

# Manx Notes 454 (2020)

## THE MANX NATIONAL ANTHEM

“TO THE EDITOR”  
PEEL CITY GUARDIAN  
(13 APRIL 1907)

(I)

DEAR SIR,—Mr T. Kelly’s kind and courteous letter published in your last issue, as well as a private one addressed to myself, disarm criticism on my part, and it would ill become a Manxman to put forward a claim to any right to pose as poet laureate to his nation, or to invite comparisons of his own work with that of any other individual. That any one and every one—especially in so pre-eminently a free country as the Isle of Man—has a right to compose patriotic songs—be they good, bad or indifferent—without letters patent or royal commands goes without saying. The history and study of folk-songs shows that unlike art songs they are not evolved by one mind but by many. Thus they grow, bit by bit, and strictly follow the law of natural selection. Nor is it the poets laureate, or the reigning monarchs, or even the poets and composers that are responsible for the creation, survival, or extinction of folk-songs, but the people themselves, and nature sternly decrees that in the struggle for existence only the fittest shall survive. Thus I would answer your correspondent’s question as to “authority.” Also his bringing to light the work of an anonymous writer of eighty years ago is both opportune and interesting. Those of your readers who are interested in this subject, and especially those who by life-long habit have become inured to the literary blemishes and questionable morality of our British National Anthem, should read my friend Mr Stringer Bateman’s charming little book entitled “The strange evolution of our illiterate National Anthem from a Jacobite rebel song.” The contemptuous epithet “illiterate” is endorsed by Mr W.S. Gilbert, who describes it as “contemptible doggerel” and the author quotes the denunciations more or less severe, of some twenty other eminent literary men of the day, including Sir R. Garnett, who says of the second and third stanzas, that they are “too execrably bad.” But all this by the way. As regards, however, the music of “God save the King,” so much admired by Weber and Beethoven, the case is far otherwise. Nobody knows for certain who composed it—whether Carey, or Purcell, or the mighty Handel himself. Probably all three, and others besides, have had a finger in the pie, and, as it now stands, it would take a lot of tinkering to beat it into a finer form. Besides—and this is the greatest merit of all—it is essentially English. Some day one might like to write a book—albeit more apologetic and less damnatory than Mr Bateman’s—on the Manx National Anthem which now stands at the bar awaiting its trial. But modesty forbids. My countrymen alone must decide on its merit, both of words and music, and its right to live or die. The fact that already five

thousand Manx men and women have given the thing a patient hearing and a kind reception—a correspondent in the *Isle of Man Times* calls it a “triumphal introduction”—is duly appreciated by its author, and is in itself, he ventures to think, sufficient justification for continuing its publication and extending its circulation. Also Lady Raglan’s personal acceptance and adoption of the composition as publicly announced in your journal, is a graceful act which entirely removes from his mind the feeling of uneasiness lest anyone should suggest invidious comparisons as between the English and the Manx National Anthems. Her Ladyship’s action ought to put us all at our ease by this happy and ingenious stroke of truly womanly policy. But, asks Mr Kelly, “Why should ‘Mylecharane’ be selected as the basis of a new National Anthem?” That question I have already partly answered in my letter which appeared in the programme of the Manx Music Guild concert of the 21st ulto, and I need here only remind our friend that, in spite of the silly words which have hitherto been associated with it, the bits of the tune itself, which have got strangely mixed and dislocated by tradition, are as old as any of our Insular tunes. As “God save the King” is general admitted to be essentially English, so I venture to say without fear of contradiction in respect of this my latest transposition and adaptation of old material, that its milder and more pacific spirit is essentially Manx. The same thing may be said of “The Harvest of the Sea,” now so well known (thanks to the Wesleyans), not only in the Island but out side of it, which in its original form I had given up as hopeless until the happy idea of its having been originally a hymn, and not the lewd song into which it had degenerated, dawned upon me, when straightway the outcast became, if not a great living power for good, at least a respectable member of society. May the same good fortune await the new claimant for public approval.—

Yours faithfully,

W.H. GILL.

“Mona,” Abingdon-on-Thames, April 8th, 1907.

W.H. Gill, “[Letter to the Editor] The Manx National Anthem,” *Peel City Guardian* 13 April 1907, [8]a.

(2)

SIR,—On reading Mr T. Kelly’s letter in your issue of last week, I was impressed by the fact that he, as well as several other Manx people, have the idea that a Manx National Anthem should be something inspiring, stately and rousing. Surely the most characteristic feature of a national anthem, which must be symbolic of character, lies in the music, and what is there either stately or rousing in real Manx music. I consider the music of our Island, what there is of it, to be quite as characteristic, and quite equal in beauty to Norwegian music, where folk lore breathes and makes itself known and felt in every air. What richer example of this

have we among our national songs than the minor version of “Mylecharane”—of all our airs, surely the most characteristic of the nation. The air itself is almost a relic of bygone Manxland, and I think that by immortalizing it, as Mr W.H. Gill has done, he will have the gratitude, appreciation and enthusiasm of all Manxmen who know and understand their country.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

A.S.M.

London, April 10th, 1907.

Pseud [initialled as “A.S.M.”], “[Letter to the Editor] The Manx National Anthem,” *Peel City Guardian* 13 April 1907, [8]a.

(3)

DEAR SIR,—Mr Kelly in his letter on this subject in your last issue seems to have totally misunderstood Mr Gill’s attitude. In offering the Manx National Anthem to the little Manx nation, Mr Gill—the composer—was careful to admit that he only stepped into the breach, because no one else attempted to do so. The Guild Committee, when including the same in their concert programme, did so, to give the Manx people an opportunity of hearing the anthem. Nowhere else, but at the concert which brings the Manx Music Festival to a close, could such an opportunity occur; nowhere else is there such a large muster of Manx people as at the Palace on this evening, when 5,000 and over from all parts of the Island form the audience. The anthem being sung, it was for the people to accept it or not. From the applause with which it was received no one would doubt but that the answer that evening was “aye.” Mr Kelly suggests that some authority should pronounce whether the anthem should be accepted or not. Where would he find such an authority? In these days the *vox populi* would seem to be the only recognized authority, and surely it will be enough if the people accept it? If the people sing it? If the people adopt it? The next few months will decide this. The strength of Mr Gill’s anthem would seem to be in its simplicity, and in music and words he has been true to Manx traditions.

The old words re-printed by Mr Kelly in his interesting letter are hardly suitable for the purpose, as the meaning is often obscure and much extraneous matter is introduced which weakens it as a National Anthem, whilst the references to Babylon, Tyre, Lebanon, *etc.*, hardly add local colour or interest.—Yours faithfully,

MANNIN.

Pseud [signed as “Mannin”], “[Letter to the Editor] The Manx National Anthem,” *Peel City Guardian* 13 April 1907, [8]b.

(4)

SIR,—In last week's *Guardian* I noticed a letter from Mr T. Kelly criticising Mr Gill's beautiful anthem. Mr Kelly, of course, only deals with the words of the new production. The anthem certainly is not immaculate, but it supplies the place as no other composition previously has done, and for Mr Kelly to compare the verses he inserted with those of Mr Gill, displays his incapacity as a literary and poetic critic. Knowing Mr Kelly as a valorous newspaper writer, and the possessor of literary instincts, I confess I am surprised at his lack of judgment.

KIONE JAIRG.

Pseud [signed as "Kione Jiarg"], "[Letter to the Editor] The Manx National Anthem," *Peel City Guardian* 13 April 1907, [8]b.

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STEPHEN MILLER, RBV

