CONCEITS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

In the present number, attention may be drawn to the preservation, with most interesting variations, of the ancient English carols, "The Leaves of Lime" and "The Fourteen Stations of the Cross"; and also to the local tunes sung to the early Primitive Methodist hymns, "Christ He sits on Zion's hill," "Come, all ye wand'ring pilgrims dear" (containing a most picturesque dialogue between the pilgrim and Apollvon), and another bearing the constant refrain, "We'll shout and sing." The old worthies from whose singing Dr Clague noted the tunes,—William Duke, Flaxney Stowell, John Cubbon, Thomas Cowell, and others,—will be well-known by acquaintance or repute to many Manx people.

THE "FISHERMEN'S EVENING HYMN"

The "Last Gleanings" consist mainly of scraps of text which complete a hitherto suspected identification of songs sung in the Isle of Man, sometimes in a Manx translation, with old English ballads well-known to collectors. Miss Gilchrist essays to reveal the origin of the musical compositions known to devout people throughout the world as "The Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn." It was never sung by the Manx fishermen as a hymn; Mr W.H. Gill, who published the air and wrote the words—very noble words they are, too, in the main—has admitted (one fancies in the periodical called *The Choir*) that he knew that the Manx fishermen did engage in prayer and sing a hymn of some kind, before putting out to sea, and that this piece of music seemed so profoundly devotional that he felt himself justified in imagining that they might have been sung to sacred words upon such an occasion. The actual words, as preserved by Dr Clague and now published by Miss Gilchrist, are anything but devotional; one does not mean that they are indecent, but they are as frivolous and rapid as a Feldman "catch of the season." They begin with the phrase, "Eaisht oo as clasht oo" ("Listen thou and hear thou"), which was probably the only scrap of the original that Mr Gill knew, and upon which he founded the opening line of his hymn, "Hear us, O Lord, from heaven Thy dwelling-place." Miss Gilchrist relates them to one of the kindly, gay, old Manx customs, the pairing off of lads and lasses as valentines for the coming year. "Listen ye and hear ye," the master of ceremonies would begin; "Jenny and Johnny, say, are valentines"—in Manx, *legadyn*—"for this year, and longer if they are agreeable." Miss Gilchrist remarks that Mr Gill's publication of the air as "The Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn" was probably its first appearance joined to other than secular words.

Possibly it was; but the air which is now published resembles the "Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn" in the most casual character, resembles it in structure rather than in actual phrase. If Mr Gill "adapted" this fragment, the adaptation was so thorough-going as to amount to an entirely new composition, and the "Fishermen's Evening Hymn" does not sound as though it were of modern manufacture; it contains all the characteristics to be noted in any admittedly genuine

old air. And as such, it is so changed with emotion and solemnity, so very suitable for mating with an expression of devotion to the Almighty, that one finds it difficult to believe that it really was sung, except perhaps in parody, to such rubbish as Miss Gilchrist here quotes. Mr Gill might occasionally be given credit for unearthing an air for himself, instead of relying every step of his way upon the researches of Dr Clague.

THE KIDNAPPING OF THE FIDDLER

The difference of opinion on one item in the collection does not, however, [2f] lessen one’s thorough admiration for the collections as a whole, and one’s profound gratitude to the lady who compiled it and, with immense labour and learning, annotated it. One cannot leave the volume now under review without commending a thoroughly charming little bit of folk-lore, illustrating the tune “Oie as Laa” (Night and Day’), contributed by Miss Mona Douglas, to whom the story was told by the late Mr Robert Kerruish, C.P. The Folk-Song Society’s journal is issued only to subscribers, and additions to their ranks would be welcomed by the secretary, Miss Lydia John, of 19, Berners-street, London, W.I.

