

Manx Notes 101 (2008)

“AS A POOR BENIGHTED SAXON”

STANLEY HILL ON THE MANX LANGUAGE (2)

Manx Language a Precious Heritage

COMPULSORY INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS ADVOCATED

(To the Editor of the Ramsey ‘Courier’)

Dear Sir:

As a poor benighted Saxon I should like to make an appeal on behalf of the Manx Language along the lines suggested by Mr Hector MacDoughal at the Keltic Congress.

The Irish regard their language as a precious heritage and one of their first duties upon becoming a self governing nation was to start a reviving of their native tongue. Mann has had self government for centuries—why cannot they follow the Irish language policy?

Compulsory Manx in the schools would of course meet with numerous objections of a very materialistic kind. If, however, the objects of learning a foreign language be carefully considered these objections seem unreal and shadowey.

The object of language teaching in a school is to enable the pupil to understand the literature and culture of that language and also to benefit from the mental training got by learning another tongue.

The latter object can be served as well by learning Manx as by learning Latin, French and German but the former object seems unattainable. Most children learn French in the school, yet apart from those going to the University, how many ever read a line of French literature after leaving school? It must be a very small fraction of one per cent. It would appear that even French and German fail to achieve what we are told is the primary object in teaching them.

Manx has very little literature and never will have if Manxmen watch the death of their language with a morbid, fatalist outlook. But to know Manx is to know two other Goidelic languages—Scotch and Irish—the latter in particular having a very respectable literature. At the recent Keltic Congress the Scotch & Irish could understand Manx & vice versa with little difficulty in the course of ordinary conversation. However Manx orthography stands rather in the way, Miss O’Farely described it as “diabolical spelling” and it certainly has cut off Manx most successfully from the other Goidelic languages. The modern spelling is not phonetic, elegant or convenient and has not even antiquity to recommend it as it is scarcely a century and a half old. If the orthography were brought into line with the Irish, and

Scotch Gaidhlig I am sure that any Irishman, Scotchman or Manxman could read a page of each other's language at sight.

I would venture to suggest the following scheme which would have to have the force of Tynwald behind it.

Manx to be taught first in the Secondary and then in the elementary schools. The Universities to be approached so that Manx might be a Matriculation subject. The spelling to be revised as suggested above. Our Manx speaking scholars to be turned into teachers. The native Manx speakers to give demonstrations in pronunciation. The Manx Churches could help by holding Manx services with increasing frequency and eventually by demanding Manx speaking priests in their benefices and children could be taught to pray, to sing in Manx at their own fireside.

Economically Manx must look towards Lancashire and to counterbalance this Mann must look spiritually and aesthetically towards Ireland and Scotland. There has not been a lack of Manx writers but they have nearly all written in English. It might take a century to produce a healthy Manx literature but unless we make a sacrifice and an effort now there never will be a Manx Literature.

Manxmen are proud of their Nationality: if they lose their National Spirit they will soon be indistinguishable from Saxons and the loss of their language is the first stage in this direction.

Cannot thirteen Keys be persuaded to adopt this suggested policy and save their country spiritually? or is the question of money an immense difficulty in their way? What Ireland has done Mann can do and we can profit by both the mistakes and successes of Ireland.

Only Government action can save the language. Now is the time to act—not tomorrow, or next year. This is the last opportunity for doing anything—it will soon be too late.

Yours etc., | STANLEY HILL.

Source: Stanley Hill, "Manx Language a Precious Heritage," Letter to the Editor, *Ramsey Courier* 7 Aug. 1931: 7c.



Stanley Hill was at some time during 1931 an assistant master at King William's College and during that time he became somewhat empasioned about the state (and fate) of the Manx language. In 1931, he communicated his thoughts and feelings in letters to two of the Island's newspapers. The first appeared in the *Ramsey Courier* in August, the second in the *Monas's Herald* later in December of 1931. The latter was reproduced earlier here (see *Manx Notes* 12), the former now appears here.

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STEPHEN MILLER
VIENNA, 2008

