

MEMBER OF TIMES WRITES FROM THE ISLE OF MAN

Editor Times:

Peel, Isle of Man, July 20, 1909 - It has taken a few days to adjust oneself to appreciation of old world things. From my window where I am staying in Peel, I can see Peel Castle. One of its ruins, the church of St. Patrick, was built by that Saint himself, in the Fifth Century, and is regarded as one of the very oldest buildings in the whole of the British Isles, Simon, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who died in the Thirteenth Century, built some of the more "modern" portions of Peel Castle and lies buried in its ruins. King Robert Bruce captured the place by way of diversion early in the fourteenth century. A "modern" wing in the form of a keep was added by the Normans, and so on for quantity.

This is probably one of the most ancient fortified places on record in this part of the world, Excavations on its site, - a rock islet of natural advantages for warlike purposes, have revealed arrowheads and stone axes indicating that man had a fort here some 4,000 or 5,000 years ago.

The uncle of the "King Maker," Earl of Warwick spent some years at Peel Castle Dungeon for plotting against King Richard II. Fenella's Tower" described romantically and at length by Sir Walter Scott in "Peveril of the Peak," is a part of Peel castle. I stood on the spot where Fenella stood and gazed as she gazed at the caves and rocks below from which her lover departed on his mission of secrecy on which she accompanied him. Peel Castle was more of an ecclesiastical stronghold than ordinary fort. The Bishop of the diocese of Sodor and Man, Shetland and the western Isles of Scotland, was commander of the garrison. The ruins, while much destroyed by time and vandals retain much of romantic interest.

There is still the portcullis and ancient studded oak door of unknown antiquity at the entrance, still the sally port through which sorties were made against attacking parties, - guarded the while by a plot of boiling pitch, poised over a cunningly placed hole, - still the ancient banquet hall with its steps into the gallery at the end, where the minstrels added their share to the performance, - still remains of the great kitchen, with its stone chimneys and the pit of the still where the ale was brewed at the other end, - still the remains of the cathedral, the chapels, the barracks, the guardrooms, the secret passages and the watch tower and other real antiquities that interest the visitor from the crude and overnew west.

Of later interest are two cannons, taken from captured ships of the Spanish Armada and mounted at embrasures in the wall.

None can tell of the joustings, the feasting, the fighting and the troubles that have centered in the now silent and crumbling big pile of the gay knights and the fair ladies, the wandering minstrels and churchmen, of the bishops of awful authority who performed their religious offices right over the heads of their prisoners kept in a cavernous jail just beneath the church floor.

The Isle of Man is a fairyland in more ways than one. It has more tales of fairies, more superstitions, than almost any little people. It had its own kings, its own language - a cousin to the Gaelic, - its own laws and its own peculiar ways. The Vikings had it very early in their wanderings. Two of the Scandinavian Kings of Man, Godred on the 10th of November, 1187 and Olave, May 21, 1237, died in Peel Castle. Godfred was buried in the castle yard : Olave taken to Iona, the following summer.

For centuries the islanders have been sailors and fishermen. Herring fisheries provide the staple industry, - excepting only the constantly growing one of looking after tourists, The herring boats, 100 of so in number sail out of Peel harbor every afternoon with their nets, and spend the nights on the various fishing grounds, near the island

or on the coast of Ireland, - and next morning they come sailing back with their loads of fish and sell the proceeds of the night's work to regular buyers, who make and cure them up into "Manx Kippers" a famous fish delicacy in this part of the world.

No more picturesque sight can be imagined than the long line of sailing boats with their tanned sails coming in over the bar or stretching far out to sea, bobbing in the swell of the sea and riding lightly and well in all kinds of weather. Most Manxmen have forgotten more about handling a sailing craft than a lot of other folks ever knew.

The island is a huge rock rising out of the water to the clouds on nearly all of its shores. The valleys are on the inside. It is 32 miles long by 11 and from there came the Quines. Some of them, evidently, never left, for one meets the name and its owner very frequently. It really seems out of place since one thinks it should belong to America.

The houses are of stone, ragged stones, well cemented and will last for ages. Some of them have already lasted that long, Streets are narrow, - land being limited. Many thatched roofs are interesting features. Whitewash is a very popular house finish, the wash extending to fence, walls, etc., as well as to the buildings, contrasting charmingly with their green surroundings.

But enough of this - let me get to the railroads. A narrow gauge line about the same as one that used to communicate with the Brewster coal mines, does the business, with a tenor whistle to the locomotive and running board like that of a street car. First, second or third class accommodations. Cars divided into compartments. You get in and slip into a seat. When the compartment, which holds about eight, is full, the guard slams the door, the tenor whistle toots and away you go, past dell and glen. There is a stone watchman's lodge and safety gates at every crossing, even in the country. This afternoon, coming over from Douglas, I was looking out of the window, when recalled by a familiar sound, I looked about and was startled to note that an extremely red-faced and uncouth Britisher was singing our own, only "Rainbow."

"Come be mahie r-r-rain bow, mah pr-r-retty rainbow, my haht beguile," etc.

It was an odd combination . I am not yet out of reach of the popular song.

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