

MANXLAND PEOPLE.

ARMS OF THE ISLE
OF MAN.

IN last year's holiday number of the Magazine we gave our readers a general view of the appearance of the Isle of Man. We have now, with equal brevity, to refer to some of the more prominent characteristics of its inhabitants. The native Manx are of Celtic origin, and belong probably to the Irish branch of that great European family rather than to the Cambrian or Welsh. Indeed, considering that the island was for several centuries subject to the kingdom of North Wales, we cannot help being struck with the fact that its vocabulary retains so few traces of the long and close connection which did at one time exist between the two countries. In explanation of the fact, however, we must remember that after the Danish conquest in the beginning of the tenth century, the Manx seem to have had little communication with the Welsh, while with the cognate races of Ireland and the west of Scotland their intercourse was close and continuous. For a lengthened period, in fact, the Isle of Man and the southern islands of the Hebrides formed one kingdom, in which were at times included certain districts in the east of Ireland. Hence, the Manx language shows a much greater affinity for the Erse and Gaelic languages than for any other Celtic tongue. It is still spoken in the country districts, and in the remoter highlands there are still individuals unable to speak any other; but the Manx, though they love it as the old language of their country, and pride themselves upon knowing something of its phraseology, are too practical a race not to see that its common use would be a hindrance to the prosperity of their country, and it is now fast dying out as a spoken language.

The English language alone is the common speech of the country, and as the Manx is not taught in the schools, in another generation it will have become extinct. In thus displacing the native speech, the English language has acquired a dialectic character among the uneducated people; but among the educated classes it is spoken with greater purity than probably in any other part of the world, owing to the fact that while it has been acquired as a foreign language, it is spoken as the ordinary language of the country.

In appearance and character, the native Manx resemble the Highlanders of Scotland rather than the Welsh, or even the Irish; perhaps, in the latter case, from the greater proportion of the Norse element in their nature. They are not a tall race, a tall man being a rarity among them; but they are a broad, strongly-built race, so much so, indeed, that it was remarked that a body of Manxmen, raised as a militia during the Revolutionary War with France, occupied more ground than an equal number of men from any other British regiment. But small as the

country is—only a little more than thirty miles from end to end—there is yet noticeable a marked distinction between the inhabitants of its two extremities, the island being in this respect, as in others, a strange parallel to its greater neighbour to the eastward.

In the south, the natives are dark-complexioned, with black hair and eyes; in the north, they are fair, with light, often red, hair. There are also marked differences in the native languages of the two districts, differences so great as to affect their pronunciation of the English language, and amounting almost to dialectical peculiarities. So great, altogether, is the difference in appearance, in speech, and in habits, that it is commonly easy to distinguish between the natives of the two districts.

We shall probably find the chief cause of these differences between the northern and southern Manx in the fact that after the second Norse conquest of the island by Goddard Crovan in 1077, the country was divided by the conqueror between his Norse followers and the remnant of the conquered Manx—a division which was rendered possible and even permanent by the physical character of the country, which, as we saw in the former paper, is divided into two distinct and nearly equal parts by a broad and difficult range of mountains which crosses the island from east to west. Even at the present day, when the island is traversed in all directions by excellent roads, and when the northern district is connected with the southern by a regular railway service, intercourse between the two is still greatly restricted, and the inhabitants of the two districts have comparatively little communication and even less fellow-feeling. In olden times, when roads were few and difficult, and when education had done nothing to smooth away local prejudices, friendly communication between the two was almost impossible; and thus the island was divided into two almost hostile districts, whose inhabitants were as strangers and foreigners to each other. Thus it has been brought about that the natives of the two extremities of the country retain still so much of the old characteristics which distinguished the races when they stood arrayed against each other as invader and invaded.

But these differences may be traced much further and deeper. Their mental characteristics are as distinct as their physical. The "Northside" folk are a keen, shrewd race, strongly resembling their neighbours, the "canny" Scots. They know their own interests, and they look carefully after them. This characteristic they exhibit even in political matters. They distinctly pledge their Parliamentary members to a definite course of action, and they hold them strictly to their pledges; and, as with the Scotch members in the Imperial Parliament, when any measure affecting "Northside" interests is under legislative consideration, the northern members hold well together, and often by skilful trimming with other political parties in the country they succeed in carry-

ing their point to an extent far beyond their real power or force in the State. The "Southside" folk, on the other hand, are nearer akin to their Irish cousins of the south-west—with whom, by the way, they hold frequent and regular intercourse through their mutually engaging in the same fisheries. They are a quiet, easy-going people, content to take things as they come. With little energy or enterprise, progress is comparatively slow among them, except in the great town of Douglas, which, however, from its constant intercourse with England, and its large "foreign" population, may be regarded as an English rather than a Manx town. Political foresight or combination is almost unknown among them, and if their present wants are supplied, or more obvious personal interests untouched, they rarely trouble themselves about other matters, and can with great difficulty be got to take any interest in the general concerns of the country.

These differences of temperament characteristically show themselves in their habits and occupations. The northerners are mainly agriculturists, and have by their sound practical sense, and steady persistent labours, drained their marshy lands, and worked their barren, sandy soil into a high state of cultivation, and made it, as they proudly call it, "the garden of the island." The southern people are mainly fishermen, who spend three-fourths of their time netting the waters of the Channel and the south-western coasts of Ireland for mackerel and herring, and a part of the remainder in cultivating in a half-hearted fashion small patches of land attached to their cottages.

Even in their patronymics the same localisation of race may be traced. The surnames which are common in one district are exceedingly rare in the other, and the inhabitants of each locality are almost clannishly connected by blood relationship, or by frequent intermarriage. As in the case of Cornish men, many of whom, by the way, are settled in the island as miners, certain names are peculiar to the native Manx. Our space will not permit us to enter upon this point beyond saying that most of the native names begin with a K sound (probably a contraction of Mac)—as Kissack (MacIsaac), Qualtrough (MacWalter), Karran, Kerruish, Kermode, &c. ; or with Myl—as Mylchreest, Mylcraine, Mylroi, &c.

In both their sections the Manx are an orderly, law-observing people ; but they are a high-spirited race, proud of their ancient liberties, and resolved to maintain them at any cost. In older and rougher times any attempt to interfere with their constitutional rights never failed to produce the most determined resistance, rising at times to open rebellion ; and still,

though it may be expressed in a less violent manner, their determination to resist oppression and to preserve unimpaired their established rights is as great as ever. Of this we have numerous examples in their past history which it would be interesting and instructive to consider if our space would permit. We will just name one or two of the most recent. In 1825, Bishop Murray revived an obsolete claim to the tithes of all green crops, and attempting to enforce it, was met by the people in the most determined manner. Assembling in great crowds, they defeated the small force stationed in the island, and compelled the abandonment of the obnoxious claim.

In 1864 the English Government made an attempt to construct a harbour of refuge for shipping traversing the Irish Sea, by erecting a breakwater in Port Erin Bay, a beautiful inlet in the wild south-western coast. The work, however, as it progressed proved to be more difficult and costly than had been anticipated, and it was ultimately abandoned in an unfinished condition. Upon this abortive work the English Government had expended a considerable sum of money (£58,000) on the security of the harbour dues to be charged on vessels using the harbour, and these proving to be much less than had been expected, the English Government attempted to make the insular Government repay it with interest, and in 1870 made a formal demand for its repayment. No legal claim upon the island could be established, or was attempted to be established ; but, to give a colouring of right to their demand, the Treasury set up the novel hypothesis of "moral" responsibility. This extraordinary claim, which would have amounted to a payment by the island of £2,600 for fifty years, was energetically rejected by the Manx, and though the English Government tried in various ways to coerce the little kingdom into an unconditional submission, they firmly resisted, and ultimately, in 1879, a compromise was effected greatly in favour of the island.

Loyal and peaceable, deeply imbued with religious feeling, though destitute of bigotry and intolerance, simple in their habits, and retaining many old-world beliefs and superstitions long since forgotten in other parts of the kingdom, the Manx are an interesting people. One of those few fragmentary nationalities still found scattered over Europe, with distinct national peculiarities, and possessing a constitution and a history as old and as instructive as those of the greater kingdom of which they now form a part, they and their country offer an ample and instructive field for investigation.

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