

Manx Notes 617 (2023)

“ROARING DISCORDANT CATCHES” *

(1784)

The town of Ramsay is famous for its bay, which is so extensive and commodious that the largest fleets may safely lie in it during the most severe storm. The inn here is but an uncomfortable house; and the company I was last night obliged to associate with, upon my arrival, was but ill suited to those enthusiastic ideas raised in my mind by the various beauties of my ride. Think how great was my dissatisfaction when, after having travelled through a country filled with some of the most delightful objects in nature, and with a mind elevated to the highest degree of romance by those objects, I was crammed into a nasty little parlour, darkened with clouds of smoke from tobacco, and deafened with half a hundred harsh voices roaring discordant catches. My romantic ideas immediately vanished. But these merry Manks were not wholly engaged in singing: some conversation passed, among the various topics of which, that of their being but little known to the world by their national title was introduced.

Anon [but “Albert”]. “Account of a Tour through the Isle of Man.”
Universal Magazine 76 (1785): 22–25.

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“Albert,” as the author of this account wished to be known, visited the Island from 1–7 May 1784. He sailed from Liverpool where “[t]wo little Manks Misses, just let loose from a Liverpool school, were the only passengers beside myself,” showing Manx children of the Insular élité clearly being educated off Island. After landing at Douglas, he visited Castletown, followed by Peel, and then Ramsey, before returning to Douglas. Kirk Michael he wrote, “particularly attracted my notice,” being sufficiently primitive and picturesque for him, but his “romantic ideas immediately vanished” as seen when he met the locals in Ramsey.... The interest here is in the singing that was going on in the inn of an evening, “half a hundred harsh voices roaring discordant catches” as he put it, giving us an insight into the musical life of an evening in the inn when singing was the norm.

Stephen Miller, RBV

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