

## “KISSING GAMES AT SUNDAY SCHOOL ENTERTAINMENTS” (1886) \*

“We have been asked to publish the following article, and letters, which deal with the custom of indulging in kissing games at social gatherings held in connection with churches and chapels and temperance organisations. There is every reason to believe that this custom is largely followed in the Island, although we may not be so bad in this respect as they are at the other side of the water. The games chiefly indulged in in this Island are known by the following title—“Silly old man” (or “Kiss-in-the-ring”), “Drop the handkerchief,” “The jolly miller,” “The Quaker’s wedding,” “The Queen of Sheba,” “Jacob’s ladder,” &c. If dancing is looked upon with so much disapproval by some people, surely the same people cannot, or should not, approve of promiscuous kissing games. It is said that these kissing games are carried on under the very nose of the leaders of religious and temperance societies.”<sup>1</sup> This article went on to reproduce the editorial column from the *Christian Million*, which also quoted from correspondence on this topic, one of whose conclusions was that “Our own candid opinion is that these ‘games’ need reforming off the face of the earth.”

Vernacular culture is ever felt to be in need of reform, or rather, erasure, and this recalls Leighton Stowell’s reminscences of his teaching of folk dance in the Island: “Also a few years ago in this port, [*ie*, Port Erin] because it was suggested that I should teach Manx and Scottish dances to a chapel Youth Club, the officials of the Sunday School threatened to resign in a block!” And in the same passage, “I well remember too how a few members of my own chapel in Castletown were greatly distressed because the six little girls were going to dance “Rigs of Marlow” and “Country Gardens” at the annual Chapel Christmas Concert.”<sup>2</sup>

Returning to the correspondence quoted in the *Christian Million*, “Band of Hope” wrote that “I have before me at this moment a programme of a *soirée* at which for nearly two hours continual kissing prevailed, the duration between each kiss probably being about two minutes. Remonstrations have no effect, be they public or private.” Of course not, when it is all such good fun, if nothing else, and that is ever the problem for many with vernacular culture.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> “Kissing Games at Sunday School Entertainments.” *Mona’s Herald* 17 March 1886, 9d–e.

<sup>2</sup> Leighton Stowell, “Folk Dancing in the Isle of Man,” *Yn Lioran* 12 (1965), 12–16.

REFERENCES

Anon, "Kissing Games at Sunday School Entertainments." *Mona's Herald* 17 March 1886, 9d–e.

Leighton Stowell, "Folk Dancing in the Isle of Man," *Yn Lioran* 12 (1965), 12–16.

