

Manx Notes 424 (2020)

“MANX SUPERSTITIONS”

(1880)

[113] Although the inhabitants of the Northern parts of Scotland have for a long time had the reputation of being the most superstitious people in the British Isles, the Manx in this respect are certainly not fall behind. Of course, through the spread of education and civilization, many of the old superstitions about funeral signs, witchcraft, ghosts, and fairies, &c., have died out; but still that are hundreds in the Island in the present day who cling to them to a degree perfectly astonishing. There is no need to narrate the strange stories about the Buggane of St Trinian's, the Maudhey Dhoo of Peel Castle, the Black Lady of Castle Rushen, or the Silver Cup for the consecration of wine at Kirk Malew, as they ought to be found in most Histories or Guide books, but a few examples will be given which have been collected personally from people all of whom are now alive, and which have never as yet appeared in print.

An old man living at present in the parish of Malew, who formerly was a sailor, told me that as he was returning from his vessel which was lying in Derbyhaven Bay, he left the highroad to make his journey shorter, and proceeded across the fields. It was nearly midnight—the time when the ghosts are supposed to make their appearance—but the night was not at all dark. When he came to a certain place he saw seated on a gate, but a few yards from him, two girls, whom he very well knew. Upon remarking to them how astonished he was at seeing them out at such a late hour, they vanished; and although he searched the place very carefully, he could find no traces of them. He firmly believes to this day that they were two fairies.

A brother of his living in Castletown says that one fine night he was coming from Ballasalla, when near The Creggans, he distinctly saw a monstrous black dog about the size of a heifer, which disappeared into the hedge, and of [114] which he saw nothing more. He has no doubt but that it was something supernatural.

A manservant working at present on one of the farms on the South of the Island, told me that one night he was thrown out of bed by some invisible agency; and that at another time he saw, at the dead of night, the room in which he was sleeping illumined by some mysterious light for about the space of ten minutes, the source of which he never was able to discover. On both occasions his hair stood on end through fear. He also told me that on the floor of a certain house in which a murder was reported to have been committed, there was a spot which always appears blood-stained, and that he had seen a new piece of board when put in the place from which the stained one had been removed, after a short time became stained just like the other one was.

A woman living near St Mark's says that one night shortly before one of her children died, when in bed she saw a little coffin in the room and felt “something

like a barrel rolling over her.” This she believed was a sign sent to forewarn her of the approaching death.

These funeral signs are said to be seen by some of the old people very often, and taking at different times and different forms. Sometimes they say lights have been seen at night moving in the direction of the churchyard from the sick person’s house, cocks crowing in the evening, &c., and in some parts of the country coffee ever does a funeral take place without somebody professing to see its sign a short time before.

The visits of the supernatural are now, however, of very rare occurrence, and only some of the old people have witnessed them, but witchcrafts and charms are very common, and I know several people who are dreaded by some on account of the power which they are supposed to possess of bewitching the persons or the cattle of the enemies, and others who are often employed to charm away quinsy, &c., about whom something may be said in another number.

Pseud [signed as “Manxman”], “Manx Superstitions,” *The Barrovian* 3 (1880), 113–14.

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This is the article referred to in the previous note (*Manx Notes* 423). Whilst short, the folklore is “collected personally from people all of whom are now alive, and which have never as yet appeared in print” and valuable material appears here.

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