

St. Patrick and the Jouyl

A traditional folktale



Culture
VANNIN

The Origin of the Isle of Man

from Cyril Ingram Paton *Manx Calendar Customs* (1942)

The Origin of the Isle of Man.

The Devil dug up a bit of land in Ireland for himself, and was carrying it over the sea, with all its inhabitants, when he was met by St. Patrick, who threw holy water at him. The "old boy" dropped his burden and it formed the Isle of Man. The place when it was dug, filled up by the rivers, became Lough Neagh, and you will find that the size and general shape of the two are the same today. The Devil has never been able to learn the Manx language since this encounter. [Told to me as a child. Ed.] There is a Galloway variant of this veracious legend.



The Legendary Origin of the Isle of Man

from the *Journal of The Manx Museum* (1 December 1941)

The Legendary Origin of the Isle of Man

by Cyril I. Paton

‘Long ago the Devil discovered a district in Ireland so much to his liking in every way that he resolved to appropriate it. He dug it up with his claws, and was flying over the sea with it when he met St. Patrick. The Saint hove some holy-water at the Old Boy and the latter in his alarm dropped his burden into the sea, where it became the Isle of Man, and if you measure Lough Neagh and look at its general shape you will see that the lough now stands where the Isle of Man once was. One good result of the fright that Old Nick got is that he never could be induced to learn Manks!’

This is the well-known tale of the origin of the Isle of Man as told to us youngsters about 1880 by a servant, Mary Anne Hudson, of Kirk Michael. I had considered it to be ‘visitor lore’ rather than folk-lore, but have recently seen occasion to change my mind, and now believe it to be in essence a genuine folk-tale. Here, for instance, is a version of the same story from a Galloway book published in 1877, giving traditions and descriptions of that country as the writer knew them sixty years before that date:

An immense giant (I never heard his name) used, in the early ages of the world, to inhabit the wilds of Minnigraff and the Glenkenns, and when he was not quarrelling with his neighbours he used to travel all up and down and examine the country.

One day he happened to be over in Ireland, and on looking down on the ground he was surprised to see a great lot of wee diminutive-looking men and women walking about, and running out of the road for fear he tramped on them. ‘What queer wee folk,’ thinks he, ‘I’ll tak yin or twa of them home and let the wife see them,’ and so he picked one or two up, but they were crushed to death between his fingers. ‘This’ll never do ava, says he, ‘I’m hurtin’ the puir craitors.’ He happened to have his spade with him, and so he resolved to tale a spadeful of the mool wi’him, and the wee folk on’t just as they were, and accordingly he dug out a spadeful and took it with him over his shoulder – a kin’ o’ biggish truff, ye ken. As he was wading across barefooted, for the sea took him abune the knees, a big roke (crab) catch’t him by the muckle-toe, and the pain made him forget the spadeful o’ mool, nd gart him gie sic a start that the haill wur coupit aff his shoulder into the tode, and he ran billyin’ hame to the wife to get his tae sortit.

The muckle truff formed the Isle of Man, and the bit he hok’t it oot o’ became Lough Neagh in Ireland, and the two places are said to be exactly similar in size and shape, and wherever there is a point in the one, there is said to be a bay in the other, and where there is a hill in the one there is a corresponding deep place in the other, and besides all that the Manx are said to have the same

appearance and to speak the same language as the aboriginal natives of the banks of Lough Neagh even to the present century.

As for the cats they are exactly the same, only the Manx ones want the tail, for it happened that when the giant stuck his spade into the grun' it chak't off the tail of the only tabby on the particular spot at the time, and so in accordance with a well-known effect of the power of mind over matter, her descendants have been born wanting tails ever since. Some very learned gentlemen put great faith in traditions.

[‘Galloway Gossip’ (1877) by Mrs. Maria T[rimme]r, page 14.]

Galloway and the Isle of Man have very much in common, and the foregoing seems to be an earlier form of the Manks tradition. However both versions seem to be related to a much older Scandinavian mythological tale originally quite unconnected with the Isle of Man. This traditional tale may have been interpolated into the *Prose Edda* by an early copyist, but it was probably committed to writing seven hundred years ago:

The Old Norse Tale of Gefjun’s Ploughing.

King Gylfi ruled the land that men now call Sweden. It is told of him that he gave to a wandering woman, in return for her merry-making, a plow-land in his realm, as much as four oxen might turn up in a day and a night.

But this woman was of the kin of the Aesir [gods]; she was named Gefjun. She took from the north out of Jotunheim [the home of the giants], four oxen which were the sons of a certain giant and herself, and set them before the plow. And the plow cut so wide and so deep that it loosened up the land; and the oxen drew the land out into the sea and to the Westward, and stopped in a certain sound. There Gefjun set the land, and gave it a name, calling it Selund. [That is Zealand – the island on which the Danish capital is situated.]

And from that time on, the spot when the land had been turned up is water; it is now called the Logr in Sweden; and bays lie in that lake even as the headlands in Selund.

[From ‘The Prose Edda,’ by Snorri Sturluson (ed. A. G. Brodeur 1929), p. 13]

These three traditions have much in common. The Galwegian giant, by the bye, was also responsible for Ailsa Craig, which was a stone which got into his shoe one day when he was wading across the sea.

An Irish version of the origin of the Island.

The Lough Neagh legend to which Mr. Paton refers is known to every Ulsterman. Mr. Paterson, Curator of the Armagh County Museum, has recorded an attractive version of it in his delightful collection of local folk-tales:

Finn was near Armagh one day, when he saw a Scotch giant an’ he wus that annoyed he after him. But the ther fella wus the faster on he’s pins. An’ Finn wus sore affeered he’d git away an’ swom back before he cut git a grip on him, so he threw sods as big as hills at him. An’ in he’s hurry he felled both he’s hands

with across of lan' an' let him have it. But it went right over him an' dropped in the say, an' it's still there, till this very day. An' it's called the Island of Man because it wus made by a man's throw. An' the place he tore the earth out of is now Lough Neagh. An' if ye brought the Island back ye'd be surprised the way it would fit it.

[Country Cracks: Old Takes from the County of Armagh, T. G. F. Paterson (1939). P. 34]



Noo Perick as yn Jouyl

retold by Orry and Finn Franklin (2021)

St. Patrick and the Jouyl

Once upon a time the Jouyl as stravaigin' about Ireland when he saw a bit of land which was especially wonderful. So, he grabbed it for himself and set off across the sea.

But just then St. Patrick came along and saw the Old Boy with the piece of land. He did not like that, oh no!

"Cha mie lhiam shoh!"

And so, Patrick got a bit of holy water and threw it all over the Jouyl.

The Jouyl dropped the bit of land and it fell into the sea, forming the Isle of Man.

Yay!

It is because of this that the Jouyl has never been able to learn Manx.

Gaelg aboo!

Noo Perick as yn Jouyl

Keayrt dy row va'n Jouyl rouail mygeayrt Nerin as honnick eh bit beg dy halloo feer yesh as ren eh geearee eh er e hon hene.

Myr shen, ghow yn Shenn Ghuilley yn thalloo, as hug eh fo e roih as ren eh toshiaght dy gholl ersooyl.

Agh haink Noo Perick as honnick eh yn Jouyl lesh peesh dy halloo.

"Cha mie lhiam shoh!"

Hooar eh bit beg Ushtey Casherick, as ren eh ceau eh er yn Jouyl, as ren yn thalloo tuittym stiagh 'sy cheayn.

Ren yn thalloo shoh tannaghtyn 'sy cheayn as cheet dy ve Mannin.

Yindyssagh!

As er dyn traa shen, cha nod yn Jouyl gynsagh Gaelg.

Gaelg aboo!



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