WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS

THE LITTLE MANX ISLAND AND ITS FOLK—II.

A Series of Charming Pictures of Mona-land—Island Scenes from Highest Mountain Peak to Edge of Crashing Sea, Where One at a Stride May Pass Over the Nineteenth to the Fifth Century.

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RAMSEY, Isle of Man, Nov. 26.—You will always have the Isle of Man thought of as a series of charming pictures in your memory after you have sailed around the island. It is only a little journey of seventy-five or eighty miles. The steamers bring you from Douglas to Douglas again in only six hours' time. Pleasanter still is it to engage a sweet little craft, and alone or with friends idle along at will with wind and tide, gaining much Manx color and feeling from your guide and sojourn in skipper's cabin, and coming close to the fisher life of the countless half hot coves and bays.

Besides, in this way, with a good martin glass, you can see every square foot of Mannland. There is nowhere a greater distance than six or seven miles from highest mountain peak to edge of crashing sea. The beautiful topographical configuration of the island in this made memorable. From a mile or two at sea, off Douglas, which shines from its crescent bay with almost the brilliancy of Naples, the chief mountain range shows at its best. It extends three-fourths of the island's length, almost as centrally as a line could be drawn.

And every one of those pleasant Manx mountains is in full view. There is South Barrule, the southernmost. Then comes the Cairn and Greeba. Between these is the great valley now leading from Douglas, the maritime eastern capital of Man, to ancient Peel, its western port, a fine old fishing town, reminding of Cornish St. Ives.

Cronk Urley, Slieve Dhoo and Dodney Fhott group closely to the north, and then comes Snaefell, mountain monarch of Mannland, his only northern rival, giant North Barrule, which breaks into savage Mangland Head by pleasant Ramsey Bay. It is a strange feeling that you can see half the bounds of the entire Manx nation at a glance. From the top of Snaefell you can see these all. Besides from the same place you can look for into Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

Coasting to the north, the ever changing panorama of mountains constantly in view, first comes Lazey Bay and village, the latter at the entrance to a winding glen, surrounded by noble hills, whose sides are thickly dotted with stone monuments left by the earlier island races. Here is also found a great cairn called King Orry's grave, which tradition and dim Manx history assign to the bones of the Danish prince who more than a thousand years ago gave the Mannsen freemen's rights. Older than Orry's bones are the Lazey mines, the only ones of importance in Man, which possess the famous Lazey overshot water wheel, said to be the largest in the world.

Perhaps six miles further to the north, and your craft will be abreast of Maughold Head. It is a wild and grand old headland, and the vicinity has for ages possessed a reverential awe in all seafaring folk. This has been due to the miracles wrought at St. Maughold's well and to the odor of sanctity left upon the place by St. Maughold. The latter was in his early life a gay and wicked Irish prince. Converted by the preaching of the good St. Patrick, he determined to renounce the world. He put to sea in a wicker boat, giving himself up to the mercy of the winds and waves. He was driven ashore here on the coast in successful proof of Man. The holy well or fountain bore fruit from the spot where he first gained his foothold.

The very stones of the curious old St. Maughold Church were built by this evangelist, and one of the strangest and most venerable crosses in Britain—the Cross of St. Maughold—still standing in the ancient churchyard, was erected to commemorate the hermit's deliverance from the sea and his conversion of the Manx people. Outside of this remarkable relic contains a carving of St. Maughold, another of the Virgin and Child, and a later embellishment on a shield side depicts the Crucifixion, to which is joined the arms of Man—the three bent legs, with the brave motto, "Whichever way thrown (or cast) it stands." The entire district is a kit of unchangeable antiquity, bound by primitive customs, enriched in the strongest superstitions. Illustrative, the parish clerk is still elected by the votes of only those parishioners who "put out smoke"—that is, whose habitations possess a chimney—and a most Hindu cross by the roadside is a profane old female who cursed her for cursing at the wind was turned to stone.

When Maughold Head is rounded, the long reach of Ramsey Bay, extending nine miles to Point of Ayre, the northernmost headland of Man, gives a scene of unsurpassed beauty and interest. The red cliffs tinge an almost vermilion shore line between the blue of the sea and the shimmering gold of the upland green. At the center of the bay is the fine old town, its ancient walls and roofs contrasting strangely with its modern ways and facades. A sleepy yet bright old fair has Ramsey, like some nodding grandma whom hoyden children have stolen upon in her sleep to laughter and hurtling, and who, on waking, has as much mischief in her glad old eyes as is in the merry hearts that made the frolic.

In rounding the Point of Ayre your skipper will cease his tales and attend closely to his little craft. It is a dangerous ocean way. The meeting of the tides causes almost a maelstrom, "The Stream," or strife, contention, the Manx call it. All around the northern coast, which is low, from sea to sound, are strange terraces of sea cobbles—small polished stones as round as cannon balls. They are constantly changing their position from the action of the waters, and are as treacherous to the foot as quicksands. Between Ayre lighthouse and the northern base of the mountains, perhaps an eighth of the total area of Man, is an almost level plain. It is called "The Curragh." The most primitive of the Manx peasantry are found here, and Celtic affinities are most pronounced. In some than a hundred tiny hamlets like the "auld clachans" of the Scottish Highlands you will find fully nine-tenths possessing the Celtic appellate Ballitoom, as Ballavarkel, Ballakinnag, Ballaleasey, and the like.

All along down the west coast your interest will be divided between glimpses of strange old Manx hamlets peeping from the mountain lanes, where flashes of lonely streams tumble like the green tops upon the hills, with the splendid mountain views behind and above, and the plainly discerned Irish coast, where the Mourne Mountains through the distance cover with purple their emerald green. But at last we come to ancient Peel, Tilnie Head and St. Patrick Isle. Miles of white strand thread long the coast to the broken old crest upon the rocks, like a shining way of faith leading unfaltringly to a dateless antiquity. No church lover will be disgusted that a touch of progress has modernized Peel. Ramsey is old and mellow and slim. Use hundreds of fishing craft forming with their gray masts an antique tracery behind the town seem to belong to a forgotten age. Dark are its walls, narrow its streets, tiny its windows, grey and silent its people.

Grey and old and more forbidding than all else is its once sightly castle at the harbor mouth. It stands on Patrick's Holm, or St. Patrick's Island, seven acres in extent. Crescent, haunted and hallowed of Hallowed and venerable for St. Patrick himself raised the foundation of the church on whose site the half ruins of a great cathedral are now found, haunted because of inexpressible cruelties and foul murders in crypts and cenotaphs. Through these lofty pillars, bending arches, hollow galleries, and by these monumental altars now can strole from the Nineteenth to the Fifth century. In the soldering echoes of the sea calls he can hear the moanings of imprisoned Eleanor, the queen of Stanley, the triumphant "Alleluiah" of Germaine that put to rest the Satans in the bloody Flintshire feuds. Hunted, more dead all else to Mannland relief, because it is the shining place for all time of that most terrible of Manx powers of darkness, the black and dreaded "Mauzy Dhoo."

From Peel to Port Erin is a matchlessly wild and romantic reach of coast. There is scarcely a break in the lofty, precipitous wall. And what a grand spot is this Port Erin and environs! The Manx mountains rise sublime and dark behind. The bay is an almost land-locked cove. Tremendous Bradda Head, rising 500 feet above from the sea, shuts out the howling northern tempests. Another headland sweeps around and up from the south. Once the ancient port was rich from commerce with Ireland. Now it is a dark antique, sleeping within a bed of myrtle. The fashionables have found it out, and soon another gay and brilliant Palermo will hide its ancient walls.

Now you are sped around the Calf of Man. Dolder, grudder, cruel, grewsome still are its vast sea walls and fearful chasms. Restless tides gnaw at its base. The angry spume is flung to its topmost crags. It is desolate of human life. Millions of surfbeat wheel and shriek above it. But one other spot have I seen so typical of furious desolation. Where the Arran Island crags receive the ceaseless pounding of the Atlantic, and the thunders of the everlasting battle are so great that even the sea gull's shriek is soundless, is another such a soulless place.

Coasting along the eastern shores again, first Spanish Head is passed and then Port St. Mary. Between these is a typical Manx hamlet called Cregneish. It is a little cluster of centuries old stone cottages. Huge walls connect each. The old habits and dress of the ancient Manx are still preserved by its twenty inhabitants. Until recently the Manx language was solely spoken here. The folk are fishermen, God fearing, simple, good. All the olden fairies still live with them and will remain until the modern steam comes.

Here at Port St. Mary Maughold the fishing season is the rendezvous of the Manx herring fleet. If you are here at this time it will remind you of the animated scenes in August at Wick, in Scotland, or Lerwick, in Shetland. The anchorage is crowded with heavily laden fishing smacks, whose brown sails shine like burnished copper in the sun, while others are constantly rounding the point into the bay. Small boats are filled with the shining silvery fish pouring to and fro between the smacks and the shore. Dappled gulls dive into the water up to their necks, the swallow to receive the fish. Not hundreds but thousands of men, women and children, all in a fine frenzy of emulative industry, scurrying in all directions and clad in strange attire. Fill up the picturesque and busy scene. These folk are nearly all Wesleyan Methodists. They are as like the Cornish fisher folk of Ireland as the herrings of both, and none of their boats ever put to sea on Saturday or Sunday, nor do they at any time venture upon their sea harvestings without goodly prayers and psalms.

A little farther to the north, dark and gray, lies Castletown, new, and old, among its darker limestone rocks, with its ancient castle, still more sombre, towering gressively above. This is the once famous Rushen Castle, with scanty remains of Rushen Abbey near, and scene of the murder of wicked King Reginald by Ivar, the good knight. The Danes founded the castle, and it resembles Kinloss, of Scotch fame. It has seen as a prison do not distract from its almost feudal grandeur.

Back at Douglas again from such a contemplation of this of the "dear little isle of Man," and I warrant you are a score of years and a hundred leaks to advantage over him who enters Mannland as the sea gates of its splendid towns, and views its form and folk through the false perspective of fine hotels, crowds of summer or winter wealthy idlers, and the misleading any attributes comparing with those of our own Bar Harbor, Newport, or an English Bournemouth or Brighton.

Here of course is some true Manx color in the strange old chaos and wynds of the ancient part of the city, but Douglas is essentially a fashionable watering place the whole year round. You must leave Douglas behind in completely know Mannland. This is no venturesome task. You can walk to the remotest portion of the island in one day. There never were finer roads. There never were lovelier views. There never were quainter, more comforting old inns, and there never were more simple, genial, hospitable people than in Man. In most countries I have visited the peasantry are vacuous and listless, or suspicious and resentful of him who comes to spy into their ways and peeks among their shrines. The Manx folk take it as an honor. The Mannsen is proud of his ancestry, his history, his independence, his chameleon customs and laws. Indeed I often think that much of his goodness to the stranger comes from pity that the stranger was not born in his isle, liberty loving island.

And after all the real pleasure of knowing any strange land is in getting close to the heart of its common folk. This is easy here. You will be thrilled by Mannland scenes of mountain and coast. It is a wonderful little land for finding scenes, flashing streams, entrancing valleys and shadowy glens. There is not another so tiny a bit of earth where you may come upon so many romantic and impressive monuments of a heroic past. Fisher folk and Highlanders, even with their distinct, centuries old, changeless ways, are close together. The murmurs of the sea can almost be heard from highest mountain peak. Contrast is everywhere mighty and close. But it is because Manx folk themselves are racy wisdom and grand then all the sights or scenes that a loving, sanctified sense of exaltation gladdens every step of your progress through all these pleasant byways.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

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