

THE SURNAMES & PLACE-NAMES OF THE ISLE OF MAN

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The Surnames & Place-Names of the Isle of Man by A. W. Moore

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A. W. MOORE

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PREFACE.

I AM at a loss what excuse to make for thrusting myself into the foreground of this work, except that I have found it too hard to say 'nay' to its author, whom I have known for years as a scholar who takes the keenest interest in all that relates to the history of his native Island of Man. Among other things I was aware that he had singular facilities for studying everything of the nature of documentary evidence bearing on Manx proper names. Those who happen to have been acquainted with the 'Manx Note Book,' edited with such ability and such excellent taste by Mr. Moore, will agree with me in this reference to him. It always struck me as a pity that he should not place on record the fruits of his familiarity with the official records of the Island; and the expression, on my part, of that feeling on sundry occasions, is the only possible merit to which I could lay claim in connexion with this volume.

The ground to be covered by the work is defined by the geography of Man, and so far so good; but on the other hand, proper names, whether of persons or of

places, usually present the most difficult problems of glottology, which any country can suggest; and such cannot help being especially the case with a people like the Manx, whose home has proved the meeting place for Ivernians, Goideals, Scandinavians and Englishmen. Manx names are therefore a compromise, and where one can fathom the history of a Manx name, it proves of great interest, not only in its relation to its home, but also in regard to the light shed by it on what may have happened in the prehistory of other lands.

Mr. Moore has given the reader not only the results of his reading in Manx documents, but he has also added remarks and notes intended to help the general reader with regard to the etymology of the names discussed. Celtic philology, however, has of late years been making such rapid progress that it is the fate of everyone who writes on Celtic subjects to have constantly to revise his views. As for me, I have had, alas! more of this experience than I should care to call to mind at the present moment; and Mr. Moore must not be surprised if the same necessity should overtake him as regards some of his derivations: it is the inevitable condition of every man, except him who thinks that he has done learning.

Apart from all points as to which difference of opinion may be expected, the book teems with suggestions which cannot help interesting the students of archaeology and anthropology. With regard to the former, I need only mention the pages which abound in allusions to tumuli, cromlechs, and cairns; and as to the latter, I refer to such articles as that on *Chibber Unjin*, 'Ash Well,' over which grew formerly a sacred

ash-tree, adorned with the bits of rags usually to be met with on such trees. Special mention may also be made of the article on *Chibber Undin*, 'Foundation Well,' apparently so-called from its position near the foundations of an old chapel, twenty-one feet long by twelve broad. 'The water of this well,' Mr. Moore tells us, 'is supposed to have curative properties. The patients who came to it, took a mouthful of water, retaining it in their mouths till they had twice walked round the well. They then took a piece of cloth from a garment which they had worn, wetted it with the water from the well, and hung it on the hawthorn-tree which grew there. When the cloth had rotted away the cure was supposed to be effected.' When I visited the place, a somewhat more elaborate ritual was mentioned to me; but here, as in the case of other wells in the island, the patient is supposed to transmit his complaint to the rag, and as the rag rots the disease perishes. If he makes an offering it consists usually of a coin, which is dropped into the well. But why the folklore man chooses to speak of the accursed rag as the offering and to ignore the coin, is a question which I cannot answer. It may be, however, that he thinks coins are too modern for him; but a few centuries, more or less, make very little difference in such matters, and the rags are no less a product of civilization than are the coins.

It is, however, to the student of history and glotto-logy that the work appeals as a whole; and one of the points of interest to both will be the traces of a sort of double tradition which some of the Maux names force upon their notice. This can be best explained by taking

an example. The mountain now called South Barrule was formerly called Wardfell, so that a portion of it is still known by that name, modified into Warfield. Thus the actual forms in use are Barrule and Warfield, and these can be shown to be two forms of one and the same Norse name *Vörðfjall*, meaning 'Beacon Fell.' Such a name is connected with the institution of 'Watch and Ward,' which was constantly enjoined on the inhabitants. From the statutes respecting this duty one finds that each parish had its warden, who was responsible for 'the dutifull and carefull observance of watch and ward,' and this went on till the year 1815. The day-watch came to his post at sunrise, and the night-watch at sunset; the former is supposed to be commemorated by the hill name *Crook-ny-arrey-Lhaa*, believed to mean the 'Hill of the Watch by Day.' Such were also, probably, the watch and ward held on the mountain-tops called South Barrule and North Barrule.

But how, it will be asked, could such a word as *Vörðfjall* become Barrule? It went through a series of changes, the chief of which were the following: according to Goideic tendency, the stress would be laid on the first syllable with the effect of curtailing the second, so that the name became approximately 'Varfl.' Similarly *Snjófjall*, which is now called *Snaefell*, meaning 'Snow Mountain,' became, probably *Snjófi*; and, as *Sartel* is supposed to represent a Norse *Svartfjall*, 'Black Mountain,' here also a contraction to 'Sartfl' probably happened. Then a further change took place, resulting in 'f' being represented in modern Manx by *ü*, as in *lout*, 'a loft,' in *carroo*, a carp,' from Norse *karf-i*, and in *Calloo*, the islet called the

Calf of Man. Thus the three names would arrive at the stage *Varrul*, *Sn'oul*, and *Sartul* respectively. Now *Sn'oul* remains practically the Manx pronunciation of the name at the present day, though, more exactly, I should say that it is *Su'nal*, with a German *au*; but, under the influence of Goidelic accentuation, *Sartul* could not well avoid becoming *Sartl*, which is, approximately, the actual pronunciation of *Sartel*. Similarly, *Varrul* might have been expected to yield *Varl*, but other influences came to play: thus no Goidelic word began with a *v*, which occurred initially as a mutation of *b*. So, according to a tendency well known in all Celtic languages, the name came to be regarded in Manx as *Barrul*, liable in certain positions to be mutated into *Varrul*. In other words, it would be regarded by a Goidelic Manxman as having no separate existence except as *Barrul*. Then popular etymology set in and found *Barrul* sounding like the words *barr oyl*, meaning the 'top of an apple;' and this is the popular notion now current as to the origin and meaning of the name. That there should have been two mountains called 'apple-tops,' in the island, though neither seems to resemble an apple, is not very easy to believe; but this idea has had the effect of stamping the accentuation of the words *barr oyl* on *Barrul*, which is pronounced *Barrule*, or *Barrool*, with the stress on the final syllable. That this was the history of the name is rendered highly probable by the occurrence of the form *Varoole* in the registers, in the name of a man designated *Villy Varoole*, or 'Willie of Barrule.'

The Goidelic tradition by which *Vörðjall* came down as *Barrule*, requires, phonetically speaking, more expla-

nation than that which made the same word into the tree-name Wardfell and Warfield; but, historically, the latter presents a greater difficulty calling for further investigation, as it suggests that Norse names became English without a break. In that case one would have to suppose that the Norse, once spoken in the island, was superseded, not by Manx, but by English. If so, it is to be compared with the transition from Norse to English in Orkney and the Shetlands. In any case the dual tradition is not confined to *Barvule* and *Warfield*; there are many other instances, such as the Calf of Man, which is in Manx called the Calloo, and Peel, which was Holme-town, called in Manx *Purt-ny-Hinskey*, meaning the 'Town of the Island.'

Even the same duality exists, after a fashion, between the word *Tinwald*, from the Norse Thingvöllr, 'a parliament field,' and the House of Keys, where *Keys* is possibly a word of Gaelic origin. Dr. Vigfusson, taking this for a Norse word, has left his opinion on record that it meant a house of *Keise*, or 'chosen' men. But shortly before his death—a loss, alas! which his numerous friends still deplore—I had a talk with him, in the course of which I asked him about the word *keise*, and found from what he said, that there was a difficulty in establishing the existence of such a form. Then I referred him to the house being called in Manx the *Kiave-as-Feed*, and any member of it a man of the *Kiave-as-Feed*. Then I explained that this, though literally meaning the 'Four and Twenty,' was used as a single word; that the first two-thirds of it were pronounced approximately K'árūs or Kārūs; and, further, that, though I had not heard it pronounced without the r,

the omission of that consonant was not at all uncommon in Manx Gaelic. My friend at once saw that I was going to suggest that *Keys* was merely the English pronunciation of *Kiave-as*, and with his usual candour he admitted that he thought it right: at any rate, he regarded it as far more probable than the etymology he had himself suggested. On a later occasion he returned to the same question, and took for granted that such was the origin of the word. As for me, I do not consider it very satisfactory; but it may, perhaps, be provisionally accepted, especially as the folk etymology current in the Island is, that the members of the House of Keys are the twenty-four keys with which his Excellency, the Lieutenant-Governor, unlocks the difficulties of the law.

Many a tedious talk pitched in this key have I had to hear through in the Island, while inwardly burning with impatience to be better engaged in ascertaining the pronunciation of a particular word, the gender of a noun, the use of a verb, or something of interest to me concerning a language, which, alas! is daily dying away. The same, however, is the case with Manx as with languages more living: the information one seeks can only be got copiously diluted with the informant's own meditations. But, all in all, my attempts to learn Manx proved predominantly pleasant to both the teacher and the taught; and Mr. Moore's book has the effect of enabling me to live over again the happy hours I spelled away in Ellan Vannin.

JOHN RHÏS.

OXFORD,

May 22, 1890.