

Manx Notes 200 (2015)

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“INTRODUCTION”
SONGS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN *
(PART I)
(1924)

I. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON DR JOHN CLAGUE

[xi] Dr John Clague, the noter of the tunes in this collection (born October 10th, 1842, died August 23rd, 1908) was the son of H. Clague, Ballanorris, Arbory, Isle of Man. He was educated at Arbory Parochial School, Castletown Grammar School, and King William’s College. and after receiving his medical training at Guy’s Hospital, London, returned to the Isle of Man, where he filled various medical offices and had also a large practice, covering practically the whole of the south of the Island, which was the district in which most of his tunes were collected. His friend, the Ven. John Kewley, Archdeacon of the Isle of Man, gives me some further interesting details. Dr Clague was a violinist and a student of science and theology. With Deemster Gill he started an orchestra in Castletown, but after a few concerts it was disbanded when he began his search for folk-music about 1890. The main period over which his songs were collected seems to have been from about 1890 to 1894. In the summer of 1894 he and Deemster Gill were joined in the systematic search for Manx folk-music by Mr W.H. Gill, the Deemster’s brother, their combined labours covering the whole of the Island. After the appearance of the selections from Dr Clague’s mss. comprised in the *Manx National Songs* (1896) and *Manx National Music* (1898), both arranged by Mr Gill, the doctor ceased to collect, but took up the study of the language, at which he worked hard until his death. From his earliest days he was deeply interested in everything connected with the land of his birth. The inauguration of the Manx Language Society specially appealed to him. “He saw the mother tongue rapidly dying out, and was anxious to secure and place on record all that would show it in its purest style.” The last few years before his death he spent much time with old Manx folk, “obtaining and writing down on the spot everything he could draw from them which threw light on the construction of the language.” His notes were carefully transcribed in the thirty volumes or so which he left behind him.

His book of *Manx Reminiscences*, which contains many interesting notes on the history, customs, folklore, and folk-medicine of the Island, as gathered during the

* A.G. Gilchrist, “Introduction [Songs from the Isle of Man (Part i)],” *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* vii.28 (1924), xi–xvi.

last fifty years of the nineteenth century, was only just completed before his death in 1908, and was posthumously published in 1911. It is written in parallel pages of Manx-Gaelic and English.

[xii] Dr Clague, on the internal evidence of his collection, was a good judge of the genuine folk-song. He recognised the existence of the Dorian Mode—that mode of folk-music which is strangest to the modern ear—and recorded faithfully what he heard. It has been necessary to discard very few of his tunes as “composed” airs, and but few were even on that borderline to which such songs as “Poor Old Horse,” “The Gallant Hussar,” “The Golden Glove” and “Colin and Phœbe” belong. Variants of all these were noted by Dr Clague, though not included in the present selection.

2. OTHER COLLECTIONS OF MANX AIRS

Prior to 1896, in which year Speaker A.W. Moore’s *Manx Ballads* appeared almost simultaneously with Mr W.H. Gill’s *Manx National Songs*—Mr Moore’s collection containing seventy-four ballads and forty-five tunes, with interesting introductions and notes—the only printed collection of Manx tunes had been a production of 1820, called *The Mona Melodies; a Collection of Ancient and Original Airs of The Isle of Man*, and now extremely scarce. It consisted of thirteen melodies—some badly noted, and further distorted to compel them to fit feeble English words bearing no relation whatever to the original songs which they supplanted and which were deemed by the compiler of “no general interest.” The new verses were, more truly, of no particular interest. From a student’s point of view, Mr Moore’s collection of 1896 is more satisfactory than any other which has yet appeared, as the original Manx words are given with their tunes, the latter also appearing, unaltered, as noted. Texts are printed even when their tunes were not obtained, and *vice-versâ*. Of Moore’s forty-five tunes, the larger number are recognisable as variants of English, Scottish, and Irish airs, but others are unfamiliar and may really be native to the Island. But no comparative study of Manx traditional airs and songs tracing any kinship with them outside the Island has until now been seriously attempted.

3. THE CLAGUE COLLECTION

The Clague Collection, as I have received it, consists of 315 tunes and variants. About 140 tunes drawn from this source appear—some, however, in an altered form and adapted to new words—in Mr W.H. Gill’s *Manx National Songs*, 1896, and *Manx National Music*, 1898. But a considerable number of interest and value still remained in manuscript. In 1913 the publication of selections from the tunes still unprinted was begun in *Mannin*, the half-yearly journal of the Manx Language Society, and in 1916 the editor, Miss Sophia Morrison, with whom I had been corresponding on the subject of Manx music and folklore, asked me to assist her in the [xiii] further selection of the most characteristic and valuable airs, lending me a copy of the

manuscript for the purpose. Seventeen had already been printed in *Mannin*, but two tunes only of my selection—the wool-winding and grinding-songs in *Mannin* No. 8—had appeared, before Miss Morrison’s untimely and lamented death brought to an end the Journal of which she was the founder and inspiration. It has therefore been a happy task to take up again, this time in the *Folk-Song Journal*, with the goodwill and assistance of my Manx friends, a small portion of the work to which she devoted herself—the recording and preservation of the traditional literature and lore of the Manx people—to which labour she joined the work of promoting the cultivation of the Manx language, literature, and music. Her loss to this cause is an irretrievable one.

Miss Morrison was one of the contributors to Dr Wright’s *Dialect Dictionary*. In 1909 she began to work with Mr A.W. Moore on an “Anglo-Manx Dialect Book.” Mr Moore died the same year, but Miss Morrison carried on the work he had begun, with the co-operation of Mr Edmund Goodwin, who added phonetics, and it was ready for the press when she herself passed away. It has only this year (1924) been published, as *A Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect*. Miss Morrison also issued a book of *Manx Fairy Tales*, mostly of her own collection among the people. She was the collector of “The Water-Kelpie’s Song “ and the cante-fable of the “Lazy Wife” in this collection. She writes of Dr Clague that he loved the Manx people and they him. “To him the old folks dwelling in lonely places in the mountains or on the wild sea-coast unsealed their lips, and so he rescued from oblivion many songs sung by mother to babe, by fishermen at sea, by the ploughman on wind-swept fields, from generation to generation.”

IV. THE SINGERS

Of the singers little is now known. The dates at which the various songs were noted are only given in a few cases, and sometimes even the singer’s name is not recorded. In the latter case the tune may belong to an earlier or less systematic collecting period or have perhaps been recollected from childhood. With the exception of a tune known to have been sung by William Duke (*q.v.*) *circa* 1820, the earliest dated tune in this collection was recorded in 1859. The following list is compiled from available particulars concerning the singers:

TOM KERMODE, “Buy Doal” (“Blind Boy”), of Bradda, from whom the doctor obtained the greater part of the words and songs that he noted down (see *Manx Reminiscences*). Tom Kermode had a good memory, was a good singer, and knew the Manx language well. Although blind through smallpox, he worked as a fisherman for many years. “He had great intelligence,” says Dr Clague, “and I owe [xiv] him a great deal for the knowledge he has given me of the life of the Manx at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He deserves this to preserve his memory.”

ELLEN COSTAIN was Mrs Clague’s parents’ housekeeper, and died shortly after them, *c.* 1894.

PHILIP CAINE, “Phillie the Desert” (*ie*, “of the desert”), lived at West Baldwin, near Douglas, and was a crippled but still cheerful old man of seventy-five in April, 1895, when Mr W.H. Gill visited him to note his songs. Speaker Moore also obtained songs from this singer.

WILLIAM DUKE (1798–1873), Arbory, was a shoemaker, herbal botanist, charmer, parish-clerk and choir-leader. At the *Oie’l Voirrey* (Eve of Mary, *ie*, Christmas Eve) *carval* (carol) service of 1860, the doctor, then a youth, heard him sing “We happy herdsmen here” (given in the second part of this present collection) and afterwards noted it from his singing, there being “no music to it.” “I am in great debt to him,” says Dr Clague, “for the knowledge of the folk-lore medicine of the Manx people a hundred years ago.”

JOHN CUBBON (1829–1903), of Crofts, Castletown, was a marble-mason, sang in William Duke’s choir, and later played the double bass in Dr Clague’s orchestra. He told Dr Clague that on the night he was born William Duke, then choir-master in Arbory, came into his mother’s house and put the music-book into the infant’s hand, in order that he should become a “fer kiaullee” (“man of music”). He followed William Duke as choir-leader, and it is to be hoped was more worldly-wise than William, who once assembled his choir to sing at the squire’s door. They began with

“Though wicked men grow rich and great”—

but got no further, for the rich and great man came out in a rage and drove them away.

CHARLES CLAGUE was Dr Clague’s coachman.

MRS. ELIZABETH CLAGUE of Ballanorris was the mother of Dr Clague.

The Ven. Archdeacon Kewley possesses photographs of five of the above singers, so interesting and characteristic that I wish they could have been reproduced in this *Journal*.

V. THE TUNES AND TEXTS

Most of the tunes in the Clague collection show, as might be expected, kinship with English, Scottish, or Irish folk-airs, in the order of precedence here given. Two tunes only seem to me to sound Welsh. It is unfortunately impossible, in the absence of texts, to say how many, or, except in a very few instances, which tunes were sung [xv] to Gaelic words. Many tunes are English folk-airs whose Manx title reproduces the English one, or is descriptive of the English song. *Eg*, “Polly Oliver” appears with a Manx title equivalent to “The Soldier’s Sweetheart”; “William Taylor” is understood in Manx as “William the Tailor”; and “The Sheffield Apprentice” is called, quite as properly, “The Cruel Mistress.” The only Manx-Gaelic versions of English songs known to me (excluding *carvals*) are the Manx translations of “The Demon Lover,” “The Shepherd’s Daughter,” and “The Sheffield Apprentice,” which are printed in Moore’s *Manx Ballads*. It is a pity that Dr Clague did not record texts (whatever their character) except in a few instances, as even one verse would have shown

whether the song was sung in Manx or English. But in Moore's collection I have found Manx-Gaelic words to certain of Dr Clague's tunes which, as far as I know, have no English words belonging to them.

The majority of recorded Manx tunes thus seem to me to be immigrants, and mostly with no very long period (in a folklorist's chronology) of settlement behind them. But these Manx versions are attractive and well-formed members of the families to which they belong—no mere poor relations of their English or Scottish kin. And careful comparative study would probably help one to differentiate a special Manx flavour—a native idiom corresponding to the Anglo-Manx dialect so racily illustrated in the new Vocabulary, an idiom drawn both from Gaelic and Lancashire speech—or at least northern English sources—the latter influence not surprising when one considers how long the Lancashire Stanleys ruled as Lords of Mann.

VI. OTHER CONTRIBUTORS OF MANX MATERIAL

The contributions to this Manx number of the *Journal* sent to me by Miss Mona Douglas and a correspondent of some years standing who desires at present to remain anonymous, but for whose honesty and good faith the Archdeacon of Man is from personal knowledge able to vouch, are, though not many in number, of particular interest, especially those in which one has a glimpse of old Gaelic lore and belief. Tradition of this class, jealously guarded from a stranger's eye and ear, is difficult to procure. The Manx are shy, and only one brought up as a child among the old Manx folk and understanding their speech is likely to, be trusted with such privacies of racial belief. The gatherer thus shrinks from appearing to exploit his friends. But names, dates, and places, where withheld for the present, are in the possession of the Editorial Committee, for reference.

From the Ven. Archdeacon Kewley I have obtained a few interesting tunes and texts noted by himself, as well as much valuable help in literal translations, etc., and information. The Misses Morrison—sisters of the late Miss Sophia Morrison—and Mr Cyril Paton of Streatham have also been willing helpers in an undertaking pursued [xvi] under considerable disadvantages and difficulties, from the impossibility of now procuring the information on many points desired by a conscientious editor. Blunders are perhaps inevitable in consequence, but I have done my best, and am sincerely grateful to those who have made an interesting and delightful labour possible at all, and helped to save so much of value from Time, the Devourer.

Note.—The word *carval* will be fully explained in Part ii of this collection, in which a selection of Manx *carval* tunes and words will be printed. Though *carval* is Manx for “carol,” the word really denotes a special type of religious ballad, formerly sung in churches in the Isle of Man on Christmas Eve, by folk-singers, to traditional ballad airs, without accompaniment.

