MANX NATIONAL MUSIC (1898)
"MANX MUSIC: A SKETCH"

INTRODUCTION

[v a] I have been asked to give a short account of the quest for Manx Music, in which, in concert with my brother, Deemster Gill, and our mutual friend, Dr John Clague, I have had the privilege of taking an active part. I had hoped that someone more able and impartial than myself might have been found to undertake the task, but this has proved impracticable. Accordingly, at the risk of repeating myself by saying over again what I have already so often said in public, I venture to offer the following sketch—narrative, commentary, and apology in one—for what it is worth.

THE QUEST.

In the Summer of 1894 I was invited by my colleagues, as stated in the Preface, to help them in carrying out a project which had been formed many years ago and had since been often discussed by them, viz., to collect and preserve from the oblivion into which it was rapidly passing all that remained of the national music of the Isle of Man, for, with the exception of the thirteen tunes published in 1820 under the title *Mona Melodies*, no attempt of the kind had ever been made before. The first steps of our joint undertaking were somewhat discouraging, for some people said, and to some extent truly, that it was

TOO LATE.

The old generation of untaught singing milkmaids and whistling ploughboys, and the race of itinerant fiddlers who used to delight the frequenters of the village inns, and the old people sitting in the cosy chimney-corners of the farm-houses, and the lasses and lads that danced in the barns at the mehlias or harvest-homes—these rustic musicians bad passed away (so it was said) and the old tunes were being replaced by the tunes of the London music-halls. However, our gleanings from one source or another were not inconsiderable, and in spite of the seeming odds against us we still cherished a hope that by a carefully arranged

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

we might yet discover in out-of-the-way spots on the mountains and among the solitary glens a remnant of the old folk who might still have retained some of the earlier tunes hitherto unrecorded.

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THE HARVEST.

Nor were our hopes in vain, for subsequent search resulted in a success far exceeding our most sanguine expectations, and in a very considerable addition to our original collection.

CONTRIBUTORS.

We had the good fortune to interview in different parts of the Island quite a goodly number of old Manxmen and Manxwomen of ages ranging from 65 to 84, all more or less musically gifted, and some of whom had in their younger days enjoyed a local reputation as singers in church, chapel, farmhouse, or inn, as the case might be. These interviews took place indoors and out, in shoemaker's shops, in smithies, in public-houses, by the roadside, in mud-floored cottages, on door-steps, in turnip fields, and in cart-sheds. We found the tunes not in libraries or museums or concert-halls, for with the exception of a dozen or so they had never been written down; not in the drawing-rooms of the gentry, for piano-playing young ladies knew not of their existence; we got [v b] them not from the proud descendents of our great kings. Strange as it may appear, it is none the less true that we found them locked up in the heads and hearts of a few of the oldest men and women we could find; most of them unlettered, many of them more or less unskilled in music, all of them belonging to

THE PEASANT CLASS—

sailors, weavers, blacksmiths, fishermen, shoemakers, farm labourers, tillers of the land and sea, dwellers in little cottages of rough-hewn stone, which look as if they had built themselves, so like are they to the rough ground on which they stand, far distant from the towns, far away in the remotest wilds. The following extract from my diary—and I could give many more of a similar kind—will give some idea of the sort of people we had to interview, and of the wild surroundings of their secluded homes. It describes our visit to Philip Caine, or

"PHILLIE THE DESERT"

as he was called. He lived in a desert only in the sense that there were but few human habitations in sight, and yet a lovely spot not far from the "madding crowd" of that over-much crowded town called Douglas.

Very beautiful is that valley of West Baldwin, flanked by the rounded mountain of Garraghan, not far from his brother-mountain Pen-y-Phot. A clear stream meanders through the meadows, and the grey stems of the ash trees and birches flash like silver spears along the valley on this bright April day. In yonder little white-washed cottage by the road side that old man lives with his wife. The window-sills of red sandstone are heightened with a wash of brilliant rose-colour, and on [vi a] them there are a few bright flowers in pots. In front of it a trim little garden with flowering currants in full bloom, and golden daffodils in their happy neglected beauty. "Phillie is up in the

loft," they tell us, "but he'll come down." Presently there appears at the top of the long flight of stone steps outside the barn an old man bent and crippled with rheumatism, his hair frosted with seventy-five winters, supporting himself with a stick in one band, and a worn-out broom by way of a crutch under his arm. The cheerfulness and powers of endurance of the Manx peasantry are proverbial. As the old man crawled down those hard stone steps on hands and knees not a murmur escaped his lips. Only once afterwards the coming cloud overshadowed him for a moment. We were sitting in the cart-shed, and a horse-cloth spread over heaps of dried bracken afforded a homely couch in perfect keeping with the rustic surroundings. As the old man rose from his lowly seat with aching limbs he said, "I am thinking, Sir, it's Death; I don't think I'll see another winter." But the next moment he was talking and singing and laughing as merrily as a child, and great was his delight to hear his tunes reproduced from the notes I had written down. The expression of that old man's face was wonderful to see. It was that of ecstasy. He had witnessed, as he thought, a miracle, a revelation, a piece of art-magic wrought in collusion with the Prince of Darkness. "Aw! grand extr'ordin'ry! Aw, well, well, I naver knew the lek was in!" As we left that old shed the valley was bathed in golden sunshine, the stream sang its old sweet song, and on the sunny slope of the opposite hill the old man's grandson was driving his plough. That was on the 18th April, 1895, and during the interval which has elapsed, old Phillie the Desert has passed away "To where beyond these voices there is Peace."

Should the reader desire to know what means were used to coax the tunes out of these rugged but venerable and kind-hearted minstrels, I would remind him of that wonderful horn in the ancient legend; and how the music in it had got frozen and remained silent; and how on reaching home the player hung the horn up on its peg over the fire-place, and then gradually the music thawed, and lo! the air was flooded with streams of melody. It was the warmth of the fire that did it. And so, in spite of these old Manxmen's native reserve and shyness and sensitiveness, we soon found that the warmth of a kind word and a sympathetic smile opened to us all the treasures of their inmost hearts.

Of this music, thus rescued from the dead past,

THE FIRST NOTE

was struck in the hearing of the public, not in the little Island which had originally produced it, but in a small and somewhat obscure town in the south of England. In a lecture given before the Sidcup Literary and Scientific Society, on the 19th of March, 1895, I gave an account of our first voyage of discovery, and on that occasion was performed, for the first time in public, a concert programme consisting exclusively of Manx Music. The lecture, which was fully reported in the local newspaper, was reproduced in the Musical Standard, and, in view of the general interest which the subject aroused, the *Daily News* suggested the desirability of a repetition of the

demonstration before a London audience. Accordingly, on the 14th of May, 1895, in response to an invitation from Sir John Stainer, I had the honour to read, at a meeting of the

MUSICAL ASSOCIATION

in London, a paper on Manx Music, with vocal and instrumental illustrations—and the sterling quality of these samples served to show that the find was well worth all the trouble that had been expended upon it.

I have often been asked,

ARE THE MANX A MUSICAL NATION?

By nature I believe they are. They certainly have good voices, and are very fond of music. But, until the beginning of the present century, they appear to have been wholly without a teacher. Poor old Shepherd of 90 years ago, with his Lancashire solfa system of singing, was the first musical missionary to the masses, and in our own day the disciples of John Curwen have introduced a better method. But, apart from these influences, we Manxmen have been musically self-taught, and the seeds of the music that is in us, such as it is, seem to have dropped direct from Heaven. Our only singing masters have been the birds of the air, the sea breezes, and the running brooks. If we had bad more teachers we might have done better work. As it is, we have been a nation of untaught

NATURE SINGERS

and nature-poets and some of our tunes show it. There is that song, for instance, about the sheep under the snow (No. xxxi, Part i, Piano Arrangements). The originators of that melody (and it is without doubt as ancient as any of them) evidently knew nothing about harmony or the art of modulation as we understand it, and yet we have in it the idea of modulation in an embryonic state, prefigured like the full-blown rose in the tiny germ of the bud. Whatever may be the actual origin of this ancient music, it may be pretty safely conjectured that a great deal of it has been produced not by great composers, nor princes, nor court-bards taught by learned professors, but that it has

COME UP AS A FLOWER

out of the very soil, and has been moulded into shape by a slow process of

EVOLUTION

extending, it may be, over several centuries, by individual singers musically gifted, but technically [vi b] untaught. All evolutionists are agreed that the two fundamental principles which underlie the life-history of an organism are

ENVIRONMENT AND HEREDITY

And the life-history of a folk-song must follow these two universal laws of growth. The first step therefore to the due appreciation of Manx music is some knowledge, however slight, of the geographical position and physical character of the country which has produced the people, and of the characteristic traits—physical, intellectual, and moral—of the people who have produced the music. Under these two heads of Environment and heredity, the following may be placed as the most important factors of evolution, viz.:

i. Locality.
ii. History.
iii. Language.
iv. National Temperament.
v. National Instruments.

I. LOCALITY

Mr Hall Caine, and many other eminent writers, have familiarized the world with the sweet beauty of the Manx scenery, and painted in glowing words the loveliness of its glens, its wealth of golden gorse and purple heather, and its "green hills by the sea." It would be strange if the dwellers in this enchanted land were not infected with a spirit of romanticism, and it is easy to see how to a simple-minded people the sights and sounds of Nature gradually assume definite shape, and at last find expression in wild melodies and the conception of fairies and phantoms. The faculty of seeing the unseen (if the expression may be allowed), and of hearing the inaudible so finely portrayed in Shakespeare's Caliban, is one of the earliest instincts in the evolution of man, and the very essence of the poetic art is but the emphasizing and higher development of this primitive child-like faculty. Hence it happens that to the unsophisticated Manxman—the cottager in the glen and on the lonely mountain-side—a belief in

FAIRIES

is to this day an essential part of his being. Until quite recently the mythology of Manxland was as real a thing as was the mythology of Ancient Greece. In illustration of this, here is a little story founded on fact relating with circumstantial detail the origin of one of our dance tunes, No. vi, Part iii, called

"YN BOLLAN BANE."

The hero of the story was a Manx fiddler, who related it to a man who still lives to tell the tale. One night he went out on the mountains to look after his sheep, his only companions being his fiddle and his dog; and, on his way home, he came upon a favourite haunt of the fairies. To protect himself from their baneful influence, he

had taken the precaution to gather some leaves of the Bollan Bane (Mugwort), a weed possessing extraordinary proper-ties which abounds in the island, and is reputed to be a specific against supernatural powers. The little people were making merry, as was their wont, dancing in the moonlight to the sound of their fairy fiddles. Desirous of learning the tune, which to him was new and very captivating, he listened attentively until he had caught it up and was able to reproduce it on his own fiddle. And then he went on his way borne greatly rejoicing at his acquisition. When he had crossed the Slieu Dhoo and got to the big Carnane where the giant lies buried, he sat down to try the tune; but, alas! he had forgotten every note of it. Nothing daunted, however, he went back again, a whole mile or so, up the mountain slope and listened once more. The fairies were still, as he said, "carrying on." This time "he got a good hould of the tune," and proceeded once more on his way home. It was now Sunday morning. The sun was rising as he crossed the big purple shoulder of Slieu Curn, and eventually he reached his little cottage home in Orry's dale, where, of course, he got a sound scolding from his good wife, Molly, for staying out all night. [vii a] However, music hath charms, and when he told his wife that he had got a tune which he would not exchange for a hundred pounds, she brightened up, and insisted on hearing it; and when, later on, "he purra a sthroke or two on the bow an' gay' her the tune," Molly, good soul, was so delighted that she vowed never again to be angry with a husband who could do "such terr'ble wondherful things."

II. HISTORY

The history of the Isle of Man is peculiarly interesting, and may be compared to a rich tapestry in which may be traced threads of many colours of nationality forming strongly contrasted patterns. For ages past the island was the battle field, as it is now the summer playground, of the surrounding nations. Its original inhabitants were Iberians, then it was conquered by the Celts, then by the Danes, after that by the Norwegians, then by the Scotch, and lastly by the English. Each of these nations has left its mark upon the character of its people, their language, their surnames, their place-names, and their ancient institutions. That being so, one would naturally expect to find in the national music of the island

TRACES

more or less marked of each of the nations who have had possession of it from time to time. As a matter of fact, traces of the Irish, Scotch, and English element are abundant. One of our tunes (No. xvi, Part 1, Piano Arrangements) has been claimed by the Irish, by the Scotch, and by the English. The English call it "The Buff Coat"; the Scotch call it "The Deuks gang ower my daddie"; and Tom Moore appropriated it under the title, "My husband's a journey to Portugal gone." It is called in Manx "Kiark Catriney Marroo," which means "Catherine's hen is dead." Wherever the tune may have originated, the fact remains that it has, from time immemorial, been

associated with an ancient custom held on St. Catherine's Day, and peculiar to the Isle of Man. Some of our tunes, however, are essentially Scotch in character, some are decidedly Irish, a few might pass for Welsh, while many have the unmistakable ring of the Old English School.

Indeed, it stands to reason, looking at the history and the geographical position of our island, that many of its tunes must have been

IMPORTED READY MADE,

and not composed on the spot. But, even so, Manx land should at least have the credit of having gathered into her bosom these waifs and strays of the surrounding lands, and thus kept them alive in the general struggle for existence. After allowing for all possible importations, there must still be a certain residue, be it large or small, purely Manx. Nothing short of an exhaustive search of all existing collections of folk-music can settle the question absolutely; but, so far as one can judge from the more generally accessible published collections, it would seem that such tunes as may have been imported into our little island have survived there, whereas they have been permitted to die and are now unknown elsewhere. Whatever be the origin of our music, a careful examination of our entire collection will leave no doubt in any candid mind that, as there is in our country and people

A CHARACTER PECULIARLY THEIR OWN

So our music, taken as a whole, has an individually distinctive character which does not belong to the music of any other country. This can be more easily felt than described in words, but some of its specific characteristics will be described later on. Like those of Scotland, as described by Professor Shairp, these melodies of' Manxland are "simple and yet strong; wild, yet sweet; answering wonderfully to the heart's primary emotions, lending themselves alike to sadness or gaiety, to humour, drollery, or pathos, to manly independence and resolve, or to heart-broken lamentation."

III. LANGUAGE

[vii a] The ancient language of the Isle of Man is Gaelic, a branch of the Celtic. It was once the language of Europe and the universal language of the British Isles. Within the memory of men and women still living one-half of the population spoke Manx. Not many years ago it was taught in the schools; it was to be heard in the law courts, alike from the bench, from the bar, and from the witness-box. It was to be heard in the church service on one or more Sundays during each month. Now it is entirely discontinued. It has ceased to be taught in the schools; it is rarely heard in conversation except among the peasantry in out-of-the-way places. Writing thirty-six years ago, an accomplished Manx scholar described it as "a doomed language—an iceberg floating into Southern latitudes." Today it is practically

A DEAD LANGUAGE

To the philologist and antiquary, however, it possesses no small recommendation. It is peculiarly forcible and expressive. It is eminently a poetical language, dealing largely with metaphors. For instance, the Manx name for remorse is "a little bone in the breast." An inconstant person is styled "with me—with thee." For "the water is boiling" they say "the water is playing." The rainbow is "the going North." The Zodiac is the "footpath of the Sun." The word for child is "half-saint," and for bed "hall-meat." The mere

SOUND OF THE LANGUAGE

has a grand rolling resonance and rhythmical pulse. Take, for instance, the last clause of the Lord's Prayer, "For Thine is the Kingdom": "Son ihiats y reeriaght as y phooar as y ghloyr, son dy bragh as dy bragh. Amen."

This is the grave and sombre side of the language. It recalls the thunder of the big waves as they roll into the ocean caverns. But it has also a light and bright fantastic side, as illustrated in the following verses in imitation of the blackbird's song

"Kione jiarg, Kione jiarg,
Apyrn dhoo, Apyrn dhoo
Vel oo cheet, Vel oo cheet,
Skee fieau, Skee fieau,
Lhondoo, Lhondoo."

There may not be much sense or much poetry in this little song, and yet there is certainly music in it.

THE SOURCE OF FOLK SONGS

will always be an absolute mystery. Once the tune has been started it is comparatively easy to conceive the subsequent steps in the evolution; how one man put in a note here and another a note there; but the mystery is: how is the first idea produced, and whence does it come? Of the many existing definitions of Art perhaps the best, because the simplest, is that

ART IS AN IMITATION OF NATURE

Take we then this jingle of words, and regard it as a little singing lesson from Nature. The very idea of it is pretty and poetical It is an apostrophe to the blackbird. Picture the imitative animal, man, listening to the bird singing, then copying the birds' song-pattern, and translating it into his own word-language. It would be interesting to analyse the steps of the evolutionary process through which such a first idea as this, passing slowly through the alembic of Art, gets transformed and transmuted into a full-fledged blackbird song such as No. lviii (Piano Arrangements). Add a flute or clarinet obbligato and the summit of Art is attained. But are we to suppose that those Manx words are

A MERE JINGLE

of sound to please the ear of a child, and that the man who composed it was thinking of nothing beyond the mere bird I would, be idle fancy and romance to suppose that he was really thinking, not so much of the bird as of his ruddy-haired sweet-heart, who lives in the cottage with "the red fuchsia [viii a] tree" yonder! With this clue in mind let us translate the words into English.

"Red head, Red head,
Black apron, black apron,
Are you coming? are you coming?
Tired waiting! tired waiting!
Blackbird! blackbird!"

Primitive, rude, and unpolished as the thing is, one must admit that, in the very essence of it, it is a love-song; and if we analyse it we get this result. First the physical basis, the objective imitative element of Form—the melody and rhythm of Sound; and secondly, the subjective element of human Emotion—love, joy, sorrow, and kindred feelings, as the soul and motive. And when, in the words of Professor Shairp, Nature and "the sensitive imagination of man" meet, we have that "result or creation" which we call Art.

IV. NATIONAL TEMPERAMENT—PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND MORAL

Some of our traits of character are conspicuous in our proverbs, of which we have a goodly number. One of these traits is our extreme caution, and a common saying with us is "Tra dy liooar." (Time enough.) But those who call us slow generally give us the credit of being also sure. In temperament the average Manxman is something between an Irishman and a Scotchman, the enthusiasm of the one being tempered with the coolness of the other. Neither optimist nor pessimist, he prefers in all things a middle course as the safest. His habitual policy is moderation. And if, as we have seen, the Manx peasantry are by nature superstitious, so also are they

ESSENTIALLY RELIGIOUS

The large number and extreme simplicity of their ancient places of worship are evidences of a wide-spread and simple religious faith; and as in politics there are here no party differences, so in religion churchmen and absenters are bosom friends. The seeds of Christianity introduced, as some think, in the fifth century by St. Patrick and his missionaries, seem to have found here a congenial soil. In later times John Wesley was particularly proud of his Manx preachers and of the islanders generally. He declares in his diary (1777) that in no other place had he found "so plain, so earnest, so simple, and so unpolluted a people." In those days the Manx sailor, before stepping on board his fishing boat, was wont to repeat a prayer invoking blessings on the fruits of his toil—a custom now more honoured in the breach than the observance. From very early times an extensive native literature had existed in the

form of Carols. These were the fruits or accompaniments of a religious revival which, on the publication of

THE BIBLE IN MANX

in 1772, received a mighty accession of force. Here, as elsewhere, the opening of this marvellous picture-book operated like the touch of a magic spring. It was the Bible that inspired the greatest masterpieces of literature, painting, and music—Milton's great epic, Bunyan's incomparable allegory, Raphael's car-toons, Handel's "Messiah." So in this little kingdom of Man, it was the first opening of the Bible in the common language of the country that touched the heart and kindled the religious enthusiasm of the nation; and the result was the production of a vast number of these carols—a form of native literature which, though not of a high order, has a definite value in the history of letters.

V. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Unlike Ireland and the other surrounding countries, the Isle of Man cannot boast of any distinctively national musical instrument. Beyond a rude figure of a harp on one of the ancient Scandinavian crosses which abound in our country churchyards, and the existence, near Douglas, of a place named Glen Crutchery, the Harper's Glen,

NO TRACE OF THE HARP

[viii b] can be found. Here, as elsewhere, the violin has always been, and is still, a favourite instrument; but its use in the past has been chiefly associated with dance music. Except in a limited sense the violin, like the human voice, has no fixed scale-intervals, and can, therefore, follow the voice with the same freedom that the voice can follow the instrument. Moreover, the older

MANX FIDDLES,

Dr Clague tells me, were fitted with only three strings, the two lower ones supplying a continuous "pedal" harmony, like that produced by the drones of a bagpipe, whilst the highest string was reserved for the melody. Something of this effect is suggested in the piano arrangement of the two dances, Nos. xiv and xvi, in Part iii of the present volume. But even for dancing purposes

THE VOICE

was, in days gone by, the instrument commonly employed; and, as no set words were available, a nonsense verse was extemporised. Thus the ideal of Manx music seems to be "Vox et praeterea nihil," which may be freely translated, Given a voice, man needs nothing more. Even today it is very noticeable that all through the singing of a song

THE WORDS RULE

while the music merely follows. It is chanting rather than singing. Or rather it appears as though music and words were twin-born. Nay, more, they are not kin, they are one; so that, if you ask your bard, as we often had occasion to do, to sing or hum the tune apart from the words, he can hardly do so, and if he once loses the words of his song the music is gone beyond recall. Hence we may truly say of Manx music that, having been born of the voice, it is

ESSENTIALLY VOCAL

Indeed, we may carry our theorising one step farther. In early times, in all countries alike, the

LIMITATIONS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS,

while in some respects promoting musical progress, have at the same time retarded it by imposing upon the voice an uncongenial scale of "tempered" intervals, and by confining it to certain keys and modulations to the exclusion of others. Hence we may argue, from what has been stated above, that the dearth of musical instruments in Man may have had a beneficial effect by making the singers rely entirely upon their unaided voices, thus conducing to purer intonation as well as greater variety of melodic design. However that may be, I would venture to say to

THE MANX COMPOSER OF THE FUTURE,

"Now you have recovered your lost models, study reverently their lines and proportions, and continue the work your fathers have commenced. But be not content with mere imitation of outward form. You can no more make Manx music by using the Dorian mode than you can make Scotch music, as is popularly supposed, by playing at random on the black keys of the piano. What we want is not so much the old form as the old spirit of the thing. We want the heart of the people, and the life of the people, and their character stamped upon the music, so that in times to come our countrymen may be able to say of your music, as we can all say of many of these old tunes, that music is essentially Manx—Manx in character, in purpose, in feeling."

To estimate truly the intrinsic value of these melodies, especially the more ancient ones, one ought in strictness to see them as we found them, growing like wild flowers among the ling and gorse of our native land—bare, naked melodies, without harmony or accompaniment of any kind—very foundlings, many of them, without even a name; all of them without a pedigree; rough diamonds, without polish or setting. Moreover, to appreciate their full flavour, one ought to come upon them in their original wild state, nestling in the hearts and homes of these primitive people, now warm with the life-pulse of love and joy, now toned down with the weight of care and [ix a] sorrow and bitter endurance. They should be heard sung to

and with the vocal intonation peculiar to the people. It is delightful to hear these old men expatiate upon the superior strength and beauty of their ancient language as compared with English—for they know both languages, and are keenly critical. At the end of a verse or a line they will suddenly stop singing and lose themselves in an ecstasy of admiration, commenting upon what they have been singing about, translating a Manx word here and there, explaining an idiom, or enlarging upon the incidents of the story. Now it is the stirring history of the brave Thurot, now the sad disaster to the herring fleet; now it is the lost sheep, the jilted maiden, the courting, the marrying, the hush-a-bye-baby, the spinning, the milking, the ploughing, and all the varied incidents of a rough country life. It is all so real and earnest. No mawkishness, no affectation; all pointing to the stern fact that in these dwellings of the poor "life is real, life is earnest." In the singing of these old people, as well as in their recitation of poetry, of which latter they are particularly fond, we found at times almost a total absence of a definite

METRICAL ACCENT,

and in its stead an ever smoothly-flowing rhythm, relieved here and there—often in the least expected places—by a pause of indefinite length. In fact such was the freedom of the "phrasing," and to such an extent was the rhythmic structure concealed, that much of their music might be appropriately represented like

PLAIN SONG

without any bar-lines. Nor was this vagueness due to any lack of rhythmic sense on the part of the performer, for when a dance tune had to be sung it was rendered with due precision and clearness of accent. And yet, if the tunes could be written down, as with a phonograph, exactly as we heard them, and then reproduced faithfully, with all their vagueness of tempo, their uncertainness of intonation, their little quaverings and embellishments, quite unrepresentable by ordinary musical notation, if we had all these things faithfully registered, who would care for the result? Some would ask "Can these dry bones live?" Others would impatiently exclaim, "How different from the singing of trained singers!" Yes, and I had almost said, "How much better!" Strong, at least, in its very sincerity, and earnestness, and freedom, and artlessness, even as nature is stronger than art. To us, indeed, it was a definite pleasure, though not unmixed with sadness, to hear these old voices now cracked and wasted by a life-long strain of hardship, for one could perceive inside those rough hard husks a kernel sweet and fragrant as the almond—so true is it that when a man sings with his soul one has no mind to criticise his voice. But, apart from considerations of sentiment, two practical difficulties had to be faced. First, as regards

THE RAW MATERIAL,

the object was to obtain an absolutely true record of the melody, the whole melody, and nothing but the melody, and in attaining this object the difficulty was twofold, viz., to represent in the precise and inelastic terms of musical notation, without prejudice and uninfluenced by preconceived ideas of artistic right and wrong, the melody which, as actually heard, was often exceedingly vague and indefinite as regards both tune and time. In respect of intonation, the difficulty lay in discriminating between the peculiar tonality of the ancient "modes" and that of modern music; while as regards time, the difficulty was the right placing of the bar-lines with due regard to the grammatical accent as distinguished from the artistic pause and emphasis imported by the individual singer. And, secondly, as regards

THE WROUGHT MATERIAL,

the difficulty was to determine the precise form in which to present these melodies to the outside world, for it seemed clear that in order to make these rough [ix b] things presentable to modern ears and palatable to modern taste,

THE FOUNDLINGS MUST BE CLOTHED,

the ore smelted, the gold minted, the diamonds polished and set, the flowers "arranged." Laying aside all metaphor, as editor of this music in its present form, I would say once for all that in endeavouring to combine antiquarian fidelity with artistic beauty I am conscious of having essayed a difficult if not impossible task. In

"ARRANGING"

the melodies full advantage has been taken of the latitude implied by the word. As regards the

HARMONIES,

my object, be it right or wrong, has been to add just enough of modern harmonic colour to make the tunes interesting to an average modern audience; and so give them a chance of life, not only in a scientific lecture or on the shelves of the antiquarian's library, but in the drawing-room of the rich, in the cottage of the poor, and in the concert hall. How far I have succeeded must be left for the critics and the people to decide. Again, in dealing with the vexed question of

"RESTORATION,"

the difficulty has been equally great, and I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to state exactly the extent of my "tampering," as some would call it. In those cases where the tune, as found, was obviously only a fragment of a larger whole I have ventured to supply new material, preserving as far as possible the character of the surviving portion. Fortunately the necessity for such restoration has arisen so seldom,

and the additions which have been actually made are, under the circumstances, so trifling as to be scarcely worth mentioning. If only, however, to pacify the anti-restorationist the following

LIST OF ACTUAL RESTORATIONS

is given. The numbers refer to the piano arrangements. Part i—Nos. i and vii, 4 bars added to introduce dominant cadence leading to a repeat; viii, 8 bars added as 2nd subject; xxii, 4 bars added as 2nd subject; xxiv, 2 bars added, inverted pedal; xlvi, two different tunes (commonly sung to the same song) combined to form one tune; lii, 8 bars (minor theme) added as a variation; lv, 6 bars of symphony mistaken as part of melody by the Librettist, and set to words in song-book; lvii, 4 bars added as coda; lxiv, 4 bars added to form chorus; lxviii, 2 bars added for symmetry.

Part ii—No additions.

Part iii—Nos. ii and iv, 8 bars added to form 2nd subject; viii, 2 bars added to restore balance; xv, 8 bars (minor theme) added as a variation.

The propriety of these restorations, or the contrary, can be tested when, in accordance with our original plan,

THE ACTUAL MELODIES AS WE FOUND THEM

shall have been published in a separate volume.

"THE ROYAL EDITION."

But to resume my narrative. The next important step was the publication in September, 1896, by Messrs Boosey, of 51 songs, selected from the general collection, and set to English words with piano accompaniment. As stated in the preface, the title of this book,

"MANX NATIONAL SONGS,"

is used in the sense only that the melodies, with many others now lost, are known to have been in past days popular, and in general use in the Isle of Man, most of them associated with Manx words. The publication of this song book was an important step, because it has given the music of Manxland a prominent position by placing it on the same shelf with that of other countries, and within the reach of all lovers of folk-music. This volume furnished the exclusive material for the programmes of several

CONCERTS

One, given in Sidcup in February, 1897, attracted an exceptionally large audience, as did also two lecture recitals in London, the first on the 19th of December, 1896, under the auspices of the Irish Literary Society, [x a] and the second on the 2nd of April, 1897, before the London Many Society. These lectures and demonstrations

were supplemented on the 7th and 14th of January, 1897, and again on the 29th of December, by concerts of Manx music in Douglas, which caused immense excitement, and attracted the largest patriotic audiences ever brought together in the island. That the book has been a success is amply proved by the frankly undisguised appreciation it has received from professional singers and their audiences, sot only in London but in the provinces, as well as by the fact that within some three or four months of its publication a second issue of a thousand copies was called for.

But this volume of songs, which has already become so well known and so much appreciated, contains only the

FIRST-FRUITS OF THE HARVEST

The success of the first installment has justified the publishers in issuing, in accordance with the original design of the projectors this second volume, consisting of Manx music simply arranged for the piano—in fact a volume of

MANX SONGS WITHOUT WORDS

Of this volume the first part consists of piano arrangements of all the

SONGS AND BALLADS

contained in the song book, besides many others, for which suitable English words will doubtless be forthcoming in due time. The second part consists of

CAROLS AND HYMNS

This class of Manx traditional music is that most generally known, and the singing of it in public has survived the longest. These carvals—a corruption of the English word carol—to which I have already referred in speaking of the essentially religious character of the Manx people, are ballads on sacred subjects which in days gone by it was the custom to sing in the churches and chapels on the eve of Christmas Day, called the Oie-il-Verree. Many of these carols are particularly interesting, as illustrating a very conspicuous characteristic of Manx music, viz.: the prevalence of the so-called

DORIAN MODE

This mode, differing essentially, as it does, from our modern major and minor scales, lends a peculiar flavour which, despite its strangeness at first hearing, has nevertheless a very decided charm of its own. If anyone will play on the piano the following succession of notes up and down many times he will experience a strange mental sensation as of a scale with a wrong note or two in it:

[Graphic]

and, if he be of a combative disposition, he will probably be possessed of a strong desire to flatten the B and sharpen the C. Further study will show that this Dorian mode is one of the ancient alphabets of an idiom of music which has become practically obsolete. For a musician whose acquaintance with the ancient modes was confined to churches and scientific books to be brought face to face with them in actual simple peasant life, and hear these untaught, essentially unecclesiastical, and unscientific people actually Singing "Gregorian" music—delightfully unconscious that they were doing anything out of the common—was an experience both novel and startling. One of the tunes in the song book (No. v, Part i, in the piano arrangements) besides furnishing an interesting and beautiful example of the Dorian mode is also a good typical specimen of a

STRUCTURAL FORM OF MELODY

common in Ireland, and still more common in the Isle of Man. In the conventional four-line melody, there is generally first a musical thought or statement, [x b] then a reply, then another (or the same) statement, and lastly another (or the same) reply. in this and other tunes of the same type the order of statement and reply is different and peculiar. Here we have

i. First a statement:

[Graphic]

ii. Then a reply:

[Graphic]

iii. Then a repetition (or modification) of the original statement:

[Graphic]

iv. Finally a repetition (or modification) of the original statement:

[Graphic]

This scheme is analogous to that of the rhymes in "In Memoriam," where the first line rhymes with the fourth and the second with the third.

OTHER EXAMPLES

of this peculiar structure of melody are the following

(the numbers refer to the piano arrangements):— Part i, Nos. iii, v, ix, x, xxvi, xxxvi, xxxix, xli, l, lix, lxi, lxii, lxxii, lxxxviii, xc. Part ii, Nos. v, iii, iv, vi, x, xxi.

"The question of determining whether or not the more ancient

SACRED MUSIC

represented by these carols and hymns was introduced by the Church, and, if so, whether before or since the Reformation, as also of solving many other problems to which the general collection naturally gives rise, is one full of interest and difficulty. Such problems involve more research than the compilers have at present time to devote to it; but being convinced that if adequately performed it would result in a valuable chapter in the history of National Music, and knowing as they do that by far the greater number of the tunes have never before been published, or ever reduced to writing, and come from a source which is rapidly being lost, the compilers consider they are doing a useful and patriotic work in rescuing these tunes and placing them on record for future use.*

The third part of the book consists of

DANCE TUNES,

all more or less interesting, of which the pedigree cannot at present be fixed with any certainty.

CONCLUSION

I cannot better conclude this sketch than by quoting the opinion of the "Little Manx Nation" itself, as expressed in its leading journal: "The compilers of these Manx National Songs have done the State a service by rescuing from almost certain extinction the songs of our native land; songs, many of them beautiful in their melodiousness and quaintness, strongly characteristic of the race which gave them birth, and, with few exceptions, entirely unknown to the present generation. This has been accomplished only by dint of unwearied devotion to a cause which to many would have seemed hopeless?"

W. H. G.

Sidcup, Kent.
1st January, 1898.

* Preace—*antea.*

Source: W.H. Gill, "Manx Music: A Sketch." *Manx National Music: Selected from the MS. Collection of the Deemster J.F. Gill, Dr J. Clague, and W.H. Gill, and Arranged by W.H. Gill* (London: Boosey, 1898) v–x.

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