

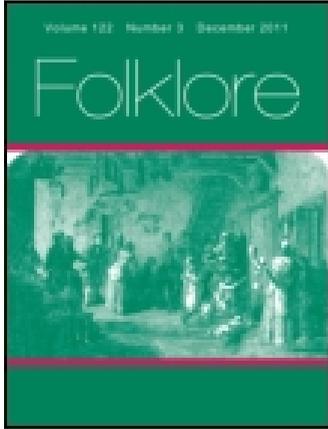
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A. W. Moore M.A.

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WATER AND WELL-WORSHIP IN MAN.

BY A. W. MOORE, M.A.

I have entitled my paper "Water and Well-Worship", as I am persuaded that the superstitious use of wells in Man, which cannot be said to be quite extinct even now, had its origin in the worship of water generally, and I think that I can show that this has been the case from still existing superstitions. Water, like earth and fire, was doubtless once worshipped as an animate being having powers which it might exercise either beneficially or the reverse, and it was therefore considered desirable to propitiate it by adoration. One of the powers possessed by it when in the form of a river was that of stopping diseases from crossing it, as is shown by the following story found among the MSS. of the late Robert Gawne of the Rowany, parish of Rushen :—

Small-pox, called in Manx *Yn Vreac* ("The Spotted One"), being personified in the ghostly likeness of a man, met a member of a well-known insular family on the bank of the Peel river, near St. John's, and, being unable to cross, asked him if he would carry him over, promising that, if he did so, neither he nor any member of his family should ever be afflicted with the disease in question. The man complied with his request, and it fell out as "Small-pox" had promised. This meeting with "Small-pox" occurred at a time when the population of the island was decimated at short intervals by that fell disease.

Running water was also supposed to be capable of preventing the passage of spirits and ghosts. Was it not on account of this superstition that the dead in Celtic countries were formerly so frequently buried in islands? Thus, in Man, the islet of St. Patrick, off Peel, was once a favourite place of sepulture. It is significant, too, of the prevalence of this superstition that it was supposed that the Manx fairies were in the habit of celebrating the obsequies of any

good person on a stone in the middle of a lake.¹ I would also call attention to the fact that some of the graveyards which surround the ancient *keills* are artificially raised, and are surrounded with a ditch, into which water would naturally fall.² An instance of the superstition that spirits could not cross running water was communicated to Mr. Roeder in 1883:—"The ghost of a lady in silk walks in the mountain passes in the evening time. As soon as you go after her, and she comes to the water or running brook, she changes; she cannot go on, as she cannot pass."

As water was supposed to be capable of stopping the passage of diseases, we need not be surprised at its also being supposed to be capable of curing them; and perhaps the water of some of the sacred wells in Man has an actual sanative value, though, as will be seen later, that of one of the most famous of them has none. Quite apart, however, from any sanative qualities, there was a belief in the magical power of water generally. "Even sea-water", writes Professor Rhys with reference to the Isle of Man, "was believed to have considerable virtues if you washed in it while the books were open at church (*i.e.*, during service), as I was told by a woman who had many years ago repeatedly taken her own sister to divers wells and to the sea during the service on Sunday, in order to have her eyes cured of their chronic weakness."³

Among these magical powers of water was that of being a vehicle for divination. Thus, at Hollantide, girls obtained information about their future husbands by filling their mouths with water, holding a pinch of salt in each hand, and then betaking themselves to the next neighbour's house but one. They then listened through the keyhole to the conversation, and the first name mentioned would be that of their future husband. On the same eve also, as

¹ *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 40.

² For instance, *Keill Langan*, in the parish of Marown.

³ *FOLK-LORE*, vol. ii, pp. 307-8.

well as on the last night of the year, ivy leaves marked with the names of a family were put into water, and if one of the leaves withered, it was supposed that the person whose name was on it would die before the end of the year.¹ Of similar significance, as regards the powers of water, was the use of it in a bowl for the purposes of divination by a notorious witch, who prophesied that the herring fleet would never return.² As the prophecy came true, the witch was put to death in the usual manner by being rolled down the steep side of Slieauwhallian in a spiked barrel.³ By the use of water, too, it was supposed to be possible to divine who was a witch, and who was not, as the witch would float, while she who had been falsely accused of practising witchcraft would sink.⁴ Not only could water detect a witch, but it had also the quite distinct function of contributing to the making of a witch, as will be seen from the annexed story, told to my informant by a man still living, who said that he had it from the victim herself about the year 1875, when she was an old woman:—

An old crone, who had practised witchcraft and charms during a great part of her life, had grown very feeble, and so, being wishful to endow her daughter with her magical knowledge, made her go through the following performance. A white sheet was laid on the floor, and beside it was placed a tub of clean water. The girl was made to undress and go into the water, and, after thoroughly washing herself, to get out and wrap herself in the sheet. While she stood in the sheet she had to repeat after her mother a number of words, the exact nature of which, as she was in an abject state of terror, she had forgotten, only remarking that their general purport was that she swore to give up all belief in the Almighty's power, and to trust in that of the Evil One instead. The mother died

¹ *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, pp. 125 and 140.

² *Notes and Queries*, No. 341, 1852.

³ *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*

soon afterwards, but the girl made no attempt to avail herself of the attributes with which she was supposed to have been endowed.¹

Water had yet another connexion with witches, *i.e.*, that of being used as a protection against them. For it was supposed that washing the face in dew on May morning rendered their hostilities innocuous.² It is possible, too, that this supposed protective power of water rendered the rite of baptism acceptable to the converts from paganism as a safeguard against the "evil eye".³ In the same way, also, the Church seems to have persuaded them that it was equally efficacious against their abduction by fairies,³ and, at a much later date, it was able to convince the people that the sprinkling of water on the places haunted by fairies would suffice to drive them away.⁴ I believe also that the practice of putting crocks of water out for the fairies at night arose from the persuasion that not only would it propitiate them, but that it would guard the occupants of the house from them.⁵

And now, coming to the superstitious use of well-water in particular, it may, I think, be reasonably conjectured that it was the employment of water in baptism, at the time when paganism was giving way to Christianity, that made the worship of water in wells more fashionable than the worship of river or sea-water. For the *keevills*, or cells, of the ancient recluses, who lived in Man during the dawn of Christianity there, were invariably near a well, whence they would draw water both for their own consumption and for baptising those who came to them for that purpose. And it was, doubtless, part of their policy to place their cell close to a well which had hitherto been made use of in the performance of pagan rites, so that the memory of the old beliefs might be obliterated by the practice of the

¹ J. C. (Douglas).

² *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 111.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

⁴ Robertson, *History of the Isle of Man* (1798), p. 198.

⁵ *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 34.

new.¹ It is probable, too, that the old Manx name of the Epiphany, *Lail Chibbyrt Ushtey* ("Feast-day of the Water Well") may record a similar attempt on the part of the Church to interfere with pagan observances on the last day of the Saturnalia, by celebrating the baptism of Christ by a ceremonial visit to the sacred wells. These attempts, however, to turn a pagan ceremonial into a Christian one have not been successful, as the very wells which in Man, as in Ireland, were named after Christian saints, and were probably visited on the festivals of these saints, have been, till quite recently, resorted to at a festival connected with pagan and not with Christian rites. This festival, which was formerly kept on the first of August, is called *Laa Lhuanys*, or *Laa Lhunys* ("Lhuanys's Day"), and was probably originally associated with the Celtic god Lug, who, as he was said to have been brought up at the court of Manannan, the eponymous ruler of Man, was closely connected with the mythical history of that island.² He was a divinity, corresponding partly to Hermes and partly to Apollo. In Ireland, his festival, called the *Lug-Nassad*, or the wedding of Lug, was "the great event of the summer half of the year, which extended from the Kalends of May to the Kalends of winter. The Celtic year was more thermometric than astronomical, and the *Lug-Nassad* was, so to say, its summer solstice."³ A fair, till recently held on this day both in Man and Ireland, at which games took place, is, together with the well-visiting, all that remains of this festival within living memory. As regards the rites practised at the well-visiting, it is clear that the Manx Church, in the 17th and 18th centuries, fully recognised their pagan tendency, as it attempted, though in vain, to put an end to them.⁴ It is, however, probable that the alteration

¹ We know that St. Patrick is said to have done this in Ireland, a country with which Man was then closely connected.

² Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1886, p. 397.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁴ For proof of this, see *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 121.

of the date of this festival from the first day of August to the first Sunday in that month,¹ called in Manx *yn chie'd Doonagh ayns ouyr* ("the first Sunday in harvest"²), was due to ecclesiastical influence, which was thus exercised with a view of giving it a semi-religious character.

Lét us now inquire what were the objects for which the Manx visited these wells, by what ritual they sought to attain these objects, and what was the meaning of this ritual. The objects were mainly the cure of diseases, but also the acquiring of charms for protection against witches and fairies, and, generally, the securing good luck. The usual ritual³ was to walk round the wells one or more times sunways, to drink the water, to wet a fragment of their clothing with it, and to attach this fragment to any tree or bush that happened to be near the wells. Then to drop pins, pebbles,⁴ beads, or buttons into them, and to repeat a prayer in which they mentioned their ailments. Such was the ritual for the cure of diseases. When the wells were visited for the other purposes mentioned, the only difference in the ritual was that the rags were dispensed with. As regards its meaning, it may be considered certain that, though the rags were occasionally offerings, they were not so in all cases, but were "vehicles of the diseases which the patients communicate to them when they spit the well-water from their mouths".⁵ This view is strengthened by the fact that it was supposed that anyone who was rash enough to take away a rag thus deposited would be sure to catch the disease communicated to it by the person who left it. It was thought that when the rag had rotted away the disease would

¹ After the change of the calendar in 1752, to the first Sunday after the 12th of August.

² The people, however, as we shall see later, spoiled this scheme by visiting the wells during church-time.

³ But it varied somewhat at different wells.

⁴ The pebbles were sometimes dropped near, instead of in, the wells.

⁵ Rhys, *FOLK-LORE*, vol. iii, p. 76.

depart. In fact, the process of reasoning was the same as with regard to many charms. Thus, for instance, a penny was rubbed on fat bacon and then on a wart; after this the bacon was buried, and it was supposed that by the time it decayed the wart would be cured.¹ As regards the pins, coins, beads, and buttons, I believe that they also were formerly vehicles of disease, but they are now invariably considered to be offerings. But, with reference to the practice of dropping pebbles into or near the wells,² it should also be borne in mind that it was probably once believed that the pebbles themselves were endowed with curative properties, so that they perhaps added to the supposed efficacy of the wells.

The pebbles found in or near Manx wells are almost invariably white, and, in connexion with this fact, some other uses of white pebbles may be mentioned, as a reference to them may lead to some elucidation of the question of their significance. It was by immersing a white pebble in water that St. Columba, who has left so many traces of his influence in Man, is said to have performed numerous marvellous cures.³ White pebbles have been found⁴ in the churchyards of the parishes of Bride and Maughold, and in the churchyard of the old *Keeill*, called Kilkellan, in the parish of Lonan, at from two or three feet below the present level of the ground. These are the only churchyards which have been examined with a view of finding pebbles, but it is probable that

¹ Another instance: A piece of woollen thread must be procured, and a knot tied upon it to represent each individual wart. It must then be thrown away or buried in some place that the patient is ignorant of, and, as the thread rots, the warts will die away.

² When thrown near the well, the pebbles were perhaps intended as offerings only. Mr. G. F. Black, in his "Scottish Charms and Amulets", gives instances of water being endowed with curative powers by pebbles being thrown into it. (See *Proceedings of Soc. o Ant. of Scotland* (1893), pp. 433-526.

³ Adamnan, *Life of St. Columba*, Lib. II, cap. xxiv.

⁴ By the Rev. S. N. Harrison.

they exist in all the older churchyards in the island. In some of the tumuli of the Bronze Age, similar pebbles, but of a larger size,¹ have been found ranged round the urns containing the ashes of the deceased.² No Manx fishermen, at the present day, will go to sea with a white stone in his boat, as he believes that it will bring ill luck upon him. Here the influence of the white stone or pebble is noxious instead of efficacious.

Coming now to the pins, I may remark that they seem invariably to have been thrown into the wells, and not stuck into the adjacent trees; and, in connexion with this fact, it is noticeable that there is no trace of the use of the wells for purposes detrimental to others, as is not unusual elsewhere. This may be regarded as a certain proof of the superior amiability of the Manx people!

There was one further object for which wells in Man were once visited—*i.e.*, for raising a wind; but this superstition has quite passed out of memory, and is only known from a solitary entry in the insular records, in the year 1658. From this it would appear that a certain Elizabeth Black had been accused of emptying “a springing well dry for to obtain a favourable winde”. When this charge was investigated by the court, in which the Governor presided, several witnesses deposed to the emptying of the well, and to the supposition that the said Elizabeth Black had done it, though no one had seen her so occupied. She, however, “utterly denied” the truth of these allegations, but was, nevertheless, fined “for such a folly tendinge to charminge, witchcraft, or scorcery”.³

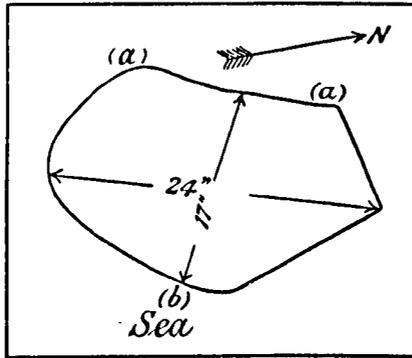
Having thus discussed the usual ritual practised at the wells generally, I will now briefly describe each of the

¹ As large as a hen's or goose's egg, but, occasionally, much larger.

² By Mr. P. M. C. Kermodé, who has opened a number of the Manx tumuli. Rough, broken bits of quartz stone, red or white in colour, are also found in the tumuli. See “The Meayll Stone Circle”, P. M. C. Kermodé, in *The Illustrated Archaeologist*, vol. ii, No. 5, p. 3.

³ *Liber Scaccarii*.

more famous wells and the special ritual practised at each of them. The best known well is that dedicated to St. Maughold, one of the earliest Manx saints, which is situate 723 yards N.N.W. of the extreme point of the headland of that name, and 430 yards N.E. of the parish church,¹ also called after the same saint. It is about half-way down the steep grassy slope of the headland, being about 120 feet above mean sea level, and 180 feet distant from the sea. It consists of a small and probably artificial cistern of an irregular pentagonal shape (see sketch), measuring



24 inches from the base to the apex, 17 inches across, and about 5 inches deep. Into this cistern water slowly oozes from the natural cliff at (a), and overflows at (b). It is covered in on the north, south, and west, partly by slabs of slate stone, artificially erected, and partly by the natural rocks, which form a canopy about 3 feet high above the well and project some 2 feet to the north and south of it, but not beyond its eastern edge. Between this edge and the sea an artificial platform, about 3 feet square, has been made of slate slabs, which are now overgrown with grass. Without it, access to the well would be difficult, as, so steep is the slope, a false step would probably cause the person making it to roll into the sea. It was this slope between the sea and the well which,

¹ Maughold Church is 215 feet above mean sea level.

according to Manx tradition, St. Maughold's horse, on which he had crossed over from Ireland, cleared at one bound, after a vigorous application of the saint's spurs, landing on his knee on the site of the well, and so making the cistern or hollow to which I have referred. From this hollow, water at once gushed forth, and, being drunk by the saint and his horse, has, since then, been efficacious for the cure of all diseases. This tradition, which was told to Sir George Head, who visited the island in 1832, by a peasant living in the parish of Maughold, is still remembered in the neighbourhood.¹

Close by the well there is said to have been a chair² on which the saint was wont to sit, but it has long since disappeared. Barren women used to sit in it and drink a glass of the water from the well, which was supposed to have the power of rendering them prolific; but, as Sacheverell, writing in 1702, shrewdly remarked, it "probably has lost much of its ancient virtue since the priests, who had the custody of it, have been discontinued"³. The well, however, continued to be largely visited, for as late as 1832 "a multitude of people from all parts"⁴ flocked to it on the first Sunday in harvest. As regards the annual number of visitants since that time, but little is known. A local guide-book, written in 1860, speaks of the practice of visiting the well as "not obsolete";⁵ but the

¹ *Continuation of a Home Tour*, p. 70 (1837). Sir G. Head's peasant added the remarkable information that all the particulars of the above-mentioned tradition were to be gathered from the cross at the entrance to the churchyard; but, as this cross, which dates from the 14th century, has no inscription, the only help it gives to such a supposition is the fact that the "three legs of Man" on it are furnished with spurs. It may be mentioned that the *Book of Arnagh* gives St. Maughold a boat to cross the channel in (see *Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*, p. 22), but Manx tradition scorns so prosaic a method of transit! It will be seen later that St. Patrick also came to Man on horseback.

² Sacheverell's *Survey of the Isle of Man*, Manx Society's Publications, vol. i, p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Continuation of a Home Tour*, p. 70. ⁵ Kneale's *Guide*, p. 151.

present Vicar¹ assures me that in his time, fifteen years, he has not known the well to be visited for any other reason than curiosity. As, however, it is quite possible to visit this secluded spot without anyone being aware of it, I doubt this being the case. There is evidence, too, that till within the last ten years, if not at the present time, the water of this well was considered to be specially efficacious for the cure of sore eyes.² Prof. Rhys was told that, when it was applied for this purpose, it was customary, "after using it on the spot, or filling a bottle with it to take home, to drop a pin, or bead, or button into the well."³ "But", he continues, "it had its full virtue only when visited on the first Sunday of harvest, and then only during the hour the books were open at church, which, shifted back to Roman Catholic times, means doubtless the hour when the priest is engaged saying Mass."³ An old man still living in the village of Ballaugh, some eight miles from St. Maughold's Well, told Prof. Rhys that he formerly visited it on the first Sunday in harvest to wash his eyes, that people left strips of cotton, with which they washed their eyes, on the bushes⁴ close to the well, and that, if anyone picked these strips up, he or she would catch the complaints that those who had left them had been suffering from. He also stated that people at the same time dropped coins into the well, which varied in value from 1*d.* to 6*d.*, and that he himself had done so.⁵ At the date of my visit, the 28th of March in the present year, I found nothing in the well except a brass stud and a hairpin, both of very modern appearance. This is the only well in the parish of Maughold whose sanative qualities are still remembered, but Colgan⁶ gives

¹ Died since the above was written, on the 1st of June 1894.

² Its efficacy for barren women seems to have been forgotten.

³ *FOLK-LORE*, vol. ii, p. 307.

⁴ There are now no bushes near the well, but there may at the time mentioned have been a little gorse there.

⁵ MS. note from "C.", Ballaugh.

⁶ Writing in the seventeenth century, but seemingly getting his information from an old document.

the following curious account of another well in the churchyard of that parish :—“ In the cemetery of St. Maughold's Church there was a sarcophagus of hollow stone, whereout a spring continually exuded in the twelfth century. This was sweet to the draught, wholesome to the taste, and it healed divers infirmities. It is added, whosoever drinketh thereof, either receiveth instant health, or instantly he dieth. And in that stone are the bones of St. Machaldus said to rest¹; yet therein is nothing found save only clear water. Though many oftentimes endeavoured to remove the stone, and especially the King of the Norici (Norwegians), who subdued the island, that he might at all times have sweet water; yet have they all failed in their attempt, for the deeper they have delved to raise up the stone, so much the more deeply was it found fixed in the earth.”² There remains no tradition of the existence of such a spring in the churchyard; but I am nevertheless able, through the kindness of the Rev. S. N. Harrison, who has caused numerous excavations to be made in the churchyard, of which he has an unrivalled knowledge, to show that Colgan's information as regards the position of this spring is probably correct.

About 1830, when a grave was being dug, a sarcophagus or hollow stone, measuring 4 ft. long by 3 ft. 2 in. broad, and 10 in. deep, was discovered four yards from the north-eastern gable of the present church, but there was no spring in connexion with it. This may possibly be the sarcophagus spoken of by Colgan, and the absence of water is capable of a satisfactory explanation. For the whole churchyard before 1860 is known to have been full of water; but about that year a mine level was driven across it, which had the effect of draining it. And, as to the

¹ They are said to have been preserved till the Reformation. (*Les Petits Bollandistes; Vies des Saints*, tome V, xxv Avril, No. 1, p. 15.)

² *Trias Thaumaturga*, Sexta Vita S. Patricii, cap. cliii, pp. 98, 99, and 116.

special spring¹ mentioned by Colgan, the discovery in the present year of a drain² some eight yards north, and slightly to the west of the place where the sarcophagus was dug up, renders its existence highly probable. There are also drains to the south of this place, and in various other parts of the churchyard.

We may next notice *Chibber Undin*, or "Foundation Well", in the parish of Malew, probably so called in reference to the foundation of an ancient *keeill*, or cell, close by. The following account was given to the writer, of the ritual formerly observed there: The patients who came to it took a mouthful of water, retaining it in their mouths till they had walked round the well sunways twice. They then took a piece of cloth from a garment which they were wearing, wetted it with water from the well, and hung it on a hawthorn-tree which grew there. When the cloth had rotted away the cure was supposed to be effected.³ A slight variation from this ritual has been communicated by the Rev. E. B. Savage, who was told that the rag was wetted with water from the mouth of the patient, not direct from the well. The chief virtue in this well was in promoting fertility among women, and it was especially efficacious if used on St. John's Eve. There is a well on the hill known as *Gob-y-Vollee* ("Eyebrow Point"), in the parish of Ballaugh, called *Chibbyr Lansh* (where the meaning of *lansh* is unknown), consisting of three pools, which was formerly much resorted to for the cure of sore eyes. The cure could only be effective if the patient came on Sunday, and on that day, according to Prof. Rhys, only during the time when the books were open at church.⁴

¹ The Rev. S. N. Harrison has also discovered a built-up well, 6 feet wide, at the southern end of an old building at the south-eastern corner of the churchyard.

² This drain is of stone, a foot or more in depth, 18 inches wide, and four or five feet below the surface.

³ See A. W. Moore, *Surnames and Place-Names of the Isle of Man*, p. 181.

⁴ "Manx Superstitions," *FOLK-LORE*, vol. ii, p. 307.

He had then to walk three times round each pool sunways, saying in Manx, "*Ayns enym yn Ayr, as y Vac, as y Spyrnyd Noo*" ("In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"), and to apply the water to his or her eyes. A well on *Slieau Maggle*, in the parish of Kirk Michael, had the same property and required the same observances.

On Corrin's Hill, to the south of Peel, is *Chibbyr Noo Pherick* ("St. Patrick's Well"), which is said to have first sprung forth where St. Patrick was prompted by divine inspiration to impress the sign of the cross on the ground. He blessed the well, and its water is consequently supposed to be efficacious in all sorts of diseases, and as a preservative against the wiles of witches and fairies. According to another account of this well, when St. Patrick first came to the Isle of Man, he crossed the channel on horseback, and, being pursued by a sea-monster, he put the horse up the steepest part of Corrin's Hill. On reaching the top the horse stood still, and a beautiful spring of water, at which both the saint and the horse refreshed themselves, sprang up at their feet. This spring was consequently called *Chibbyr Sheeant* ("Blessed Well"), and at it the first Christians in the island are said to have been baptised by St. Patrick.¹ It is also called *Chibbyr yn Argid* ("Well of the Silver"), from the silver coins which were thrown into it as offerings. There is another *Chibbyr Pherick* ("Patrick's Well") near Laxey, where the saint is said to have stopped to drink on account of his horse having stumbled there. It is supposed to be just as efficacious as its namesake. If people passed this well and left nothing there, it was supposed that they would not be able to find their way home. There is a well without a name on South Barrule, of marvellous health-giving properties, but they can only be enjoyed once in a lifetime, as tradition has it that the well cannot be found when sought a second time. A story is told of a man who left a stick at the well to mark the place, but on returning he could not find either the well or the stick. The stick,

¹ W. Cashen, Peel.

however, was discovered some weeks after on the shore at Port Erin, three miles away.¹

There was formerly a well at the Nunnery, near Douglas, dedicated to St. Bridget, which, said Waldron, in 1726, "has been, notwithstanding the many extraordinary properties ascribed to it, of late suffered to dry up".²

Another famous well is that of *Chibbyr Katreeney* ("Catherine's Well"), at Port Erin, where many a wonderful cure is declared to have been effected. This well is now covered by a pump. There is a second well, dedicated to the same saint, on the Colby Fair ground, about two miles inland from Port Erin, which is also renowned for the cure of diseases.

At *Chibbyr Unjin* ("Ash-tree Well"), in the parish of Marown, there is said to have been an ash-tree, formerly, on which rags were hung by those who resorted to the well. There is a well of the same name near Ballabeg, in the parish of Malew. The water of both these wells is said to be good for diseases generally.

Near Baldwin village, in the parish of Malew, is a well called *Chibbyr Uney*, which is probably a corruption of *Chibbyr Runey*, St. Runy, or Runius, being the patron saint of the parish of Marown, which was called after him. It is interesting in this connexion to note that the parish of Marown at this point projects a long narrow strip right into the parish of Braddan, seemingly for the purpose of enclosing this well in its limits, as it is only a few yards from the boundary of the two parishes. Its water is supposed to be a marvellous cure for sore eyes. An educated Manxman, now living, told the writer that it had completely cured his brother, who was nearly blind, and that he himself, when his eyes were weak, had received great benefit from it. He simply took some of the water home in a bottle to bathe his eyes, and did not condescend to go through the ordinary ritual, which consisted, as usual, in

¹ Rhys, MS. note.

² Manx Society's Publications, vol. xi, p. 46.

walking round the well, repeating the same prayer as at *Chibber Lansh*, leaving a rag, and either dropping a coin in the well, or leaving three white pebbles close to it,¹ the pebbles being the offerings of those who were too poor to put in a coin.² The Rev. E. B. Savage, who visited this well three years ago, found no rags, but there were a number of halfpence in the well, and a large pile of white pebbles close by it. He sent some of the coins and pebbles to the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford, retaining some for the proposed Manx Museum. The water of this well was most efficacious when the parson of Marown was in church on Sunday. It was on such an occasion that I visited this well in February last, and bathed a defective eye with its water, but I regret to say that the eye has not improved since then. Perhaps the failure of a cure in my case has resulted from my not having gone through the whole ritual, or, worse still, from want of faith in the efficacy of the water. That the latter was probably the true cause will appear from an analysis³ of this water, kindly taken by Mr. J. F. Terry, Public Analyst to the Manx Government, which has been submitted to Dr. Lauder Brunton, who says: "The water is a most ordinary one, and does not contain anything likely to help, even slightly, any disease of the eyes." To this he adds, somewhat wickedly: "It might, of course, be useful for a patient to go for a nice country walk and there bathe his eyes in this water." As the well is situated in one of the most beautiful and healthy districts in the island, some four miles from Douglas, and as the walk to it entails the climbing of several steep hills, there is some probability in the learned Doctor's suggestion that the patients would improve in general health, and so, perhaps,

¹ W. J. C., Braddan.

² Mr. Savage thinks that the three pebbles indicate some survival of Phallicism; but, as they prayed in the name of the Three Persons, it is more likely to be Trinitarian.

³ For analysis, see Appendix A.

in their sight also. I may mention that, since the visit of the Rev. E. B. Savage, some ardent folk-lorists have evidently been to the well, as I found that the pile of pebbles had almost disappeared.

In conclusion, I would draw attention to the fact that the accounts given of the ritual at these various wells are connected with the cure of disease only, and do not refer to the use of their water as a charm against the wiles of witches and fairies, or to secure good luck. The reason of this is that it is exceedingly difficult to obtain any information of the use of these wells for such purposes. Those who will readily confess to having resorted to them for the cure of disease will not admit that they had any other object in going to them. I am, however, quite satisfied from indirect evidence that the water of some wells which was considered efficacious for the cure of diseases, was also considered equally efficacious against witches and fairies, and that it was used in accordance with the ritual specified above till quite a recent period.

APPENDIX A.

*Analysis of One Gallon of Water taken from CHIBBER UNEY,
February 16th, 1894.*

Total solid matter	.	.	9.80	grains.
Volatile ¹ organic matter	.	.	2.80	" (Loss by ignition
Chlorine	.	.	3.00	"
Iron. Hy. traces.				
Free ammonia	.	.	0.007	"
Albuminoid ammonia	.	.	0.0098	"
Nitrates	.	.	0.0408	"
Oxygen absorbed in four hours	.	.	0.0644	"
Phosphoric acid	.	.	<i>Nil.</i>	
Total hardness	.	.	2.7	degrees.

¹ The residue after ignition consisted of—

Sulphuric acid	}	Iron, Prot. oxide.
Hydrochloric acid		Lime.
Nitric	}	Traces. Soda.
Carbonic		

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The water when received was bright and clear, a very pale green in colour, and contained no suspended matter. When boiled and concentrated it did not deepen in colour or smell offensive. The residue, when ignited, slightly blackened, but did not smell offensive.

(Signed) JOHN F. TERRY (Public Analyst).

ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF PROVERBS AND
‘SAYINGS OF THE ISLE OF MAN.

BY G. W. WOOD, F.I.C.

The *Handbook of Folk-lore*, published a few years ago by your Society, led me to attempt a classification of the proverbs and sayings of the Isle of Man. In the chapter upon proverbs they are said to constitute a vast and almost unexplored field of folk-lore inquiry, and to have an important bearing upon philology, ethnology, history, and archæology, but before any scientific deductions can be drawn from them they must be “classified in groups”.

Classification is never an easy matter, and I soon found that the arrangement specified in the handbook, which is given on the authority of the Rev. J. Long, although excellent in its main features, required some extension to permit a thorough and complete analysis of the Manx proverbs to be made. I have therefore introduced several additional heads of classification. Under “Anthropological” no provision had been made for man physically considered, viz., the body, food, and clothing. Under “Physical” further heads seemed to be desirable, in order to include marine and celestial bodies, and the ancient “elements” of fire and water. Besides these, many sub-heads were necessary so as to properly take in all the Manx proverbs with which I have dealt. I quite anticipate that in the case of larger collections than the present it will be necessary to still further extend the number of sub-heads. The Isle of Man constituting a “little nation” of itself, its proverbs, when complete, may be regarded as