

Manx Notes 446 (2020)

W.H. GILL

“THE MANX MUSIC FESTIVAL”

(1907)

The preparations for the forthcoming Manx Music Festival are well advanced under the able control of Mrs Laughton. A very special attraction is promised in the first performance of a Manx National Anthem, the words and music of which have been written for the Manx nation by Mr W.H. Gill, compiler of the *Manx National Songs*. Mrs Laughton has received the following interesting letter from Mr Gill:

“Mona,”

Abingdon on Thames,

February 21st, 1907.

Dear Mrs Laughton,—I am very sensible of the honour done me by yourself and the Guild Committee in affording me this opportunity of saying a few words respecting one of the items in the programme of your festival concert on the 21st March.

A nation without a national anthem of its own is obviously an anomaly, and yet up to the present time our Little Manx nation, so unique in its history and constitution among the great nations of the world, and enjoying all the blessings of civilization, has lacked one important possession. I mean the possession of a national anthem exclusively and characteristically its own—not Irish, nor Scotch, nor Welsh, nor commonly Pan-Celtic—but pure and simple. However, it is never too late to mend, and, though not without considerable diffidence, I have ventured with a boldness akin to presumption—to do for our nation now what far abler hands ought to have done long ago. Such a production must, I conceive, be constructed by a Manxman out of Manx material, and must be the sincere expression of the Manx spirit and character, which is essentially religious and patriotic. Out of Manx material? Certainly. Look at Castle Rushen. There you’ve got an ideal structure from the foundation to the topmost battlements. Not only is it made of our native rock but it grows as it were out of the rock. It will stand as long as the Island, which itself is a rock. Which thing is an allegory. Just let me explain, then, without being too technical, my *modus operandi* in constructing this Manx national anthem out of native material. The most typical of all our recently recovered Manx music is undoubtedly “Mylecharane.” But tradition has so twisted and distorted the tune that nobody can tell for certain what the original “Mylecharane” was, except by a long train of reasoning and speculation. The very fact that we have two quite distinctly different types of the tune, one minor and the other major, is very significant, and I can only account for the duality by supposing that the original tune was substantially minor, embodying (as it probably did) some very sad, mythical, and pathetic story of the forlorn or forsaken one, which, after several verses, concluded with a bright

ending in the major. Right or wrong, this was a happy thought. I wrote a little poem carrying out that idea, and, to my great delight, I have thus (to my own satisfaction at least) solved the problem which has sorely puzzled me for thirteen years past. Premising that I entirely renounce and apostatize my treatment of the tune and melody in the “Royal Edition,” I have disposed of “Mylecharane” proper by turning it not only into a really singable form, but one such as the great singers of the day will, if I am not greatly mistaken, delight to sing, for thus treated it makes a gracious and lovely tune which can never die.

That disposes of the minor version of “Mylecharane.” But how about the major? Well, I have turned that into a companion picture to the other. By a little management I have coaxed it not only into harmonic form but strictly choral form, *viz.*, as a national anthem distinctly Manx in character and yet separating itself from the other version of the tune which is essentially a song, and one, moreover, which, to quote our old friend, Thomas Edward Brown, suggests “a depth of ineffable melancholy.” Then, to utilize still further this precious nucleus or germ of Manx material, I have supplied verses enough to serve for two different purposes; 1st, as an anthem proper for use on state occasions, and 2nd, as a hymn for public worship to be used during the prevalence of stormy weather. In this connection I would suggest for festival use verses 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; and for purposes of public worship, verses 6, 4, 5, 8.

In the building up of this composition (I mean the music) I have added as little new matter as I possibly could consistently with good musical taste, and the result is, what I hope my fellow countrymen will consider to be, a solid and stately choral hymn that will compare favourably in force and dignity with any other national hymn in Europe, and worthy to stand side by side with, although at a respectful distance from, our justly famous “God save the King.”

Our best thanks are due to Mr J.J. Kneen for his skilful translation of my verses into Manx. I should love to hear them sung by your big chorus.

While on the subject of Manx music you will all be glad to know that Messrs Boosey, of London, are now contemplating the issue of a “selection of music songs,” from their “Royal Edition,” to be offered to the public at the almost nominal price of sixpence. Having already repudiated my treatment of “Mylecharane” in that edition as unworthy and sacrilegious—in fact an artistic blunder—I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to explain how I have tried to make atonement for the same. Both the remodelled song and the National Anthem will be included in the selection.—Yours sincerely,

W.H. GILL.

W.H. Gill, “The Manx Music Festival,” *Peel City Guardian* 9 March 1907, [6]d.

*

STEPHEN MILLER, RBV