

Manx Notes 282 (2017)

THE MANX LANGUAGE SOCIETY (2)

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

(1899)

[2a] The annual meeting of this Society was held on Monday in the Rosebery Hotel, Douglas. The Speaker of the House of Keys (Mr A.W. Moore, M.A.) presided, and there was a large attendance of members, including Miss Morrison (Peel), Miss Corrin (Castletown), Miss Creer and Miss Clague (Douglas), Rev. Canon Kewley. Rev. C.H. Leece, Rev. T.R. Kneale, Rev. J. Quine, Dr Clague, Messrs W. Kneen (Croit-e-Caley), J.E. Leece, M. Christian, John Cubbon, T. Moore, W. Quayle, W.J. Cain, E. Corteen, W. Kneen, —. Killip (Clyeen), S.K. Broadbent, J. Callow (Laxey), J. Taylor, W. Cubbon, and others.

Letters of apology for inability to attend were received from the Rev. Canon Savage, Messrs J.C. Crellin, H.K., P.G. Ralfe (Castletown), Wm. Radcliffe (Andreas), J.J. Kneen (Douglas), and H. Kelly (Ballaqueeney), Miss A. Langland Williams (“The Dau Wynne”), co-author of “One of the Loyal Celts,” &c., “What the Celts are Doing,” &c., and the member of the general council of the Pan-Celtic Congress, &c., wrote a sympathetic letter in which she states “that the work, of the society will ever be followed with sympathetic interest and admiration by the Celtic-speaking peoples of Brittany, Ireland, the Highlands, and Wales, who proudly claim “Ellan Vannin” in the group of “The Five Nations.” Professor Geoghegan, of Tacoma, Washington. U S.A., who is a member of the society, also wrote expressing sympathy with the aims of the society and desiring information as to its progress.

The hon. secretary (Mr W. Quayle) read his report as follows:

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,—I have pleasure in laying before you a summary of our proceedings for the past year, and in doing so, cannot but feel that we have reason to congratulate ourselves upon the progress made by the Society during the few months it has been in existence. Short as the career of the Society has been, there are not wanting distinct evidences of increasing interest and vitality in the movement with which we are associated. The feeling of indifference, not to say hostility, to the preservation of the native language which has hitherto been so marked is slowly melting away, and giving place to a more enlightened and patriotic sentiment. Prejudice is gradually yielding sway to common-sense. It has, to a large extent, ceased to be the custom to regard an acquaintance with the vernacular as a mark of ignorance, or to look upon its use as a thing to be despised and boycotted. This is as it should be; and it is to be hoped that this enlightened spirit will take root and develop; and there can be no doubt that the ultimate result will be the evolution of a strong and healthy national sentiment that will tend to our advantage in a material as well as an intellectual sense.

As you are all aware, the Manx Language Society was formed at a public meeting held in this town on the 22nd March last, under the auspices of the Committee of the Isle of Man Fine Arts and Industrial Guild, and I am glad to be able to report to-day that 30 members have been enrolled or proposed for admission. This is very encouraging, and is also a good augury for the future success of the society. Perhaps a word of explanation may be necessary here. You will doubtless notice a slight discrepancy between the figures here given and those in the Treasurer's Report, and I may state that it is accounted for by the fact that, owing to inadvertence, or probably misconception as to the date on which the financial year ends, several subscriptions have not yet been received.

A meeting of the Council of the Society took place in Douglas on the 29th April last, when the constitution and rules of the Society were framed and adopted. At this meeting an Executive Committee was appointed to conduct the affairs of the Society, consisting of the following seven members in addition to the officers, viz.: Rev. Canon Kewley, Miss Morrison, and Messrs H. Kelly (Rushen), Wm. Cubbon (Douglas), Wm. Radcliffe (Andreas), J.E. Leece (Douglas), and J.J. Kneen (Douglas).

A meeting of the Executive Committee was held, by kind invitation, at the residence of the President, on the 6th May, when a proposal from the Peel Manx Language Class, with reference to the publication of a M.S. grammar, kindly prepared by Mr Goodwin, was submitted for consideration, and agreed to. The work will accordingly be published under the auspices of this Society, and is at present undergoing careful revision. It is an elementary treatise with graduated exercises, and, while its publication will supply a longfelt want, it will also entail a considerable outlay. As they are desirous of co-operating as far as possible, with the Peel folk in the matter, but have practically no available funds for the purpose, the Committee earnestly appeal to Manxmen and women to join the Society, and thus help to place at its disposal the means required for effectually prosecuting the work in which it is engaged. And they venture to believe that their appeal will not be made in vain.

It has also been decided to issue a circular directing the attention of the public, both in the Island and across the water, to the objects of the Society, and inviting interest and support.

I have also to report that the Society received an invitation to be represented at the Welsh National Eisteddfod held at Cardiff in July last, and that our worthy President accordingly attended the festival, and was accorded a very warm reception. It will be gratifying to you to learn that he also had conferred upon him the position of Druid with the title "Agoriad Manaw," in recognition of his great services to Manx literature, and I am sure you will all readily join with me in tendering to him our heartiest congratulations upon the well-merited honour of which he has been the recipient.

The Society was also requested to send delegates to the "Highland Mod" held in Edinburgh last month, but unfortunately it was found impossible to secure the services of a representative on that occasion.

It is now my painful duty to refer to the great loss sustained by the Society through the lamented death of one of our Vice-Presidents. The late Deemster Gill was a truehearted Manxman, and always took a deep, kindly, and sympathetic interest in every movement that concerned the well-being and prosperity of his fellow-countrymen. He was an ardent lover of everything Manx, and has earned a lasting debt of gratitude from the people of this Island for his important services to the cause of Manx music.

I should like to express our indebtedness to the editorial staff of the "Isle of Man Examiner" for its able advocacy of our cause, and for the strong support it has at all times rendered to the movement. May it long maintain the same attitude!

In conclusion, I sincerely trust that our meeting today will have the effect of stimulating and encouraging interest in the study of our ancient tongue and of giving a fresh impulse to the work of the society; and that we shall one and all, return home, imbued with a determination stronger than ever to prosecute its aims, and to do what we can to advance the interests of the movement in the respective districts in which we reside.

The hon. treasurer (Mrs Laughton) reported that there was in hand a sum of £2 10s.

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

Mr A.W. Moore said: My year of office as president of "The Manx Language Society" having now come to an end, I propose, as is usual on such an occasion, to give a brief address. You have heard the report from our secretary of the work that has been accomplished by the society during the first year of its existence, and so I will now venture to lay before you my views with regard to the work I think it should endeavour to accomplish in the future. Though called the Manx Language Society, it should, I think, by no means confine its energies to the promotion of an interest in the language, but extend them to the study of Manx history, the collection of Manx music, ballads, carols, folklore, proverbs, place-names, including the old field names which are rapidly dying out—in a word, to the preservation of everything that is distinctively Manx, and, above all, to the

CULTIVATION OF A NATIONAL SPIRIT.

Let us co-operate cordially with the Guild in its admirable work of encouraging Manx industry, music, and art; and with the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society, and the Trustees of Ancient Monuments in their care for the relics of the past, while devoting ourselves more especially to the tasks at preserving and collecting our literature and song. We shall thus form part of an organisation which, I trust, will in time accomplish for the Isle of Man what the Eisteddfod has done for Wales. Let us then examine more particularly

THE TWO MAIN OBJECTS

which I think our society should have before it, i.e., the preservation of our national literature and music, and the cultivation of our national spirit. Our literature, alas, is almost non-existent; but I rejoice that within the last 40 years something has been done to perpetuate what little there is. Thus collections of carols and ballads have been printed, and the publication of the Phillip's Prayer Book of 1610 has rendered a knowledge of what I may call classical Manx possible to the student. It is not yet too late, perhaps, to gather some fragments of written Manx. Every old carol book, for instance, should be diligently sought out. Our most important literary need, however, is an

ADEQUATE GRAMMAR AND DICTIONARY.

[2b] The first of these, which is due to the ability and diligence of Mr Goodwin, will, I believe, shortly be issued under the auspices of our society, and I trust that the other will soon follow. But, after all, these things, though desirable in themselves, will not go very far in stimulating what I think should be our chief object, the cultivation of a national spirit, the most valuable aids to this end being a national spoken language, a national music, and, most important of all, a national government. The first has, I fear, all but passed away from us. The second, thanks to the patriotic efforts of the late Deemster Gill and his colleagues, Dr Clague and Mr W.H. Gill, three honoured members of our society, to whom the Isle of Man owes an immense debt of gratitude, has been, partly at least, preserved, and will form one of the strongest links of the chain which unites all Manxmen, in whatever land they may live. The third, I am thankful to say, still remains our most precious possession. Let us not fail to value it and maintain it by all means in our power. Being thus assured of two of the three aids towards the preservation of a national spirit, let us consider how to deal with the

ONE WHICH IS FAILING US.

namely, the spoken language. the question is: is it desirable to endeavour to revive the spoken Manx by teaching it to the young, or is it not? I venture to think that it is not, and, as I know that several respected members of our society differ with me on the point, I will ask your indulgence while I state my views. We have, on the one side, the incontrovertible fact that a common tongue is a stimulus to the feeling of a common nationality, and, on the other, the equally incontrovertible fact that the capability of speaking a language which is only shared by a very limited number of people is of no value for the purpose of gaining a livelihood. Manxmen are a very practical folk—indeed we should not have accomplished what we have if we were not, and, after all, “one must live,” as the French say. I think, then, that when we come to consider how much better our children would be equipped for the battle of life by learning to speak (say) French or German rather than Manx, we can hardly hesitate as to what our verdict will be. Much as I regret to think of the day when the

grand and sonorous language of Ellan Vannin will be no more heard, yet I feel that I must

PREFER THE PRACTICAL

to the sentimental and acquiesce in its disappearance. And, indeed, I am encouraged in this attitude by the belief that the bond between Manxmen, whether here at heme, or in America, Canada, Australia, or wherever they may be, is so strong that it is not likely to be loosened by the death of our ancient language. But let us make sure that it will not be loosened by redoubling our efforts to maintain a national spirit. It is not necessary for me to impress upon you the importance of preserving a spirit of nationality. For it will be generally admitted to be a most desirable thing, always provided that it contains no suspicion of disloyalty to the central authority. I need scarcely say that this condition is fulfilled in the Isle of Man, Her Gracious Majesty having no more loyal subjects than the Manx. Our loyalty to the crown, as well as our separate nationality is, it seems to me, admirably typified by our flag, combining as it does the Union Jack with our own golden "tree cassyn." We are proud of being part of a mighty Empire, but we are proud also of being Manxmen. We are thoroughly English (using the word in its broadest sense) and yet we have a feeling that by our race, by our language, by our customs and traditions we largely belong to that gifted Celtic race which has played such a remarkable part in the history of the world. And yet, though more neatly allied to the Irish, the Scotch, and the Welsh than the English, we are neither the one nor the other, but Manx. This fact is recognised by the numerous Manx societies in England, America, and the Colonies who have done so much to promote the object which I trust that our own association will ever have in view, *ie*,

THE UNION OF ALL TRUE MANXMEN

not only to promote the welfare of our beloved Island, but to preserve and, as far as is consistent with true progress, maintain all that differentiates it from other lands.

The following officers were elected for the ensuing year: President, Mr A.W. Moore; Vice-Presidents, Dr Clague, Rev Canon Kewley, Rev. Canon Savage, Mr J.C. Crellin, H.K.

Mr W. Quayle was, on the motion of Mr A.W. Moore, appointed hon. secretary, and Mrs Laughton was again elected hon. treasurer.

The following committee was appointed: Rev. J. Quine, Rev. C.H. Leece, Miss Graves, Mr W. Radcliffe, Mr E. Corteen, Mr J.E. Leece, Mr W. Cubbon, Mr W. Kneen, Mr T. Moore. Miss Annie Gell, Mrs H. Kelly, Miss Corrin, Mr S. Kerruish, Mr J.C. Looney, Mr J.H. Cain, Mr J. Costain, Mr P.M.C. Kermode, Rev. T.R. Kneale, Mr W. Quane, Mr W. Cashin. Mr J. Taylor, Miss Morrison, Mr W.J. Cain, Mr Goodwin, Mr W.J.C. Joughin, The Ven. the Archdeacon, Mr H. Kelly, Mr John Cubbon, Mr Jas. Callow, Mr J.J. Kneen, Capt. Jas. Clague, Mrs Roberts, Mr Killip, Mr D. Teare, Mr W.H. Bell, Miss A.M. Crellin, Mr J. Callister, Mr W. Tupper, Mr

P.G. Ralfe, Mr T. Kelly (Peel). Mr W. Moore, Miss Joughin, Mr T.C. Kinnish, and Mr J.E. Crye.

The Executive Committee were appointed as follows: Canon Kewley, Miss Corrin, Miss Morrison, Messrs W. Cubbon, J.E. Leece, J.J. Kneen, T. Moore, and W. Radcliffe.

It was announced that the Literary Committee had possession of the M.S. of a primary grammar and lesson book which had been compiled by Mr Goodwin, of Peel, and the Committee reported that the book should be published under the auspices of the Society. An opinion was expressed that such a work was very much needed.

The meeting then concluded.

The annual subscription has been fixed at 2s 6d, and may be paid to the secretary (Mr William Quayle, Laxey), or to the treasurer (Mrs Laughton, Peel).

There are classes for the study of the Manx language held in Peel and in Douglas. The teacher in Douglas is Mr J.J. Kneen, and the meetings are held in St Thomas's School-room on Wednesday evenings.

“The Manx Language Society: Annual Meeting.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 18 November 1899: 2a–b.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017

