J.F. CAMPBELL IN THE ISLE OF MAN (1860)

[l] Such, then, is the evidence which bears on the immediate origin of the stories. I believe them to be pure traditions, very little affected by modern books, and, if at all, only by those which are avowedly taken from popular tales. A trip of five days in the Isle of Man in April 1860 has but confirmed this opinion.

That island, in spite of its numerous rulers, is still peculiarly Celtic. It has belonged to Norwegians. English, Scotch, Welsh, and Irish have fought for it. It has a Law Court with a Norwegian name held on a mound; half the names in the island are Norse, such as Laxey (Salmon isthmus), Langness, Snafell; but these names are not understood by the people who live at the places. Peel has a descriptive Gaelic name, which means island port; a Salmon is Braddan, not Lax; and of the poorer classes living in the mountain farms, and on the points and distant corners of the island, there are still many who can hardly speak anything but Manks. Their hair is dark; the sound of their voices, [li] even their houses, are Celtic. I know one turf dwelling which might be a house in North Uist. There was the fire on the floor, the children seated around it, the black haired Celtic mother on a low stool in front,—the hens quarrelling about a nest under the table, in which several wanted to lay eggs at once.

"Get out, Polly! Drive her out, John!" And then John, the son, drove out Polly, the hen, with a stick; and the hen said "Gurr-r-m;" and ran in under the table again and said, "Cluck, cluck," and laid the egg then and there. There was the same kindly hospitable manner in the poorest cottage; and I soon found that a Scotch Highlander could speak Manks as soon as he could acquire the art of mispronouncing his own language to the right amount, and learn where to introduce the proper English word. "La fine"—fine day—was the salutation everywhere; and the reply, "Fine, fine." But though nouns are almost the same, and the language is but a dialect of Gaelic, the foreigner was incomprehensible, because he could not pronounce as they did; and I was reduced to English. Now this island is visited every summer by shoals of visitors from the mainland; steam-boats bring them from Liverpool, a thousand at a time, and they sweep over the whole country. If visitors import stories, here there are plenty of strangers, and I was a stranger myself. If stories are imported in books, here are the books also. The first picture I saw on landing was a magnificent Bluebeard in a shop window. He was dressed as an Eastern potentate, and about to slice off his wife's head with a crooked scimitar, while the two brothers rode up to the gate on prancing steeds, with horror on their faces and swords in their hands. But there was not a trace of any of that kind of story to be found amongst the peasants with whom I spoke in the Isle of Man.

[lii] I found them willing to talk, eager to question, kindly, homely folk, with whom it was easy to begin an acquaintance. I heard everywhere that it used to be

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common to hear old men telling stories about the fire in Manks; but any attempt to extract a story, or search out a queer old custom, or a half-forgotten belief, seemed to act as a pinch of snuff does on a snail.

The Manksman would not trust the foreigner with his secrets; his eye twinkled suspiciously, and his hand seemed unconsciously to grasp his mouth, as if to keep all fast. After getting quite at ease with one old fellow over a pipe, and having learned that a neighbour's cow had born a calf to the "Taroo ustey," water bull, I thought I might fish for a story, and told one as a bait.

"That man, if he had two pints, would tell you stories by the hour," said a boy. "Oh, yes, they used to tell plenty of stories," said the old man, "Skyll, as we call them."

Here was the very word mispronounced, "sgeul," so my hopes rose. "Will you tell me a story now?" "Have you any churches in your country?" "Yes, and chapels; but will you tell me a story?" "What you got to sell in your bag?" "What a shame now, for you, an old Mananach, not to tell me a story when I have told you one, and filled your pipe and all." "What do you pay for the tobacco?" "Oh, will you not tell the man a story?" said the boy. "I must go and saw now," said the old man; and so we parted.

But though this was the usual thing, it was not always so; and it soon became evident that the stories given in Train's history of the Isle of Man, are nearly all known to the people now; and these are of the same nature as some known in the Highlands of Scotland; [liii] some are almost identical; and nearly all the Manks customs are common to the Western Isles.

Thus I heard of Fairies, "Ferish," who live in green mounds, and are heard at times dressing mill-stones in haunted mills; of Taroo Ustey, the water bull; of Dinny Mara, the sea man, and of the Mermaid; of Caval Ustey, the water horse; of Fion MacCooil; of a city under the waves; of a magic island seen in the far west. I heard of giants. No one would tell about them; but in a book I found how Goddard Crovan threw a vast boulder at his scolding wife, and how a Norman baron, named "Kitter" and his cook; "Eaoch," and his magic sword, "Macabuin," made by "Loan Maclibhuin, the dark smith of Drontheim;" and "Hiallus-nan-urd, the one-legged hammerman,"—are all woven into a story, and mixed up with such Norwegian names as Olave and Emergaid, exactly as a story is jumbled together in the Western Isles of Scotland.

I got some stories which I have not found in the Manks books, so I give them here, in the hope that some Manksman may be induced to gather the popular lore of his own country. This from a woman who lives near the Calf of Man.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Glashan?"

"No; tell me about the Glashan."

"Well, you see, in the old times they used to be keeping the sheep in the folds; and one night an old man forgot to put them in, and he sent out his son, and he came back and said the sheep were all folded, but there was a year-old lamb, oasht, playing the mischief with them; and that was the glashan.

You see they were very strong, and when they wanted a stack threshed, though it was a whole stack, the glashan would have it threshed for them in one night.

"And they were running after the women. There was one of them once caught a girl, and had a hould of her by the dress, [liv] and he sat down and he fell asleep; and then she cut away all the dress, you see, round about this way, and left it in his fist and ran away; and when he awoke, he threw what he had over his shoulder, this way; and he said (something in Manks which I could not catch).

"Well, you see, one night the ould fellow sent all the women to bed, and he put on a cap and a woman's dress, and he sat down by the fire and he began to spin; and the young glashans, they came in, and they began saying something in Manks that means 'Are you turning the wheel? are you trying the reel?' Well, the ould glashan, he was outside, and he knew better than the young ones; be knew it was the ould fellow himself, and he was telling them, but they did not mind him; and so the ould man threw a lot of hot turf, you see, it was turf they burned then, over them and burned them; and the ould one said (something in Manks). 'You'll not understand that, now?' 'Yes, I do, pretty nearly.' 'Ah, well.' And so the glashans went away and never came back any more."

"Have you many stories like that, guidwife?" "Ay," said she, "there were plenty of people that could tell these stories once. When I was a little girl, I used to hear them telling them in Manks over the fire at night; but people is so changed with pride now that they care for nothing."

Now here is a story which is all over the Highlands in various shapes. Sometimes it is a Brollichan son of the Fuath, or a young water horse transformed into the likeness of a man, which attacks a lonely woman, and gets burned or scalded, and goes away to his friends outside. In the islands, the woman generally says her name is myself; and the goblin answers, when asked who burned him, "myself." This Manks story is manifestly the same, though this incident is left out. I have heard it in Lewis, and in many places besides, and part of it is best omitted.

The Glashan, as I found out afterwards, frequented neighbouring farms till within a very late period. He wore no clothes, and was hairy; and, according, to [lv] Train's history, Phynodderee, which means something hairy, was frightened away by a gift of clothes—exactly as the Skipness long-haired Gruagach was frightened away by the offer of a coat and a cap. The Manks brownie and the Argyllshire one each repeated a rhyme over the clothes; but the rhymes are not the same, though they amount to the same thing.

Here, then, is a Gaelic popular tale and belief in Man; and close to it I found a story which has a counterpart in Grimm. I heard it from my landlady at Port Erin, and I met two Manksmen afterwards who know it:

"The fish all gathered once to choose a king; and the fluke, him that has the red spots on him, stayed at home to make himself pretty, putting on his red spots, to see if he would be king, and he was too late, for when he came the herring was king of the sea. So the fluke curled his mouth on one side, and said, 'A simple fish like the herring, king of the sea!' and his mouth has been to one side ever since."

It seems, too, that the Manks version of "Jack the Giant Killer" varies from the English; for

"Jack the Giant Killer,
Varv a Vuchd in the river,"

killed a pig in the river; and the English hero did nothing of the sort. In short, the Isle of Man has its own legends, which have their own peculiarities; they resemble others, and do not seem to be taken from books. The same class of people tell them there as elsewhere; the difficulty of getting at them is the same; and the key to the secret is the native language. From what I gleaned in a five days' walk, I am sure that a good Manksman might yet gather a large harvest within a very narrow space. And now to return to my own subject.

> J.F. Campbell, "Introduction," *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. i (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860) ix–cxxxv.

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J.F. Campbell, the editor and compiler of the four volume *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860–62), visited the Island for five days in April 1860. As can be seen, he was not particualry successful in his attempts to collect similar material here.

Stephen Miller, rbv

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