

Manx Notes 293 (2017)

THE REVIVAL OF THE MANX LANGUAGE (13) LIVERPOOL AND LONDON TO THE RESCUE (1900)

Jack Jones has again written from London, and says in the course of his letter: I must certainly thank Mr J.J. Kneen for the trouble he has taken in the lessons, and the clearness with which he has explained matters, so as to enable an outsider like myself to understand everything without extraneous assistance, and I trust that his efforts will not prove futile in assisting in the prevention of the Manx becoming entirely extinct as a spoken language, and increasing the interest in it.

Speaking for myself (and doubtless there are many who can re-echo the sentiment), I am indebted to him for giving me an insight into the construction, it, of the Manx, and for putting the rules, &c, in such a facile form. The exercises also are of great use—without them the vocabulary would be but dry bones. It may interest Mr Kneen to know that all I have learned of Manx has been learned whilst travelling to business in the train every morning.

Responding to the above Mr Kneen writes from Liverpool as follows:

Sept. 17th, 1900.

DEAR SIR,—If I have been instrumental in helping your correspondent, Mr Jones, out of his difficulties, I am sure that my efforts have been more than rewarded by his eulogistic reply to my letter. I am afraid that the revival of the Manx as a spoken language is a vain hope. Manx people are becoming too mercenary, and their patriotism is a vanishing quantity. Their contact with the Saxon has imbued them with the spirit of avarice and aggrandizement (which, sad to say, very often characterizes the modern Saxon), before whose tide sentiment and patriotism rapidly disappear. The old Manx people, referring their native tongue, used to say:

“Lhig jee goll roee. Cre share ee dooin nish? Cha nod mayd dellal aynjee ayns Sostyn, ny s’ goan boayl erbee elley. Cha nel ee er y fa shen dys veg yn ymmyd da’n Ellan nish. Lhig jee goll raad saillee.”

“Let it go. What good is it to us now? We can’t deal in it in England, or scarcely any other place. Therefore it is no use to the Island now. Let it go wherever it pleases.” The old Manx people who could converse in their native language are mostly to blame for the rapid extinction of the Gaelic in Mann. They kept it from their children, and only made use of it when they did not want them to know what they were conversing about, the result being that Manx children are now generally brought up totally ignorant of the language of their forefathers. As late as 1872, a Manx clergyman, corresponding with a friend, stated:

“Ta ardreiltes Ellan Vannin noi ’n Ghailck; ta shirveishee jeh dy-chooilley chredjue noi eck—ta briwnyn as leighderyn noi eck; as ta’n aegid troggit seose nish ny s’meehusthee jeh Chengey ny Mayrey na va maase y vagheragh cliaghtey ve.”

Seeing then that everyone's hand was turned against it, from the rulers to the people, we cannot wonder that it has become submerged. Children were taught to despise it, and regard it as a cumbersome and unnecessary part of their education, whereas they might have been bi-lingual like the inhabitants of Wales and many other dependencies.

But the Manx language is doomed, and most probably within the next fifty or sixty years, it will have passed into oblivion, where its sister dialect, the Cornish, passed about a century ago. If my efforts have fanned the smouldering embers into flame, even for a short while, I shall consider myself amply rewarded for the labour which I have had in preparing these lessons.—Yours faithfully,

J.J. KNEEN.

“Liverpool and London to the Rescue.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 22
September 1900: 6c.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2017

