

MORE ABOUT MANX FOLK

THE LITTLE ISLAND AND THE KIND OF PEOPLE FOUND THERE.

Manxmen and Their Wives, Their Homes and Belongings—Amplitude Tempered by Thrift—Pictures of Manx Interiors—Characteristics and Customs.

PEEL, Isle of Man, Dec. 9, 1892.—Most Manxmen, indeed all save the proprietors of mountain farms, are also fishermen. In a population of less than 50,000 souls, including all town folk, it is estimated that at least one in every five derives his chief support from the harvests of the sea. When boat builders and net-makers are taken into account, the proportion would be far greater.

Within the Manx yeoman's home the picture is homely but pleasing. The house-place, living-room and kitchen combined, is on one side of a green painted door and short passage. On the other is a narrow slip of a parlor, for, as with the Staffordshire potters, the parlor is a hereditary and necessary dignity with the Manxmen. It is, as usual with other places of dignity, the only place of discomfort in these kindly island homes. In the centre of this room will always be found a little square mahogany table. A family Bible rests upon it. A half dozen ancient mahogany chairs are adjusted against the walls with a view to their support. A short, low-backed mahogany-framed chintz settle is in the window. Over the mantle piece is a huge mirror whose texture is as choppy as the surface of the Man-encircling sea; but this reflects in a zig-zag way a marvellous collection of stuffed birds, dried grasses, Claret dogs, vases and rampant shepherdesses, with sundry carvings from Druidic days and huge shells which sailor-sons have brought from far-off shores. This dim little retreat is seldom disturbed. Fitly enough it is almost exclusively sacred to the uses of funerals and weddings.

But the comfort of the roomy old house-place and kitchen atones for all this. The stone hearth is deep and wide, and the feet of a great family might all have place upon it, with room for hide-and-seek for the little ones between the owner's chairs. The fireplaces are broad and deep and high, for burning peat or wood, with huge, vast chimneys above them, where a whole sheep or pig might be roasted, and the great chains and hooks for slinging the pots above the fire, would bear the weight of a cow or an ox.

In some of these habitations, the chimney is so set back and outward into the garden that a genuine Scottish "ingleneuk," such as may be found in the old weavers' village of Gartenside, near Melrose, is formed, with tiny, deep windows, played inwardly. Others have at one side the Cornish "uncarnar," or fuel receptacle. (There is always a recess for storing peat or wood, sometimes finished like an old-time chest, with a wide, long, deal cover. This provides a rude settle, upon which, when not occupied by some member of the family, will always be found that strange but ever-beloved animal, the tailless Manx cat. A "stubbins," as this tailless cat of Man is called, is regarded in many districts of the island with an affection bordering on veneration. It is more than a superstitious notion, it is a belief, that any one injuring a cat will suffer dire harm when at sea; for the progenitors of this curious species were cast upon the island from a wrecked ship, from which no person was saved.

In one corner, on the fireplace side of the room, will always be found the stately dresser, set high in the room upon its four crooked and slender legs. A wealth of gaudy crockery ware ornaments its capacious shelves, and one of its two deep drawers provides for the reception of the daily gathering of eggs, while the other is heaped to the edges with the weekly baking of barley clap-bread, still the staff of life in most of the countryside homes. Beyond this is the deal table, the family board for common or festive uses. It is a huge stout affair white as the silvered hair of the dame whose mother's mother's mother set the example of its daily scouring.

Between this and the dresser, as well as beneath the latter, is a row of huge casks and jars. The largest of these contains the greatest of blessings to the Manxman, his "gay" or pickled herring or "scadden." In another is his store of salted mutton or goose. In others are preserved fruits and vegetables. This region is sacred to the single supervision of the housewife, and woe to the Manx lad or lass in unlawful proximity. In the opposite corner is the family "corner-cup board," the Mecca of all childish longings and eager glances. More than all else this receptacle stamps the Manxman as a bounteous liver. It is never known to be lacking such comfortable matters as a few pounds of home-made butter, toothsome skim-milk cheese, pots of honey and coarse jam, and slices of fancy bread and cake. All this, outside the family's requirements, serves in a most genial countryside custom. Stranger or neighbor never calls at Manx cottage without invitation to eat and drink; and neighbor's children are never sent away from a Manxman's home without carrying in their chubby fists some hospitable token from the generous corner cupboard.

Huge wooden chairs, and great-arm chairs which might have come down from King Orry's time, give the place an atmos-

phere of restfulness. Flitches of bacon, golden brown from their bronzing of peat smoke, hang temptingly from the rafters below the thatching. The tiny windows are shadowed with snowy muslin, and the light is mellowed and softened as it is filtered through a tracery of plants. The flames flicker blue above an abundance of glowing peat, changing the great fireplace anon from orange to purple; while, ticking comfortably and with a friendly and companionable sound, a huge eight day clock looks blandly down upon all. Not gorgeous homes these, but they are homes of integrity, comfort and content, every one.

Strictly speaking the Manx are a serious people. They are not given to festivities. They are comfortable, happy and content during all the year, rather than hilarious and turbulent at stated periods and moody and discontented in the long and mournful intervals. There is but one day in the year which may be regarded as of national importance. That is Tynwald day in mid-summer when the laws of the land are promulgated and solemnly ratified by court and people. Now as a thousand years ago all Manxland comes to the purple glen where this ceremonial takes place, for a few hours stands face to face with customs of Saga times, and returns to the centuries-old Manx homes with the precious writs of King Orry and his Norse lawgivers revived in giant presences.

The ordinary amusements of lowly European folk have little place among them. A surpassing calm, as if these folk endlessly stood in the presence of a mighty and heroic past, seems to brood upon island and islanders. When midsummer days have come, the fires of Beltean are lighted. They flash from height to height, as in pagan days. No one can tell you why it is done. There is no weird and fetish exaltation in these scenes as in some parts of Ireland, in the Scottish highlands and in Cornwall. Of course the flames drive away all witches, but with these staid folk the fire of Bael must burn today not in superstitious need but because the Manx forefathers never failed to light them.

Indeed unwavering loyalty to established customs in their marked characteristic and highest charm. They have utterly grown out of superstitious incident, dread or motive which gave importance to the origin of many, but hold to the act and fact of tradition with changeless zeal. "Our fathers did thus and so. We respect the doings of our fathers, caring not for their reasons, save that they had them," governs all retention of what may seem incongruous and uncanny to you and to me.

Weddings are almost secret affairs. All the tender and forgivable excitements of preparation are attended with rigorous and austere repression of publicity. No one can tell you why. It is simply so. It has always been so. On the contrary, as in Cornwall, funerals are drawn out to the utmost limit of sympathetic attention. The body is carried, never driven, to the churchyard. Hours, often days are consumed from the start to the church. Innumerable delays give occasion for innumerable outbursts of affection, and the singing of an equal number of lugubrious psalms, intoned in such shrill minor strains that the weirdest and most thrilling of keening at Irish wakes is often surpassed. The origin of this custom is also mystery. No matter to the sturdy Manx. Anything different would be sorrow for the living, a wrong to the dead.

In the tender holiday time when these words will be read, Manx folk of the remote countryside will have already celebrated their most cherished custom. Though discountenanced by the clergy it has almost fiercely held its own since the introduction of Christianity in the island. This is the service of Oriel Verree, undoubtedly a corruption of *Peall Vorree*, literally the Feast of Mary. To supercede this, church authorities hold Christmas eve services. But they are of no avail. When the lights are out, some one is always found with a key to the sacred edifice. Then from the remotest corners of the parish come all, young and old, each with a long lighted tallow dip, tied about with a bit of ribbon or rosette.

As the midnight nears, old men advance towards the communion and chant the widest, weirdest carols and ditties mortal ears may know. Most are addressed to the Virgin. Some are in honor of Saga-time heroes. Still others are of woe and death. Singers and listeners often reach a tremendous pitch of exaltation. Strange and wild these midnight scenes at the moment of Nativity in Manxland. The bardic strain of old, held true and firm down the shining line of a thousand years, thus once each year flashes its flame through Christian fervor in this "dear little Isle of Man."

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

Old Books a Bad Investment.

The day of old books as an investment has been a long time going, but it may now be regarded as almost if not quite gone. This fact is very plainly indicated by the prices which are being paid for the books in the Apponyi Library, now in course of dispersal. The first three days' sale showed an average of considerably under £2 per volume. Eight years ago, when the Syston Park Library, formed by Sir John Thorold, and not differing very greatly from the Apponyi collection, came under the hammer, the result was the average of £14 per volume. A comparison between the prices realized at the two sales for identical books is also somewhat startling, considering that only such a brief period has intervened. The Aldini first edition of "Aristotle and Theophrastus" was at the earlier sale appraised at £51; the Apponyi copy went for £17. The first edition of St. Augustine's treatise "De Civitate Dei," printed in the Monastery of Soubiaco, falls from £66 to £25; and even the famous Ximenez "Biblia Polyglotta," of which only a very few copies can ever come again into the open market, shows a decline in value of about £50. In many instances books which eight years ago sold for pounds now only realize as many shillings. A few exceptions, however, occur here and there. Clearly old books are not a safe investment, and the man who wants to make money out of book-collecting must put it into the first editions of Dickens, Thackeray, and other modern writers.—Pall Mall Budget.

Beats a Burglar Alarm. A music box prevented a robbery in St. Louis the other night. W. A. Meany, newly married, received when his wedding gifts a handsome box. The robbers broke

into his house and had managed to gather together a lot of plunder, when they mistook the music box for a jewel casket and tried to open it. In doing so they set the music machine in motion and presently Mr. Meany was roused from his slumbers by the touching strains of "Auld Lang Syne." Mr. Meany got his gun and started for the burglars and they started for a window. He arrived at the drawing room doorway just in time to see the two burglars leaping from the window. He fired, but the robbers continued their flight.

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What a perverse thing life is. You have had your eye on that adjoining farm. The other fellow steps in and buys it.

You have had your heart set on that pretty Miss Sweetbrier in the village. The other fellow gets the first prompt word in, and you are lost. There is a concert in the Town Hall. You have promised to take Miss Mossrose. The rain falls in torrents.

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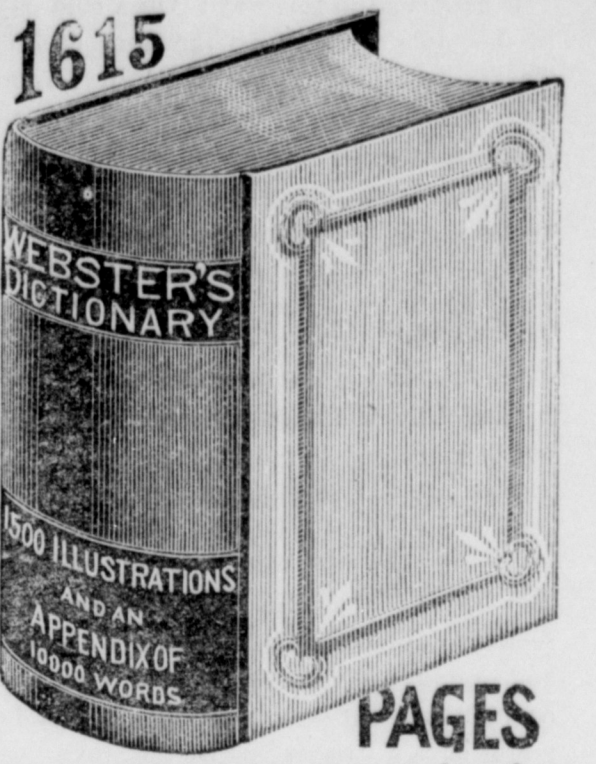
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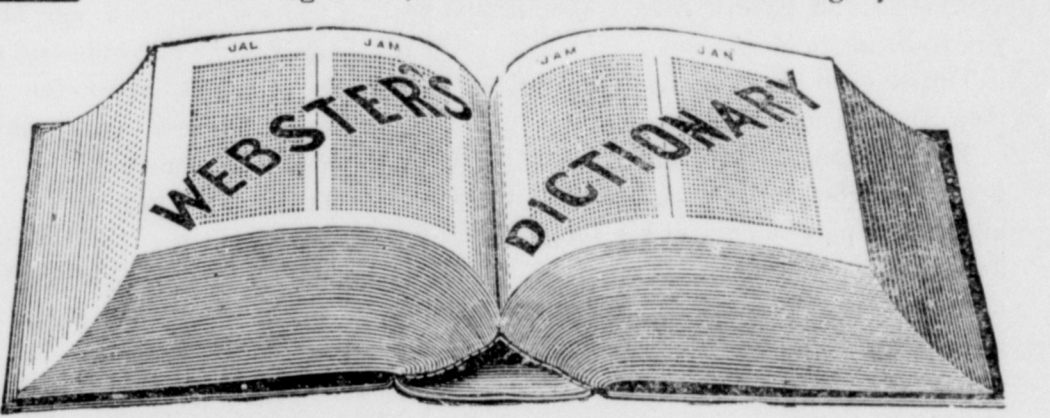


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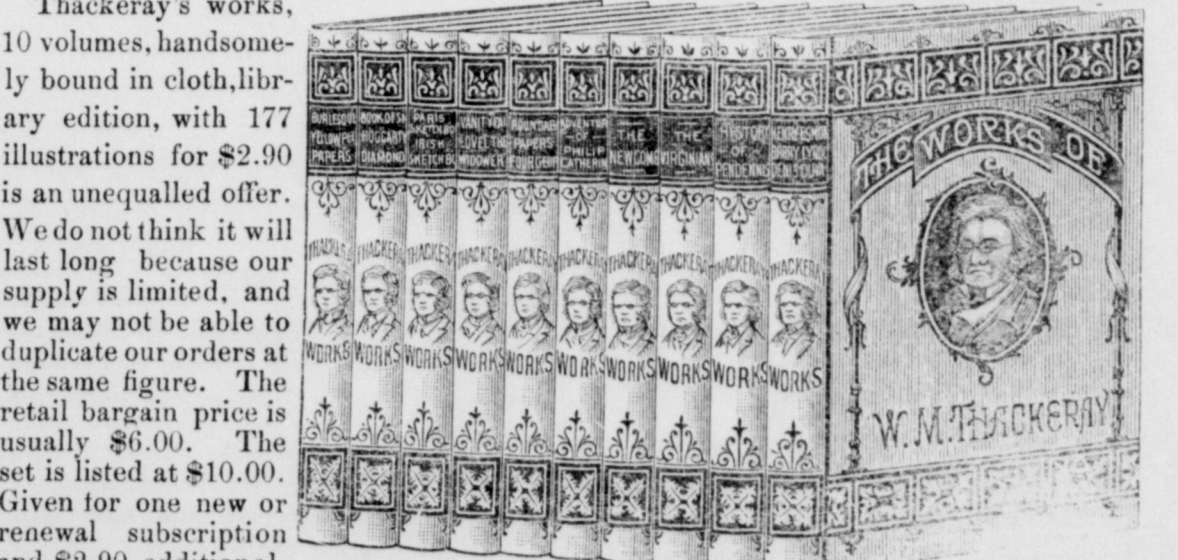
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