A LETTER FROM THE REVEREND J.T. CLARKE READ AT YN LAIGH GHAILCKAGH (1872)

Dear Dawson,—It highly gratifies me, though nearly 300 miles off, that at last Manxmen, though 'the day after the fair,' are rousing up out of their deadly indifference in saving their mother tongue from being altogether buried in the grave.

Although it is fast running down hill, like the other branches of the old original Celtic language which once prevailed over a third part of France, yet it is no wonder that each Celtic dialect is on the decline, especially the Manx part of it, inasmuch as the population is so small.

God has endowed the human intellect with so much sense, that he can force onward his fiery steampackets against the very eye of the wind; and man has as much skill given to him that he has made balloons to take him up to the clouds. Man has also his sailing ships to navigate the seas from country to country, aided by screw and steam against wind and tide and every storm. Even at the bottom of the great ocean man has the means to send his messages from one part of the world to another, with the rapidity of lightning. Therefore the peoples of the world are so much more mixed up together than they ever were before, that whatever language in the world becomes the most commonly in use, that is the language which will prevail. This is the principal reason that our Manx dialect is of no use, therefore the English language takes the lead, and it will prevail. The reason is very evident. The Manx market is brought within five or six hours of the English markets; and in order to be able to deal in the English markets, it is English, and only English, Manx people must learn to speak.

The youths of Mona also, as well as adults, travelling from country to country all over the globe, some to common service, some to all kinds of commercial business, and some enter into a seafaring life to foreign parts, all to save a little for the 'rainy day,' are only anxious to speak in English; and now for the most part it is English they speak, because it is in English they deal.

Foreseeing this, then, people think less of their own natural tongue. At the same time they might have Manx as well as English, without one interfering with the other. It is the greatest nonsense in the world to believe that a knowledge of reading and speaking the Manx dialect would ever come in their way to learning English, at least it never was any detriment to me in learning English.

At ten years old I was able to speak fluently in Manx to my father's tenants who had no English, and before I was twenty years old I had translated for the press into Manx several English tracts, and afterwards the greater part of Dr Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress,' &c. And moreover for five years I was not allowed more than the first Sunday in each month to officiate in the English language, all the rest Manx. Now with all this labour in the Manx dialect, the intimate knowledge I had of it both in conversation, preaching, and other duties therein, it never interfered with me either in speaking or reading the English tongue. But all the authorities of the Island conspired against the Manx dialect. Ministers of all sects and parties rose up against it. Both Deemsters and lawyers were against it, and now young people are brought up more ignorant of Manx than the cattle of the field used to be. During the reign of Bishops Wilson and Hildesley, no young man could be ordained without his possessing an intimate knowledge of Manx.

When the twenty-four Keys, before now called the Carrane Keys, ruled, it was all Manx they had. And in the time of Deemster Lace and Deemster Crellin, no attorney dare appear before them unless they could plead in Manx. Even in my own recollection, in my youthful days, it was in the Manx dialect we always spoke to our horses and our cows. Even the dogs themselves, unless you spoke to them in Manx, they could not understand you, but looking all around them, and up into your face, taking the greatest wonder in the world what you wanted them to do. The dogs themselves, poor fellows, did not understand English, for it was all Manx they had, and they were not ashamed of it either.

Not many years ago since I overtook an old man on the high-road, driving before him about half-a-dozen milch cows, going home from the field where they had been grazing, to put them up in their cow-house for the night. There was a small enclosure about the cow-house, into which as soon as the cows had entered with their stomachs full, they began to wrestle in their own pushing way whilst the old man was opening the door and preparing to let them into their cow-house. As soon as he came out he rushed among them in great fury, nearly cracking their ribs with a thick short stick in his hand, which he called in Manx a 'bad,' calling to the guilty animals by name in his own Manx dialect as they were bruising each other with their horns, saying, '*Ghonag*, thou shameless hussy, go into thy halter and take rest.' '*Vriggin*,' if thou wilt not give up in time, I'll break thy bones in thee. In, in, I tell thee.' '*Ghooag*, – impudent slut – give up, wilt thou?' and away goes the 'bad' after her. It struck her on the horns, and brought her down upon her knees. I thought sure enough that her horns were broken into pieces. At last, by shouting and beating with his 'bad' he got them all in upon their ties, and he was satisfied. 'I say, old man,' venturing to address him, 'your cows have been well taught in the Manx dialect.' 'Manx! the mischief take them,' said he, 'when their bellies are full and going into the cow-house, their strife and their merriment is enough to provoke Job himself if he were among them; but I have made their bones creak pretty well, and let them that

for their supper.' Thus, Dawson, you see that the cattle of the field in olden times, before now, understood Manx better than most people do at the present day.

'Let her go (the Manx)' some will say, 'what is the good of her for us now? We can't deal in Manx in England, or scarcely anywhere else, therefore she is of no use to our Island now—let her go wherever she likes.' But there are about a thousand Manx people in a part of America called Cleveland, who would not say, 'let her go away where she likes.' There 'tis all Manx they have in their social meetings, in their daily transactions, in preaching the Word of God to the people, and almost in everything else; at the same time no other inhabitants of the place have better English.

Two young men from Cleveland once visited my house a few years back. One of them was born in America, though of Manx parents. He was a lawyer. The other was a sister's son of my own, who went away in his youth to America, as an apprentice boy, and when he left home he understood no language but English. They struck me with astonishment at hearing the good Manx they spoke, and both declared that their knowledge of the English language never proved a hindrance to them in learning Manx. They had the two languages instead of one.

There is another circumstance I will reveal to you, John Dawson, and then I must conclude. About twenty-three years ago I went upon a certain day to visit the Calf of Man, in company with an old acquaintance from London, who had never before seen the Isle of Man. When we had arrived at the top of the Howe, there was a place there which had been, at some period or other, in a most wonderful manner torn asunder and split into caverns by an earthquake. They call the place in Manx the *Scaur-yn*, or caverns, or chasms. There were a few young lads there about from ten to twelve years of age, plucking heath for fuel. I spoke to the biggest lad in English, and asked where these caverns were. The boys all stared at me, their faces were covered with blushes, but did not return me a word of answer. I again asked the same question of the same boy in English, because of the stranger in my company, but in addition to the former question I inquired if they had lost their tongue in the heath. I was no wiser than before. The boys opened their mouths in astonishment–like an old skate on the hook when dying–and one would think that their very eyes in their foreheads had swollen with wonder. It immediately occurred to my mind that Manx was their vernacular tongue, and I spoke to them in Manx and asked why they did not answer me when I spoke to them in English? Instantly, as soon as they heard the Manx spoken, one would think that they were inspired with a new spirit, for they bounded away hop-set-and-jump, vieing with each other who could get first to show us the chasms. At length, before we left them, I inquired if they had a school in their neighbourhood to teach them the English language? 'O yes, they had,' they said, 'but they had not time to go to it. There it is over there,' they said. 'A little boy who goes to the school has English, but he has better Manx,' replied one of them. When I was about to part with them, the eldest of the boys looked up into my face with a very smiling countenance, and with a very roguish, inquisitive eye, and asked me 'why I did not speak to them first of all in Manx?' But before I had time to answer him, he addressed the other boys surrounding him with considerable astonishment, and said, 'who could think,' said he, 'that a white neck would have Manx,' and thus we parted.

And now, Dawson, I verily believe that there are still scores in our Island, here and there, as well as among the young as the aged, who cannot read God's Word either in English or Manx. Now, although the Manx dialect is nearly extinct (and go she will, one of these days), surely we all believe that every one ought to be taught to read the Word of God in whatever language the people best understand. Well do I know that they who have been, as it were, brought up in Manx from the cradle, would learn to read in Manx in quarter the time they would require to learn English, for this reason, being the language in which they were brought up to speak, every word they would learn to read is familiar to them beforehand. This is the only advantage, according to my opinion, which would accrue from teaching all in our Island who have no education, to read the Word of God in their own native language, which might ultimately lead to the salvation of their souls. I am not persuading you to attend to any- thing whatever that I have not proved to be true.

Before I was twenty years old I had two adult Manx schools in my native parish of Jurby, consisting of 150 scholars. Many of the adults had grand-children. For the greater part the pupils had little or no instruction before that, yet a few could read English tolerably. It was marvellous what delight both old and young took in learning to read in Manx, and they got into it directly, because they were acquainted beforehand with every word they learnt. Many of them afterwards went to America, bringing along with them their Manx knowledge, which continues among them to this day. Many of those too, who remained at home, acknowledged on their death-bed that it was the delight which they took in reading Manx, which lead them daily to read one portion after another of God's Word, which ultimately led them to Christ their Saviour for pardon of sin through a lively faith in his name. Many of them also, when their spirit had flown home to God, had that Holy Book in which they so much rejoiced to read in their native tongue, laid carefully by their side, when the soul was gone.

Therefore, Dawson, if it be thy hearty desire to teach the countrymen to read the Word of God in the Manx dialect, which formerly the Manx people understood much better than the English; if it be on account of drawing the hearts of the people to god by a knowledge of him through Christ, that you wish to revive a knowledge of the Manx dialect which dies away very fast, what more can I advance than I have done, unless I conclude by saying, may good luck attend you, ride 'prosperously because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness.' Amen.

John Thomas Clarke
South Wales, April 18th, 1872.

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Stephen Miller

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