

Manx Notes 436 (2020)

“DANCING AT PORT ST MARY” A CERTAIN DIFFERENCE OF OPINION * (1896)

DEAR SIR,—Will you please allow me a little space in your valuable paper. I would like to bring before your readers’ notice the new dancing class lately opened in Port St Mary, which has caused a nine days’ talk. There is a lot of speculation going on now as to whom the next members to join will be. It is rather strange to relate that the only members as yet consists of a few Sunday-school scholars and a few members of the different choirs. Now the question asked is this—is it a good thing for young people? as we have heard so much said against the evil of dancing classes. But what is most surprising of all is when we hear of a parent who, up to now, we considered a Christian, and not only sanctions permission to his sons attending, but encourages it as a recreation. Now, I think it would have been more to this man’s credit as a professing Christian if he would have exerted himself in trying to establish a Bible class for young men.

But we are glad to know this man takes no part in the Sunday-school, as we must guard against any talk of dancing in the Sunday-school. As for the lady who holds the classes we know nothing about. She may be very capable of holding the position of dancing mistress, which we have no doubt she is, with the help of her talented young daughter, whom we hear is a trained skirt and ballad [*sic*] dancer. But I think all Port St Mary will agree with me when I say that if the lady is in financial difficulties, and does this to help the family purse, we would all willingly have helped her in any other way but this. But now we must not only withhold our patronage from her, but, if possible, close the class. Hoping all I have said will be taken in a right spirit, and with our children’s interest at heart, and apologising, dear Editor, for monopolizing so much of your valuable space, I remain, yours *etc.*,

A BELIEVER.

Port St Mary, November 4th, 1896.

[The views of the writer of the above letter appear to be very narrow. A well conducted dancing class affords a pleasant means of recreation to young people. Doubtless if the class in question be carried on upon proper lines, the writer of the letter will see reason to adopt other views.—ED.]

Pseud [signed as “A Believer”], “[Letter to the Editor] Dancing at Port St Mary,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 7 November 1896, [4]g.

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “‘Dancing at Port St Mary.’ A Certain Difference of Opinion (1896),” *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* May (2020), [18].

DEAR SIR,—We, members of the social dancing class held at Port St Mary, on whom the cowardly and uncalled for attack was made in your last week's issue, by an andediluvian fossil, calling himself "A Believer," (query—in what?) beg to say that we feel in nowise bound to ask his permission to enjoy ourselves in a perfectly rational and innocent manner. Is "Believer's" morality so loose that he sees evil where none exists and none intended? As to his patronage, we neither ask nor desire it. All the same we know he is longing to cut a caper, and when the moon changes he will probably dance to another tune.

We think it would have been more in a spirit of Christian charity had he confined himself to managing his own family than dictating to well known and respected men how to manage their's. As to the class in question it is solely intended as a social recreation for the winter evenings, which we all know are very dull at Port St Mary. It is far better than lounging round the streets. Being well and respectably conducted by a lady of irreproachable character who only consented to do so at the earnest solicitation of the members who, to their credit, belong to the society mentioned.

As to the unmanly attack on the lady, it approaches dangerously on the verge of slander, and we warn "Believer" to be very careful. If he will read his Bible a little more carefully, he will find dancing specially commended on all joyful occasions.

He had better get a dictionary before he writes another letter, and find if it contains the word "ballad dancer," we never heard of it before, he may also find the word "skunk," and apply it to himself or let him stand out.—Yours, &c,

SEVERAL OF THE MEMBERS.

Port St Mary, 12th Nov., 1896.

Pseud [signed as "Several of the Members"], "[Letter to the Editor] Dancing at Port St Mary," *Isle of Man Examiner* 7 November 1896, [5]g.

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We are now over a hundred years and more removed from this exchange of letters and whilst the first one blustering against "the evil of dancing classes" verges now on the border of seeming parody of the harm offered up by the dancing on offer the members of the class gave back as good as they were given. Whether the evenings in winter are still "very dull at Port St Mary" and if the youth there remain "lounging round the streets" I will not approach "the verge of slander" here....

STEPHEN MILLER, RBV

