

Manx Notes 705 (2025)

WILLIAM CASHEN'S MANX FOLK-LORE REVIEWS (1913)

(1)

There has just been published, at the price of one shilling, a neatly printed and well got up volume of Manx Folk Lore from the pen of the late William Cashen, for many years custodian of Peel Castle, with an introductory memoir by Miss S. Morrison. This posthumous publication of the output of a rich mine of Island story and legend, forms a most acceptable supplement to the book of folk-lore compiled by the late Mr Arthur W. Moore. It can be obtained at the *Courier* Office along with the new edition of "Cushag's" Poems.

"Manx Folk-Lore." *Ramsey Courier* 3 January 1913: 5f.

(2)

To the late Mr William Cashen, Custodian of Peel Castle, and Miss Sophia Morrison, the enthusiastic secretary of the Manx Language Society, we are indebted for a welcome contribution to Manx Folk-lore. The ancient customs, the old manners, the venerable speech of our ancestors are surely drifting in the distance, and it is the duty of patriotic persons to preserve all that can be preserved of our ancient heritage before it is too late. The unselfish labours of the Manx Language Society, which has done noble service in the past, is being continued with unabated earnestness and the country should be grateful. We have too much unsympathetic criticism of these noble endeavours, and it is usually those who criticise who perform the least, either for themselves or others.

However, Miss Morrison and her fellow-members of the Manx Language Society, do not look to the present for reward; their reward will undoubtedly come when the critics are dead and forgotten.

Mr Cashen's Folk-lore Book is prefaced by a sympathetic introduction by Miss Morrison, who was for years closely associated with him; in fact Miss Morrison declares that much of her knowledge of customs, Folk-lore, and the language was obtained from him. The story of Mr Cashen's early days, as told by Miss Morrison, is very interesting. It appears William Cashen was born at Dalby, and was one of a family of ten. They were all brought up at the Niarbyl Cottage, situated in one of the loneliest and most impressive pieces of scenery in Mann. He used to say that he and his brothers "slept in the cock-loft there, with their noses almost touching the *scraas*, that not a window in the cottage opened, and not a doctor darkened the door." He always spoke highly of his mother, as a hard-working, unselfish, God-fearing woman. He learnt a good deal of his folk-lore from her. He remembered her singing "Yn Grainder Jouylagh" ("The Demon Lover"), as she rocked her baby to sleep.

Cashen left school very early and his first place was with a Dalby farmer, who gave as wages material for fustian breeches, and hide for a pair of shoes. At fifteen, he went to sea, and served his time on a brig trading between Dublin and Whitehaven. To show the mettle he was made of, it should be stated that when the brig was in port, he took night lessons in navigation and other subjects. He subsequently “went foreign,” sailing to Australia, the Pacific Islands, China, and Newfoundland.

In Ireland and Scotland, Cashen’s knowledge of Manx Gaelic helped him to converse with the Gaelic speakers of those countries. An interesting episode in Cashen’s life was that, when sailing from Whitehaven to Dublin, his vessel got shipwrecked near Peel. Cashen was carried unconscious to a house close by, where he was nursed back to health by Sussanah Cowell, whom he afterwards married. He afterwards skippered one of the Peel nickeys, and became assistant harbour-master at Peel. He organised a crew of Manx fishermen to take part in the Sea Fisheries Exhibition, hold in Liverpool about 30 years ago.

Cashen was concerned in a public event which will be long remembered in the Island. He was the leader of the fishermen, when, in 1874, they rose in protest against the levying of harbour dues by Governor Loch. It was he who organised their march, fifteen hundred strong, to the Tynwald, and who so conducted the affair that all ended peaceably; the Governor visited Peel to discuss the questions in point, and finally withdrew the dues. He also at another time headed a strike of fishermen who demanded higher pay than 9s. a week for overhauling and repairing the trains of nets during the winter.

Cashen died on June 3rd, 1912,—whilst on duty at the Castle,—his end was sudden and peaceful, and such, one thinks, as he would have chosen. It seems impossible to think of the Castle without him, the real old Manxman, with his fine form and kindly rugged face, was such a fitting guardian of the ancient Manx fortress. The chief interest in his life was his country, her history, language and folklore, in all of which he was well versed.

The chapters of the Folk-lore are divided as follows:

- i. Home Life of the Manx.
- ii. Fairies, Bugganes, Giants, and Ghosts.
- iii. Fishing.
- iv. History and Legends.
- v. Songs, Sayings, and Riddles.

The volume, which is published at one shilling, is well worth reading, and should be in the library of every patriotic Manx person. The sympathetic lines by “Cushag” on William Cashen are worth inserting here:

The old man ceased, and in the pause,
We watched the smoke against the hill
As in a dream he told his tale,

As in a dream we listened still.

His sea-blue eyes though dimmed by years
Saw far beyond our time and space,
And child-like faith in unseen things
Had smoothed the furrows in his face.

His simple creed-to do his best
As guardian of that treasured pile,
Whose ancient towers and ruined choirs
Stand crowned about Peel's holy Isle.

And leaning on his staff he sat
Beside us in the sunny nook,
Embrasured by cathedral walls
Whose stones were all his sacred book.

“New Book of Manx Folklore.” *Mona's Herald* 15 January 1913: 4f.

(3)

Surely no place could be more favourable for the preservation of traditional ballads, legendary tales, and general folk-lore than was the Isle of Man before the advent of the visitor. The Celtic temperament of its older people must have been thoroughly conducive to the fostering of all that was romantic, and will have seen in its glens a fit habitation for fairies, in its mines a place for gnomes, and endowed every hill or valley with some wild legend. To the folklorist, Manx superstitions, tinged with influence from both Wales and Ireland, cannot but be a source of great interest, as it is a field scarcely entered into by those living out of the Island. The little volume entitled *William Cashen's Manx Folk-lore*, which we have just received from its publishers, G. and L. Johnson, of Douglas, will, therefore, be generally acceptable to students of the subject. It is edited by Miss S. Morrison. and is the outcome of the remembrances of the late William Cashen, originally a fisherman, “born seventy-four years ago,” and a notable personage in the Isle of Man. The booklet is “printed for the Manx Language Society,” and there are specimens of Manx poetry, in its own language, interspersed throughout the text.—From *The Yorkshire Post*. The volume may be had at our stationery branch, price 1s.

“Manx Folk-Lore.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 31 May 1913: 2b.

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