THE MANX FANCY LAND.

ABOUT THEIR BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS.

The Poet Traveller Delves Among the Superstitions and Folk Lore of the Manx Islanders—Weird Reminders of Pagan Times—Manx Fairies, Gnomes and Imps.

DOUGLAS, Isle of Man, Dec. 3, 1892.—Few writers ever troubled themselves at all about the Manx people. Those have invariably set them down as "extraordinarily superstitious." Then they have galloped away leaving the Manxmen in mist and their readers in mystery.

A truer statement regarding these interesting and sturdy people would be that they have emerged from boundless superstition.

Everywhere one may go in Manxland are found evidences of that extreme antiquity which so impresses and at times appalls the student in Ireland and Cornwall. Coming to a later though still remote period one cannot escape the conviction that the first Celts of Ireland and the west of England and the first people of Manxland were not only of common stock, but for centuries were, while pagans, a people of common language, customs and interest.

In the interweaving of paganism and christianity there was undoubtedly large ecclesiastical sanction entertained towards many of the superstitious practices of the ancient Manx people. Long isolation from the remainder of progressive England, and the retention of a distinct language, in which the gospel is still preached, in a few instances precisely as a friend of mine preaches one Gaelic sermon per month in the little old church of Fas-na-kyle, Strathglass, Scotland, fostered the clan theory of society, and left countless legends, superstitions and customs among this stolid though singularly impressionable and sentimental people.

But I have gradually come to know that, however grim-visaged the face of the one confiding the weird assertion of uncanny belief, secretly the masses of the people scout and flout them all, save those of a tender and winsome character. Briefly, Manx folk today reject the essential slavery of superstitious practices, but universally insist on retaining the pleasure of subscribing to the superstitions themselves.

One illustration out of many which could be given will serve to emphasize this conclusion. In olden times it was a universal custom here on retiring at New Year's Eve for the family to carefully strew ashes upon the floor, in the expectancy of finding the next morning the impression of a fairy foot. It was religiously believed that the direction of the foot predicted death, if toward the door; and if toward the fireplace, an increase in the household by birth or marriage. The custom is quite as universal at the present time; but the element of terror is wholly eliminated; footprints are always discovered pointing towards the fireplace; and the superstition prevails only in its gentle and kindly aspect to give added zest to the merry holiday time.

In tracing Manx mythology there will be found, precisely as in the Gaelic mythology of Scotland and the Celtic mythology of Ireland two classes of bugaboo immortals. One of these consisted of imps and demons having the power of taking upon themselves the form of man or woman at will, and particularly by wooing human men or women, and particularly by holding out ravishing promises of immortality, leading them into fatal unions, through which the souls of mortals so deluded were endlessly banished from heaven.

The second class comprised semi-immortals and magicians, wholly devoted to Druidism and the Black Art. Whether the latter had existence, or were solely creatures of the imagination, centuries behind them were the sort of folk really existed in ancient Manxland. Their wonderful skill in the erection of sepulchral mounds, stone circles and menhirs, and in the making of metal ornaments and delicately formed spear-heads, was such as to compel from a less skillful and more warlike people the gradual deification of the mysterious race, and their eventual identification with local phantoms and gods.

In the gradual evolution of Manx fairies, whose real origin was in the Finnish sylvans, satyrs and fauns, that portion of its demonology providing impish spirits of a malevolent nature has been largely extirpated. The "man of the hills," the identical fellow found in the Irish and Scottish Highlands, was a wicked fellow indeed Among the Manx shepherds of Snaefell and North Barrule mountains I found a few who still firmly believe in his power for harm; who recognize his voice in the soughing of the winds through the gorges; and, when troubled in conscience, avoid the darkness of night and leading their flocks to the lonlier glens.

The banshee, that fateful mother of grewsome brood in all originally Celtic countries, has given way in Scotland to its host of "guid neibors" or Brownies, as mighty a host of good and ill sprites in Ireland, and in Manxland to an intangible army of gnomes, elves and spirits. These in general possesses power of rewarding the good and punishing for evil. A Wesleyan clergyman named Corjaig a few years ago undertook to "lay" them by stoutly declaring from his pulpit that he saw them with his own eyes depart in a body from the Bay of Douglas in empty rum puncheons, scudding before the wind in the direction of Jamaica. But the "wee people" are still safely ensconced in the hearts and traditions of Manxmen, and cannot be deported and marooned even by well-meaning clergymen.

One will still find among the Manx fishermen farmers clear traces of exact congeners of the ancient water bulls and horses of the misty north of Scotland lochs. The "tarroo ushety" is the wild water-bull and the "glashtin" the furious water-horse of Manxland. The former destroyed cattle, the latter left the sea to chase Manx ponies over the mountain crags to destruction. These have no terrors now for Manxmen; but it ill befalls kine or horses, these creatures of the misty days always return in the fireside banter and gossip.

These folk have one remarkable friend among the elves. He is called the "phynnodderee." For some form of misdemeanor he was banished from elfland and became a satyr with shaggy hair. Those who have seen him assert that he has feet like an elk with a protruding spear-like horn where the fetlock should be enabling him to scale walls and mountains at will. One good old lady of ninety whom I found among the glens of Snaefell remembers distinctly an encounter with the "phynnodderee" when she was still in her teens. She was "yarded," that is legally made a servant at a neighboring estate and was set to carrying peat in a creel by a cruel master.

She was ill unto death, but was driven to her toil relentlessly. One day she came to the bog but could not return laden. She fell upon the ground and moaned her wish to die. Then the "phynnodderee" appeared. He stood beside her shivering with the cold, and piteously begged her for her tartan to prevent him from freezing. Appalled at the thought of any being suffering more deeply than herself, she instantly complied with his request. Her strength and health at once returned. The next morning all her month's task was found to have been performed by invisible hands. And better than all, the handsomest tartan in Man was found hanging beside her bed;—in proof of which she produced a bit of the selfsame plaid, and a handsome one it surely must have been. Generalized, the "Moody Dhoo" is the sable spirit of loneliness, of impending danger, of irrevocable despair. To a people barren of book lore, impressionable with a thousand misty shadows from the past, whose mental activities are chiefly in contemplation of the saddening sea and the keening voices of mountain winds, some form of a mental "Moody Dhoo" is a logical and inevitable presence.

This same handy elf possesses the infinite drollery of the Irish dullaghan, who is generally found with his head under his arm, in his pocket, or, where a number are together, flinging it merrily at some other dullaghan, or again engaged with it in games of foot-ball. It also possesses the power of numberless devices and disguises of that most exasperating impish practical joker of all Irish fairies' the leprachaun, or "the little imp in green." Everywhere in little Manxland where liquor is in and wit is out, where uncouth folly meets with retributive humbling, and in all those sluggish rustic channels of forgivable mischief and merriment where penalties are light as countryside laughter, the kindly, helpful avenging "phynnodderee," is ever ready with a helping hand.

One traditional spook which represents the evil genius of dull despair, of dumb inevitability and of rank fatalism glowers through Manx tradition as black and dreadful as the gloom of the halls of Eblis. This is the "Moody Dhoo." Tangibly and as crystalized in tradition it took on the form of a huge, voiceless black spaniel which haunted ancient Peel Castle, the daring of whose satanic power by a drunken soldier terminated in the tragic death of the latter, as made famous in fiction and song.

I have never been able to discover among the peasants of Brittany, of England, Ireland or Scotland, the exact equivalent of a curious sort of elf of darkness which the Manx people still possess. It is called the "dovinney-oie" or nightman. He meets certain belated persons along the highway, or in lonely spots, foretelling dismal events with great volubility, but always without personal malevolence. Indeed his hints of impending danger are regarded as invaluable. He provides the only weather bureau the Manx people possess, and on all parts of the coast his weird cry of "howlaa, howlaa!" foretells an approaching storm.

All evil spirits in Manxland are known under the universal term of "buggane." It the cream fails to "rise," if the crops are poor, it the catch of herrings be worthless, if harm befall the sheep upon the mountains or the kine and fowls at home, it a love affair goes wrong, or any ill whatever betides for which there is not a present clear and unquestionable explanation, the "buggane" is held responsible. Useless vexation and anxiety are thus dispensed with, and, as a good Manx dame pleasantly explained: "Aw, mon, th' buggane doan't mind aw blame; an' its better n' fast'nin' t' neebors!"

Fairy doctors and hermits are still popular in the little island. In olden times the person and home, usually a cave, of the Manx hermit were so venerated that the person of a mortal enemy was sacred against harm when in a hermit's presence. These canny old loafers are no longer proof against scepticism, but they are well liked by the peasantry who hospitably tolerate them. I have made the acquaintance of several. One was in quite a despondent mood and threatened to leave his vocation forever. He admitted that the countryside people were friendly enough; but the Liverpool holiday excursionists guyed him unmercifully, and the Douglas hotel landlords, who had engaged him to unexpectedly appear to tourists in lonely glens, were not prompt about paying his contract stipend of six shillings per week.

The "evil eye" is still possible to be cast upon horses and cattle and even upon children in unfrequented places where old superstitions die hardest. Fairies also work mischief in butter and among the fields. There are still those who prepare and sell charms not only to remedy but to ward off such ills. All but the most ignorant of Manxmen regard "fairy doctors" in a jocose spirit of its expression emanates from themselves. But among the best there lingers a general toleration for all these olden vagaries; and should a foreigner first offer the sceptical allusion, the inherent stubborn resentment to iconoclasm would instantly find expression in something like: "Am, mon, safe side's no harm's side."

Naturally among a people where folk lore largely takes the place of book lore omens, portents and what might with much exactitude be called "whimsies" are exceedingly frequent among Manxmen. The birds of the island and their habits provide as many of these as among their Irish neighbors with quicker invention and warmer fancy. A raven hovering near a herd of cattle is an unwelcome sign. The plaint of the linnet is associated with the cry of a lost soul. When the robin will not sing in the church yard trees the place is said to be haunted. A fine is still imposed in Man if a sea-gull be killed during the fishing-season; and the feathers of the poor wren which is so mercilessly hunted here on St. Stephen's day are sold for trifling sums as charms.

There is throughout the island an actual dread regarding publicity of weddings. Though all the neighbors may be aware of little details leading up to the ceremony, households directly interested affect the greatest secrecy. Cooking for the feast, dressing and the like is often done with closely curtained windows at night, and when all is ready the wedding party will mount an open car and gallop away to the nearest church in the gray of morning as though all the witches were after them. But the arrival of the Manx baby brings a host of traditional superstitions safeguards and ominous protents into immediate activity.

No one must step over it or walk entirely around it, lest it becomes dwarfed and weazened. Amulets of undyed woolen cord are often worn around the mother's neck until the babe is weaned to ward off fevers. Until baptism all babes are quite at the mercy of the fairies. The baby will remain lucky through life if it first handles a spoon with its left hand, but it will come to perfect estate if it shall have repeated tumbles out of its mother's arms, its cradle or bed before it has attained its first birthday.

One of the most winsome of half superstitious customs in Manxland is for the family on stormy nights to retire to rest at a very early hour, so that the good fairies may unobserved enter to find shelter and repose. A very ancient tradition that a fairy in the guise of a beautiful woman once bewitched a host of the best men of the island, and then led them all over a cliff to their death in the sea, prevails so unyieldingly to this day, that a Manx wife or sweetheart will on no occasion precede her husband. lest her character for correct womanly attributes be impugned. The same fairy which established this custom is the one which, in its efforts to escape Manx vengeance, was transformed into a wren, and has ever since, on St. Stephen's day been hunted, stripped of its feathers and beaten to death in countless numbers. The same unaccountable mercilessness towards the wren exists, though

> The robin and the wren
> Are God's two holy men—

in Ireland. There, in the vicinity of Galway, I have seen the wren hunted on Christmas day, its pitiful remains beribboned and hung to tree branches, the exhibition of which by children before house-doors proving an unfailing prompting to gift of coin or "sweets."

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

NOTED AUSTRALIAN NUGGETS.

Where the Big Finds Have Been Made and by Whom.

Referring to an interesting article entitled "Gold in Nature," appearing in Chambers' Journal April 19, 1890, and mentioning a nugget of one hundred and thirty-four pounds' weight found in "South Australia, (Victoria?), perhaps a reference to some noted Australian nuggets and goldfields might be of interest. Chief amongst these nuggets comes the "Welcome Stranger," which contained over 2300 ounces of gold, worth about £9200, and was found on February 5, 1869, at Moliagul, near Dunolly, Victoria. Next in rank comes the "Welcome" nugget, found at Bakery Hill, Ballarat, in the same colony, on June 11, 1878, at a depth of about one hundred and eighty feet. This nugget weighed nearly 2200 ounces in the gross, and its net value was £8780. It was sold for £10,000 to a party who wanted it for show purposes, and doubtless cleared thereby the difference in cost.

It would perhaps be a little too much to say that "nuggets had family ties;" but though they usually "lie low," there are at times exceptions to the rule, and when found near the surface, as in the following instances, they are not infrequently in groups. The selections referred to (found in 1870, 71, and 72) are taken from the record of the "Berlin" goldfield, in Victoria, and do not include the many minor nuggets found in that locality. 'Precious' Nugget, 1717 ounces, value £6868, Catto's Paddock, at a depth of twelve feet. 'Viscount Canterbury' Nugget, 1121 ounces, value £4420, John's Paddock, at a depth of 15 feet. 'Viscountess Canterbury' Nugget, 896 ounces, value £3536. "Kum Torr" Nugget, 795 ounces, value £2872, Catto's Paddock, at a depth of twelve feet. "Needful" Nugget, 249 ounces, value £984, Catto's Paddock, at a depth of twelve feet. "Crescent" Nugget, 179 ounces, value £704, John's Paddock, at the depth of two feet. These members of the royal family of nuggets thus totalling nearly 5000 ounces of gold, worth £19,384.

As a rule, however, the richest goldfields are not those where the largest nuggets are found, as witness the well-known Gulgong Goldfield (New South Wales), referred to in Rolf Bolderwood's capital story of The Miner's Right. The largest piece of gold found on this field was only sixty-four ounces in weight, and was so thoroughly coated with ferric oxide, that the man who was forking the gravel, &c., out of the sluice-box in which it was found, was going to throw it out, but that its weight attracted him. This goldfield had for fourteen years maintained an average yield worth about £300,000 per annum, the total weight for that time being 1,072,752 ounces (nearly forty tons), valued at £4,162,550. As a great portion of the gold from this locality was found on private property and subject to a heavy royalty, large quantites were sent away through private hands, and thus were not included in the above return. In one part of this goldfield, known as the 'Canadian' lead, the gold—all alluvial deposits—was found in limestone caverns, often in company with the fossil remains of extinct mammoth kangaroos, &c. Some of these caves were over one hundred feet in length by a width of forty feet; but few of them were really bottomed, so as to test the depth, the inrush of water after reaching a certain level being too intense for the machinery on hand.

The auriferous district of which Gulgong is a part extends in a southerly direction for about one hundred miles, having a varying width of from thirty to ninety miles. It was in the Hargraves or Sofala branch of this great field that the famous nugget mentioned by Charles Reade in Never too Late to Mend was found; and subsequently other handsome nuggets were unearthed. including one at "Maitland Bar," weighing 344 ounces, and worth £1240. The former of these two nuggets was really found by a black-fellow, as described by Mr. Reade, and contained about 1200 ounces of gold, worth £4500.

Between Hargraves and Bathurst lies the celebrated gold field of Hill End, a reefing district adjoining the alluvial field of Tambaroora, which had previously been worked for many years. Hill End was chiefly noticeable for the richness of the narrow "leaders"—quartz in slate and diorite—which were found in the sloping face of a very precipitous hill descending to the Turon River at its foot. Some of these claims were certainly wonderfully rich, especially considering their limited extent, few of them being over one hundred and twenty feet along the line of reef, if reef it could be called, it being so irregular in form. Notwithstanding their small size, these claims were eagerly bought up at one thousand pounds per foot along the supposed or real line of reef; and, yet in spite of this and the enormous cost of sinking shafts—twelve pounds per foot—some of them paid extraordinary dividends. "Krohmann's" claim, floated for £120,000 returned over £200,000 net to its shareholders; and "Beyers and Holtermann's" claim did nearly as well as this. Carroll and Beard's the next *en suite*, though yielding some rich crushings, came rather short of paying cent per cent.

One enormous slab of slate, and quartz, and gold, all intermixed—from Beyers and Holtermann's claim—weighing about three hundredweight in all—yielded fully 1200 ounces (one hundredweight) of gold, the whole of the crushing, which included this, being worth about £60,000, and averaging about five hundred ounces to the ton. A similar quantity of stone from Carrol and Beard's claim, crushed at the same time, returned about 12,000 ounces of gold, worth £48,000.

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