

Manx Notes 706 (2025)

T.E. BROWN READS "BETSY LEE" (1873)

We heartily congratulate those who did not let the very unsummerlike weather of Wednesday evening last, deter them from going to the hall attached to the Presbyterian Church, Finch-road, to hear the now well-known poem, "Betsy Lee," read by its gifted author, the Rev. Mr Brown, or as he is better known throughout the Island "Tom Brown." Such a treat rarely occurs twice in a generation, and we venture to think, from the unmistakeable marks of appreciation and keen enjoyment visible on every countenance, that those present, carried away what will be a very pleasant recollection to them for the rest of their lives. It is apart from our purpose to comment upon the great and recognised literary merit of the poem; but, although we were aware of Mr Brown's powers of oratory and extraordinary command over his voice, still we were astonished at the new light thrown upon the story by his admirable reading, the more so that authors are rarely good exponents at their own works.

The Poem was read in the genuine Anglo-Manx dialect, as rough and broad, but withal as true to nature, as if the rev. gentleman had been brought up at the foot of Snaefell. Indeed, so perfect were the assumption of the character of Tom Baynes, and so thoroughly Manx the pronunciation, that you lost sight of the reader, and saw before you the rough simple big hearted sailor spinning his yarn between decks, and the pictures standing out one by one from the canvass with life-like reality-the creeping lawyer's clerk, and the true hearted girl, the worldly old doctor and the child-like old parson-one and all drawn with profound truth and knowledge of human nature.

Those who have read the poem will remember that it abounds in contrasts of pathos and humour, and the rapt silence with which the audience listened to the pathetic passages, and their hearty enjoyment of the quaint Manx humour and old fashioned turns of expression, evidenced the power of the reader. The episode of the death of Betsy Lee occurs to us as one of the most effective bits of reading in the work; but from first to last it was of a high order of merit, and enabled us to appreciate the story in a way we could never have done-merely reading it for ourselves. We can only regret that the weather, which would have done credit to December, should have prevented a great many from enjoying an intellectual treat of the highest order. Votes of thanks to the reader and to his Worship the High-Bailiff, who presided, closed an evening which we shall always look back upon with peculiar pleasure. A wish has been expressed that Mr Brown should again read the poem in public. If he does consent to do so, there is no doubt that a large number of persons will attend.

“‘Betsy Lee,’ read by the Author.” *Isle of Man Times* 16 August 1873: 4f.

STEPHEN MILLER RBV

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