

Manx Notes 429 (2020)

“TRELJAH”

HARVES’

(1921)

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HARVES’

The Harves’ is arris, graihvanagh vogh veen;
The corn in a jiffy turnt yalla’ from green,
An’ nava’ a glint from the red Harves’ moon,—
But hate, ay the hate tha’s brung Harves’ soo soon.

Come gels, don yeh sun-bonnads, save yeh fair skin,
For lovely complexions the lek is not in;
An’ natheral bloom—give the saycrit away,
An’ yeh washin’ yeh faces in jew on May day.

Get sickles, an’ oul stockin’ feet on yeh han’s,
An’ bring all the childha’ yeh can to make ban’s:
Come bhoys, tuck yeh sleeves up, it’s time to begin,
An’ sharpen yeh scythes, then so arrit lek win’.

An’ quen the corn’s cut, the las’ shafe in i’s stook,
The oul’ sickle ready to hang on the hook,
I’s Hip-pip-hooraa, till our vices is bruk;
The Melliah is tuk, aw’ the Melliah is tuk.

Then tay, an’ pinjane, an’ the bistiks an’ saaves,
Lil bonnags wis’ raisins in, cut in two haaves,
Fresh griddle cakes spread wis’ new gooseberry jam,
An’ may’ve a rasha or two of Manx ham.

The barn is swep’ clane for the dancin’ an’ games;
An’ jine in the fun , oul’ men an’ oul’ dames,
Wis feet terbal swival, wis’ hearts light, as day—
The fiddlas till mornin’ keep peggin’ away.

Alas! for them oul’ days I now sit an’ mourn,
The scythe an’ the sickle lies rusty—forn;
The Melliahs, the Club-days, the innocent fun,

Are things of the pas'; an' a new worl' begun.

TRELJAH.

M.A. Watterson ["Treljah"], "Harves'," *Isle of Man Examiner* 20 August 1921, 7f.

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"Treljah" was the pen-name of Mary Ann Watterson (*née* Quirk) who was one of a number of Island authors writing in the idiom of Anglo-Manx and the poem is a fine example of their output. The sentiments expressed are familiar ones but neither the author nor any reader of the *Examiner* in 1921 would be unaware of the back breaking work of life on the land and especially that of harvest. "The Melliah is tuk, aw' the Melliah is tuk." The *mbelliah* was the last day of reaping itself and celebrated that evening as described here with a welcome release from labour and a time to celebrate with food and drink, and especially dancing, "[t]he fiddlas till mornin' keep peggin' away." By this date, the *mbelliah* as described here was gone as shown in a piece from 1916 written by the paper's agricultural correspondent:

By the way, what has become of "The Melliah"? It is hardly ever heard of now. Have farmers become more close, less generous? Are they inclined to drop the feast because it is not utilitarian? It may not be well to give up things to promote heartiness. A good melliah may be held without its degenerating into a drunken orgie [*sic*].¹

In 1890, E. Shimmin at the Primitive Methodist Tea & Public Meeting held at Loch Parade School-room in Douglas spoke of the end of harvest:

It had been celebrated in the Isle of Man for many hundreds of years—for a time under the name of the Melliah, but now it had taken a much better form. In olden times the Melliah was mostly for drinking, dancing, and fiddling.²

He was followed by J. Callow:

He had heard a lot of talk about Melliahs, but he had never been at one. At these Melliahs, he was told, they enjoyed themselves, drinking and making merry. He had enjoyed himself that evening with a good cup of tea, and it seemed like a Melliah to him.³

For William Proctor harvest celebrations had begun with the Druids:

The harvest festival they enjoyed was the offering of a human being, and dancing round an oak tree at midnight. Then they advanced a step further and got to the

¹ "Agricultural Notes," *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 October 1916.

² "Primitive Methodist Tea & Public Meeting," *Mona's Herald* 15 October 1890: 4d.

³ "Primitive Methodist Tea & Public Meeting," 4d.

Melliah and the *jough*. They had now made a step farther in advance and rendered their thanks to God.⁴

That “drinking, dancing, and fiddling” were on offer at the *mbelliah* and that—for Proctor at least—it was one stage removed from Druidical sacrifice were reason enough for it to be discontinued in that form.

The *Examiner* reported in 1901 under the heading of “The Mhelliah”:

Mrs Moore, of Moorhouse Farm, Ballagawne, kept up the good old Manx custom of holding “The Melliah” on Saturday last (Sept. 21st). A numerous company assembled shortly before 8 p.m., and after partaking of a substantial meal, a very pleasant evening was spent. Songs, recitations, etc., were given by Mrs Gilmore, Miss Salisbury, Mr B.W. Atkinson, Mr T. Woodworth, and others, and “The Melliah” of 1901 was brought to a close shortly before 12 o’clock by the singing of the National Anthem.⁵

This reads as being staged—and with the best of intentions—but staged nevertheless but with little “drinking, dancing, and fiddling” being on offer as of old.

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REFERENCES

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 ——. “[Rushen] ‘The Mhelliah.’” *Isle of Man Examiner* 28 September 1901: 5c.



⁴ “Primitive Methodist Tea & Public Meeting,” 4dDe.

⁵ “[Rushen] ‘The Mhelliah,’” *Isle of Man Examiner* 28 September 1901.