

Manx Notes 331 (2018)

“WITCHCRAFT”!! MOST EXTRAORDINARY PROCEEDINGS (1844)

Within the last three weeks proceedings have taken place in the parish of Marown, in this Island, which may humble those who boast of the march of intellect in the nineteenth century. Up to the present we have studiously refrained from advertizing to the subject, until we were in possession of the indisputable *facts*; and the following particulars, gleaned from the testimony of eyewitnesses of unimpeachable credit, may be relied on. A farmer named John Quine, residing at Ballaharry, in the above parish, recently lost, by death, several beasts: a heifer died from the effects of injuries received from a man of ungovernable temper; a cow having received a double allowance of raw potatoes, became what is termed “blown;” and a person unacquainted with the proper method of treatment, in attempting to administer relief, stabbed her in the wrong place, and as a matter of course the cow died! The third case was that of a horse, which, it is said, became “griped” by eating too many potatoes; was neglected, and also died; all of which cases were attributed by the infatuated man to the influence of *witchcraft*! Accordingly, a *trespass* warrant was obtained from his honor Deemster Heywood, on the Tuesday before Christmas, on which day nearly half the people of the parish were summoned to attend at the Half-way house on the following Thursday. On that day, at an early hour, the following persons were sworn jurymen: Caesar Christian, Joseph Cretney, W. Collister, and W. M’Clure, the two latter being local *preachers*, but in what connexion we have not learned. M’Clure was foreman, and he and Collister were particularly active; but the other two jurymen appeared to be ashamed of the whole proceedings, and took little or no part in the affair. The greater part of those examined, confessed to having, on one or two occasions, passed through Quine’s fields; but this was not the fact wished to be elicited. The principal questions (put in Manx) were “Did you *witch* Quine’s cattle?” “Have you done injury to the goods of this man.” “Do you wish evil to his goods?” “Have you coveted his wife?” “Did you wish him to prosper or fail in his business?” “Do you bear him any malice?” “Did you hear anybody talking of Quine, or seeming to grudge him what he had?” These and suchlike questions, utterly irrelevant to matters of trespass, were asked the first day. On St Stephen’s day several others were brought up to be sworn; but on this occasion Mr Christian interfered, and refused to allow such questions to be put. On the labours of the jury being concluded for this day, the people assembled were so disgusted with the superstitious mummary, that before separating they gave three loud cheers in utter derision of the proceedings.

It appears, further, that Quine is a sort of preacher himself; and on a late occasion was holding forth with much fervour, at a public prayer meeting at a place called the

Rock, in the same parish, "that God would forgive all who wished to injure him;" but, nevertheless, recent events proclaim that his own "tender mercies" were *anything* but "forgiving!" For,—can the reader believe it?—the adjourned jury was convened on Thursday last, and several people who did not attend this pious and forgiving gentleman's former juries, were this day brought up by constables! Quine's sister-in-law who, it appears, acts as a midwife in the parish, was sworn, and confessing that, having been sent for in great haste to a neighbour's house, she had once crossed Quine's fields, and on another occasion, her husband being intoxicated, and in order to get out of his way she went over a hedge of Quine's, her field and Quine's adjoining each other. She was then asked if she had any malice against Quine? or whether she had ever come in any *shape* or *form* to do him or his cattle any injury?!? The jury was then charged to bring in damages against the poor woman for trespass. Mr Fleetwood was sent for to Douglas to write down the evidence; and the jury awarded a verdict against her, which, with the expenses will amount to £5!!! It is roundly asserted that the foreman of this jury encouraged Quine to adopt these proceedings; that he accompanied him to Douglas to get the warrant, and offered himself for a juryman to conduct the investigation.

The closing "scene" in Mr Burrows, at the half-way house, where this *enlightened* jury were assembled and about to award their *righteous* verdict, and where Mr Fleetwood was busily engaged in writing the evidence, was quite in character with the other proceedings. A few boys in the neighbourhood having caught a wild rabbit, resolved to have some "fine fun" at the jury's expence, and managed, unseen, to let it loose in the room. On this formidable apparition making its appearance, the scene may be better conceived than described. From those assembled, with open mouths, distended lungs, and hair standing on end, shouts resounded that "the *witch* was caught!" "the *witch* was caught!" and one of the party, of more than ordinary courage and daring, seized the culprit, at all hazards, unceremoniously finished its existence, declaring that her witchship's pranks should then and there terminate, and that poor Quine should not be witched in his person, his effects, or the wife of his bosom any longer! Whether the learned advocate's *gravity* was discomposed on the occasion, "this deponent sayeth not;" but the boys, we learn, enjoyed the spoil amazingly. Such are the facts, which have excited no small sensation amongst the good people of Marown. We refrain from comment, at least for the present.—

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us,
To see ourselves as others see us;
It wad frae many a blunder free us,
And foolish notion."

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