

THE STATE OF MANX GAELIC FROM NOTES & QUERIES, 1882, 1883, AND 1884

[1]

WENDISH AND MANX. Has any bibliography been published of books, &c, printed in Wendish and Luzatian during the last twenty years? I believe their little literature is increasing rather than otherwise. Also, what books have been recently printed in Manx? Is there any newspaper in that language?

W.S. LACH-SZYRMA
Notes & Queries, 6th series, VI (1882), 208

[2]

WENDISH AND MANX. (6th s. vi. 208). There are no newspapers published in Manx, nor is there any purely Manx literature. The last book printed in the language was the Prayer Book in 1842; a few years before that a little book called *The Sinner's Friend* (*Carrey yn Pheccagh*) was printed at Maidstone (among a list of those who aided its publication appears 'Benjamin D'Israeli, Esq., M.P.'). Twenty years ago a proclamation issued by the late Governor was published in Manx and English; and at the promulgation of the laws on the Tynwald Hill the title and the marginal notes of each act are read out in English from the top of the hill by the first deemster, and afterwards by the coroner for Glenfaba in Manx. The old people, especially in the mountains and other remote parts, still use it, but in another generation it will have almost died out.

ERNEST B. SAVAGE
Kirk Michael, Isle of Man.
Notes & Queries, 6th series, VI (1883), 435b

[3]

WENDISH AND MANX (6th s. vi. 208, 435). Although a reply on the subject of Manx has already been given, a few further particulars will not, perhaps, be unacceptable to some of the readers of *Notes & Queries*. I fear it is too true that the language is dying out. Two years ago I paid a visit to the Isle of Man. I looked in vain for any Manx publications in the shop windows, or for any sort of notice or inscription in that language. Not once did I hear it spoken, even in the rural districts, except a few words now and then at my special request. In answer to my questions people usually stated that they knew nothing of Manx, adding sometimes, however, that their parents spoke it; others advanced in years said they had completely forgotten it; scarcely any one would admit that he knew more than a few words. There can be no doubt that the Manx people are thoroughly ashamed of their language. They say, and, of course, with truth, that it is of no use to them, either for advancement in life or for the acquisition of the most ordinary information.

Then, again, they have heard it constantly ridiculed by their English visitors. These latter, for the most part excursionists—holiday folk of the lower classes from the great manufacturing towns—are the very people to make game of any speech that they may find strange or unintelligible. Consequently the Manx, who nearly all speak English fluently, speak nothing but English when there is any chance of strangers overhearing them, though in certain rural districts they still use their own language amongst themselves. I remarked, however, that those who thus, it was said, habitually used Manx were spoken of with contempt by the other Manx people of their own class who used English only. I heard of but one person who could speak nothing but Manx, and that was an aged woman of the name of Kagan, or Cagan (I spell the name phonetically), who resided at the picturesque little village of Cregneish, near Port Erin. Her ignorance of English was considered so remarkable that she was quite an object of interest in the neighbourhood, and strangers who visited that part of the island usually made a point of seeing her. I was informed that Manx, though no longer used in any of the churches, was still to be heard in some few Dissenting chapels that are situated in certain out-of-the-way places, such, for instance, as Cregneish. In these Manx sermons are occasionally delivered; hymns are sung, too, in the same language; but the prayers are always said in English. This is all that is now left of the public use [316b] of Manx. The only Manx books in circulation among the general public are, I believe, Bibles and hymn-books, and the former, which are all old, are getting scarce. The extinction of the language seems to be imminent. Can nothing be done to save it? I believe I am correct in stating that the works brought out by the Manx Society are always published in English. These are for circulation among subscribers only. Thirty volumes have been issued since 1858, in which year the Society was established. The last of these was published in 1880. The thirty-first, now nearly ready, will be the *Journals of the House of Keys*, edited by Mr Richard Sherwood, advocate. I have no personal knowledge as to the present use of Wendish. The language, however, seems to be flourishing. The *Standard* of December 27 last states, in its letter from Berlin, that among the newspapers for which the authorities of the Imperial Post Office receive subscriptions, and which they supply to the public in Germany, are six that are published in Wendish.

C. W. S.
Notes & Queries, 6th series, VII (1883), 316

[4]

WENDISH AND MANX (6th s. vi. 208, 435, vii. 316). C. W. S. says at the last reference that the Manx sermons at certain remote dissenting [395B] Chapels in Man are 'all that is now left of the public use of Manx.' But surely the Acts of Tynwald are still proclaimed yearly in Manx as well as in English, from the Tynwald Hill at St John's? When I was last in the island, some ten years ago, I heard Manx spoken, though rarely, in the market place at Douglas on market day; I heard it on the hills above the Foxdale lead mines, and in cottages near Peel, and (I think) at Craigneish, and certainly in some farmsteads on the west coast, beyond Glen May. At one of these the whole household spoke only Manx among themselves, and the elders hardly knew any English. The only way to preserve the Manx tongue is to encourage it and make it useful, which could be done by allowing it in schools side by side with English, and by fostering among the people a taste for their own old legends and ballads. This, however, cannot be hoped for. The Manxmen, indeed, have a certain just pride in Ellan Vannin. But when a small and poor people, of mixed race, is suddenly allowed to share the wealth of Liverpool and Manchester, is invaded by countless British Trinculos, whose money it understands but whose contemptuous ignorance it takes for wisdom, then truly we may abandon all hope that the insular life and language will last. The Philistines are upon Ellan Vannin, or rather she herself is in league with Dagon.

A. J. M.

Notes & Queries, 6th series, VII (1883), 395

[5]

THE MANX LANGUAGE (6th s. vi. 435; vii. 316, 395). Neither C. W. S. nor A. J. M. has gone to the right part of the Isle of Man to hear Manx spoken. A large portion of the population of the northern parishes of Jurby and Bride, which are remote from the haunts of the tourist, still speak it, though they are all acquainted with English. The last person who could not speak English was an old woman in Kirk Andreas village, who died about ten years ago. There are no longer sermons delivered in Manx, but the Lord's Prayer and blessing are sometimes given in that language. The titles only of the Acts are promulgated from Tynwald Hill in both Manx and English on old Midsummer Day every year. What I may term Anglo-Manx (i.e., English interlarded with Manx phrases) is very generally used among the country people, except near Douglas, upon which the Philistines have, indeed, descended.

A MANXMAN

Notes & Queries, 6th series, VIII (1883), 258a

[6]

THE MANX LANGUAGE (6th s. vi. 208, 435; vii. 316, 395). When A MANXMAN stated that a woman who died about ten years ago at the village of Kirk Andreas was the last person who could not speak English, he should

have added, in the northern part of the island. Thus limited, his assertion might have been correct. As it stands it is not so. I have recently made inquiries as to the accuracy of the statements contained in my former note on this subject, and, through the kindness of a gentleman who resides permanently in the Isle of Man, I am able not only to confirm, but to add to them. I have ascertained that the woman Kagan (or Keggen, as I now have the name) is still living, and that both she and her husband are quite unable to speak or understand English. The old man is eighty years of age; his wife, seventy-eight. It is also stated, on trustworthy authority, that in Nonague, four miles from Port Erin, is a man named Kurly, who cannot speak English; but my information in this case is not direct. From the foregoing it will be seen that, with regard to language, the inhabitants of the southern part of the island are more primitive than those of the northern districts. This state of things, however, is just the reverse of what we were asked to believe. The country around Jurby is not unknown to me, and I was well aware that in that neighbourhood Manx was still spoken. But for strangers the district has few attractions save Runic stones, and monuments of this class may be found in other and more accessible parts of the island.

C. W. S.

Notes & Queries, 6th series, IX (1884), 34A

W.S. Lach-Szyrma was the Vicar of Newlyn in Cornwall and later went on to write about Manx under the title "Manx and Cornish: The Dying and the Dead," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, XLIV (1888), 273-78. Manx had already been the subject of a piece by his compatriot Henry Jenner ("The Manx Language: Its Grammar, Literature, and Present State," *Transactions of the Philological Society for 1875-76*, 172-97). The response to his query was by E.B. Savage, then Vicar of Michael; Manx is only spoken in the remote parts of the Island, and then only by the elderly. The initials C.W.S. cannot be related to anyone at present. This writer goes further then stating where Manx is and is not spoken and details some of the social pressures on native speakers: the ridiculing of the language by trippers (the tourist economy of the Island is massively expanding in this period), the use of English by native speakers to avoid becoming tourist attractions themselves, and not least, contempt by native Manx people unable to speak Manx of those who can. Finally, the oft-stated opinion that Manx is of no practical value. Both A.J.M. and A MANXMAN agree that the language is restricted to the remote parts of the Island. The areas mentioned by A.J.M. were thinly inhabited, whereas the northern parishes mentioned by A MANXMAN were quite well populated providing a reservoir of native speakers. Monoglots are now noteworthy. The mention of Cregneash recalls J.G. Cumming's doom-laden statement, "Here the Manx language lingers, and may linger some time longer" (*A Guide to the Isle of Man*, London, Edward Stanford, 1861, p.90). It lingered for 113 years longer, until 1974.

Stephen Miller