

Manx Notes 682 (2024)

“SUPERSTITION IN THE MOUNTAIN GLENS OF MONA” (1871)

Were it not that there is sufficient evidence to the contrary, one who studies the popular beliefs and superstitions of some parts of the Island would be inclined to think that the inhabitants of those parts still live in the dark ages. Their superstition is such that, should their cow withhold its milk, or the cream require a longer time than usual to churn, they are deemed to be bewitched, and the services of the witch doctor are had in requisition; or, should one of their domestic animals sicken or die suddenly, some one is said to have cast on it an evil eye, and the path of the suspected person must be instantly swept, so that the evil may be averted. The extent of their credulity is amazing. They have charms for the cure of all the ills that flesh is heir to from a burn on the finger to the severing of an artery in all of which they place implicit confidence, and when these fail (which they always do, except by the veriest accident) they do not blame the inefficacy of the charm, but some failure in the mode of administration. In one of the most picturesque glens of the Island, lives an old woman, upwards of 70 years of age, who keeps the house for an unmarried son, a miner employed in one of the mines in the neighbourhood. She was in the habit of wearing clogs, and, having a pair of these on, had occasion to go upstairs. but upon reaching the top, they by some means tripped her up, and she fell head foremost to the bottom. There she laid for some time, unconscious, the blood gushing from a wound on her head, one of her hands bruised and swollen, as if sprained, and her whole system so shattered and paralyzed that it was feared she could not survive many hours. A reasonable person, with judgment unclouded by superstition, would have at once sent for a doctor. But it was not so in this case. The doctor's skill was considered as nothing in comparison with the virtue of a charm; and though the possessor of this all-potent cabalistic remedy lives a mile and a-half away, he was at once applied to. “What is the person's name?” he asked. “Mrs ——.” “Her christian name?” “I don't know.” “I am very sorry;” said the wise man, “the charm, when properly applied, is very powerful, but I must know the person's christian name as well as surname, so that it may have its fullest effect however, I will do the best I can for you!” What was to be done before the messenger could get back again?—the poor woman might be dead! He, however, posted back at full speed; but, in the meantime, a neighbouring woman, thinking there could be no harm in trying local remedies, applied bandages to the wounds, stopped the effusion of blood, and before the messenger could get half way to the charm wielder's house, the poor sufferer had regained consciousness, and was able to speak a little. Whether or not fresh charms were applied we do not know, but so far as we can learn, there has been no doctor brought to the house. She does not get any better, but rather worse, and lies in a very precarious condition.

“Superstition in the Mountain Glens of Mona.” *Isle of Man Times* 8 July
1871: [Supplement] [2]c.

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