

Manx Notes 564 (2021)

“THE GUILD MANX COMPETITIONS AND CONCERT” *

(1899)

[2a] The Manx Competitions and Concert in connection with the Isle of Man Fine Arts and Industrial Guild took place last Thursday evening in the Palace Opera House. This is the first year that the Guild Committee have introduced Manx recitation, reading, and singing contests, but either from slight public interest in the matter, or else owing to the threatened inclemency of the weather, the audience was only a moderately large one. Considerable interest (and not a little amusement) was shown in the singing competitions, but the Manx language section was somewhat wearisome and monotonous to most of those present. For the musical items the adjudicators were Miss M.L. Wood, A.R.C.O.; Miss McKnight, F.R.C.O.; and the Rev W.S. Isherwood of Douglas; while the judges for the Manx language were Dr. Clague of Castletown; and Messrs W. Kneen, Rushen; W. Quayle, Laxey; and John Costain of Colby. Practically all the music, both vocal and instrumental, rendered during the evening was of Manx origin; and the concert opened with a capital selection of Manx melodies by Mr Harry Wood’s orchestra. This arrangement has often been heard during the season in Douglas, and the hearty applause which was accorded to it was ample proof that it is as popular as ever. The first Manx language competition, for the best vernacular recitation of the Twenty-third Psalm, was open to students in any of the existing Manx classes. Six juvenile competitors appeared in this section, and the first prize of 5s was awarded to Nellie Moore, of Laxey; the second prize of 2s 6d to Elsie Kee, of Peel; while the other competitors in order of merit were arranged as follows: 3. Thomas Corkan, Peel (a sturdy little fellow who quite took every body’s fancy, and to whom the audience no doubt would have liked to award a prize); 4. John Comish, Peel; 5. Florence Killip, Douglas; 6. Fanny Palmer, Peel. After a capital orchestral suite of three Manx dances, the adult Reading and Translation competition was taken. Competitors were required to read at sight a passage from the Manx testament, chosen by the judges immediately before the competition, and then to translate it into English. The selected passage was taken from the first ten verses of the General Epistle of James. Only two candidates appeared in this section, the first prize of £1 (presented by Col. Anderson R.G.) being awarded to Mr Thomas Taggart, of Kerrowkiel, Malew; while the second prize of 10s was won by Mr J.J. Kneen of Douglas. The programme was here varied by an English version of an old Manx Song, “Hush, Little Darling” (from Gill’s National Songs) which was rendered in a very pleasing manner by Miss B. Cregeen, A.V.C.M. The song has an exceedingly beautiful yet simple musical setting, and was sung in a

* Originally published as Stephen Miller, “The Guild Manx Competitions and Concert” (1899), *Kiaull Manninagh Jiu* November (2021), [20]–[21].

highly creditable manner. For the Male Voice Solo Competition five competitors appeared, and in some cases there was a distinct flavour of originality, which was not without its accompaniment of humorous effect on the greater part of the audience. The songs were to be chosen by the competitors from any collection of Manx songs, and points were given by the adjudicators for both singing and pronunciation. The first prize of £1 was awarded to Mr Robert Bridson of Tromode, who sang “Kirree fo Niaghtey” (Moore’s Edition); the second prize of 10s to Mr J.J. Kneen of Douglas, for “Mylecharaine” (Moore’s Edition); and the third to Mr W. Christian of Peel, for “Mylecharaine” (Gill’s Edition). For the excellence of the Manx pronunciation additional prizes were awarded to the other two Competitors; 10s to Mr Thomas Taggart, and 5s to Mr Charles Lace. From this part of the competition it would appear that Manx songs are particularly distinguished for the large number of verses they contain, and the endurance of the audience was taxed to the utmost during the hearing of them. Each competitor sang more than twice as much as was necessary; but Mr J.J. Kneen excelled the rest in managing to inflict upon his long-suffering hearers nearly a dozen verses of his monotonous “Mylecharaine,” until all patience was well-nigh exhausted. If ever the competitions are repeated [2b] it is to be sincerely hoped, out of compassion for the audience that some restriction in this section will be placed by the Committee, for last Thursday evening the hearers had to endure a far greater ordeal than the singers! Probably the best item of the evening was the recitation of Clement Scott’s well-known lifeboat poem “The Women of Mumble’s Head,” by Miss B. Cregeen. The admirable manner in which this was recited roused the audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm, and reflected the greatest credit on Miss Cregeen. In the Female Voice Solo competition, for the best rendering of a song in the Manx language, there were only two competitors. The first prize of £1 was won by Miss Maggie Radcliffe, of Andreas, for her finished rendering of “Mannin Veg Veen” (Moore’s edition); and the second prize of 10s to Miss Ada Corrin, of Castletown, who sang “Kirree fo Niaghtey.” Miss B. Cregeen was deservedly encored for her capital rendering of the well-known song “Fair Maids of Mann,” and she responded with another native song. The programme concluded with Sullivan’s musical arrangement of Rudyard Kipling’s already famous patriotic poem, “The Absent-Minded Beggar,” which was sung in good style by Mr Evan Kermodé, the audience being requested to join in the chorus—a request with which only a small proportion complied. Taken on the whole, this new departure of the Guild Committee in endeavouring to promote Manx singing and reading competitions can scarcely be termed a success, either from the public interest shewn, or from the number of competitors and the quality of their attainments. A noteworthy feature of the contest was that only two of the competing candidates came from Douglas, while five hailed from Peel. Judging from this, it would seem that but little interest is taken by the inhabitants of the chief city on the Island in the attempt to revive its already defunct national language.

“The Guild Manx Competitions and Concert.” *The Manxman* 16
December 1899: 2.

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“This is the first year that the Guild Committee have introduced Manx recitation, reading, and singing contests,” reported *The Manxman* in its issue of 16 December 1899. Whilst the review of the evening’s proceedings in the *Isle of Man Examiner* was a positive one, the paper under Sidney Broadbent being a firm supporter of the Manx Language Revival, an opposing view as seen above was also evident.

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