

Manx Notes 670 (2024)

“SWEET KITTY, MY COUNTRY COUSIN”

(1903)

Sweet Kitty, my country cousin,
Dwelt on old Snaefell’s side,
And half-believed in the legends
Told round the fireside
By the old, old folks of the village
In the gloam of eventide.

They said if you heard the cuckoo,
When standing on soil that was soft,
It was an infallible sign
That someone was going aloft;
And Kitty and I, when we heard it call,
Stood on the rain-sodden turf.

I laughed as I reminded Kitty
That we stood in an unlucky place;
But she didn’t smile back, and I noticed
A strange look of fear on her face;
For she still had faith in the fables—
The myths of the Celtic race.

Then Kitty, my country cousin,
Became engaged to me.
So I placed a ring on her finger
And sailed across the sea,
To dig for gold in Southern lands,
That we might wedded be.

The years passed on while I laboured
With only one thought in my mind—
To hoard up the wealth that I gathered
For the girl I had left behind;
And I wrote her long hopeful letters
For I knew that Kitty pined.

But I found it very hard to hope
When luck got worse each day

And anxious toil and labour
Seemed only thrown away;
At last, my health was undermined,
For a man can't last alway.

I had slept on vapour-draped soil
When the rain turned the earth to mire;
I had lain like a snake in a coil
By the side of a flickering fire;
And my briar pipe was my food and drinks
When the heat of the day made me tire.

Then came the day when I gathered
Together my golden spoil;
The price of three doses of fever,
The gold of five years of toil;
I set out for Mona, to claim my bride,
Sweet Kitty who dwelt on the mountain side.

I shook off the dust of the Transvaal,
I packed up my kit, and fled
Down to the coast, and took steamer;
Then lay in a Christian bed,
With visions of Kitty that made me
Light of heart and of head.

I lost no time, when we landed,
In finding the dear old spot,
Where the red and white roses were twining
Round the door of Kitty's cot;
And it seemed rather strange to see it,
The old familiar spot.

With the thin blue smoke curling upwards,
'Mid the cluster of rugged tress,
And the purple-heathered mountain
To protect it from the breeze
That swept the Laxey valley,
Coming up from the rolling seas.

Soon all my dreams were shattered,

For they told me Kitty died,
And I know not how to answer
And I half believed they lied;
And I wandered where we sauntered
In the old time, side by side.

And I found myself brooding and lonely;
Still was the evening air;
Sweet was the scent of the hawthorn;
But for these I had ne'er a care.
When, hark! through the stillness, faint, but plain,
The cuckoo I heard call thrice again.

Then it all came back in a moment,
The eve when I said "Good-bye,"
And lightly laughed at Kitty,
For the light of fear in her eye,
Because we stood on soft ground
When we heard the cuckoo cry.

And a strange weird feeling came o'er me,
Was it myth, or was it fate?
By the gods I cared but little
Since they robbed me of my Kate.
Then I stopped to think the puzzle out—
Stood leaning on the gate.

C. LANGLEY.

C. Langley. "A Manx Superstition (A Laxey Miner's Story)." *Mona's Herald* 17 June 1903: 2c.

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