

## “STANDING ON THE BORDERLINE” (3)

### “A REVIVAL OF THE MANKS LANGUAGE DOES NOT INFER A DEPRESSION OF THE ENGLISH”

LETTER FROM “A MANKSMAN”  
(1821)

SIR, It is obvious that when tribes of men are intermixed, who speak different languages, a great part of the advantages which man should afford his neighbour, must be diminished or lost. The Magistrate cannot address his subjects, the Pastor his flock, but by the imperfect medium of an interpreter. Lawyers, Divines, Physicians, Merchants, Manufacturers, and Farmers, all feel more or less this inconvenience, when they have to do with those with whom they have no common language.

To remedy such evils, Schools have been established for a century in the Highlands of Scotland, where the Erse, a dialect very much resembling the Manks, is spoken; and in these schools English books were the first put into the scholar's hands; but the result was, that the scholar, although taught to read English, did not understand it, in a great proportion of cases. The failure arose from supposing that every person who could read a language, understood it of course.

Effectual education must be commenced in the language of the scholar. Suppose an English child, who had not learned his letters, put under a Greek tutor, who should begin with teaching him the Greek alphabet, to spell and read in Greek, but not to translate, to get by rote passages of Greek authors, how would such a scheme of tuition be approved of? Yet, if you will suppose the scholar the son of a Highland peasant, and for Greek substitute English, you have a picture of the mode of education whose defect Scotland has but lately discovered after an hundred years trial, and this Island has yet to learn.

Some may fear, that any encouragement to the revival of the Manks language may be injurious, by delaying its decline and the consequent extension of the English; to me this decline does not appear so rapid as it may to many others. But with respect to the extension of the English language, it appears likely to be promoted at present, by the cultivation of the Manks. This will open an easy path to the first rudiments of knowledge. When these are obtained, emulation and interest will soon excite him to the acquisition of the English language, on which his hopes depend, and he will speedily outstrip the scholar, who has been taught, like a parrot, to pronounce by signal, words which convey to his mind no meaning whatever.

A revival of the Manks language does not infer a depression of the English; but it is so much to be wished, that many of those who speak but one of those languages,

should learn to speak both. Nor is this difficult for the young. Nor is the state of a country, where a considerable proportion of the population use two languages, unusual. The maritime towns of Europe, some of the smaller states of Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, speak two languages.

Let us then diminish the inconvenience of distinct languages by multiplying interpreters. All the intercourse of society will be conducted with more facility, and the tribes so long separated may at length begin to blend into one nation.

A MANKSMAN.

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Pseud [signed as “A Manksman”]. “To the Editor of the Manks Advertiser.” *Manks Advertiser* 18 January 1821: [2]d.

STEPHEN MILLER, 2018

