

Manx Notes 435 (2020)

JOHN FELTHAM

A TOUR THROUGH THE ISLE OF MANN, IN 1797 AND 1798
(1798)

LETTER V

To the same.

“Content of spirit must from science flow,
For ’tis a godlike attribute to know.”

DEAR SIR,

[59] THE enlightened Manksman, if he is fond of his native language, must lament the barrenness of its literary field, and the almost daily disuse of his mother tongue. The English language is preferred in general. In the Church and in the Courts of Law, it is indispensably necessary: in general the lower class understand English, and few are wholly ignorant of it; yet they are more ready at, and attached to, their Manks.

Douglas has two printing-offices, from whence issue a Manks almanac, and a weekly paper, at the price of 2½d. intitled the Manks Mercury, both printed in English

They have neither grammar nor dictionary, and few except the clergy know Manks well enough to compose in it.¹ In a letter to the Rev. Mr. Corlett, of Lez-ayre, in 1774, from Mr. John Kelly, of Douglas, he inquires for all the proper names of places, &c. and adds, “My intention is to annex these proper names, which will prove as useful as curious, by way of an appendix to a dictionary of the Manks language, [60] *which is almost compiled.*” What has retarded this design I know not.

The following curious observations on the Manks language and customs, is from the pen of the late learned Rev. Philip Moore:

“One great cause of their security in the Isle of Man, arises from an ancient law, still in force, that makes it felony to enter any man’s house, without first calling *Vel Peccagh s’thie?* Anybody within? literally, Is there any *sinner* within? For, anciently, few houses had any other door than a bundle of briars or brush-wood, tied up close, and bound all round with a straw rope, to keep out the weather by night; and in the day, when they left their cabins to go to work abroad, they set up two sticks across the door, or a couple of flails, or anything of that kind, which the law made it capital to remove, without permission from within, after calling as above. And this furnishes

¹ The Irish language, also, though spoken by the inferior classes, is used but by few of the superior sort; and the books printed in it consist chiefly of devotional tracts.—*Tour in Ireland.*

another strong presumptive proof of the originality, antiquity, and very expressive significance for our language; that the whole human species is distinguished by the term or appellation of *peccagh*, that is, *sinner*. For instance, we say, *peccagh mie*, for a good man or person, literally, a good sinner. Nor a good christian, *peccagh creestee*, *i.e.* a christian sinner: *peccagh ny gha*, many a sinner, for many a one: *cloan ny peccee*, the children of sinners, for all mankind. Would not this proof, taken from the very natural and moral state of man, incline one to conclude, that the Manks language is coeval, if not with the fall, at least with the dispersion at Babel, in both which incidents the whole human race were involved; and universal guilt became the characteristic of man. The term *peccagh*, a man, or person, but literally and originally, sinner, showing how religiously we have preserved the memorial of these most ancient, wonderful, and interesting catastrophes.

[61] I am well aware of what some would insinuate, that the word *peccagh* is derived from *peccatum* of the Latins; not reflecting, that the Manks, the Welsh, the Irish, the ancient Cornavian, and the Erse, are all different dialects of one and the same original language, and each of them evidently deducible from the primæval Celtic; which all Antiquarians affirm to have been the language of all Asia Minor and Europe, for many ages, and long before either Greece or Rome had any existence or any peculiar language as distinct nations.”

This language has many compound words, by which the ideas they are meant to excite are more forcibly impressed: for instance, *laa*, signifies *half*; and *bee*, signifies *meat*; when these are conjoined they form *laabee*, the Manks for a bed, which is vulgarly said to be half-meat:—Again, *laa*, half, and *moo*, a saint, when joined as *laanoo*, mean a child; very expressive of the innocence of that state.

Mr. Sacheverel remarks, that the Manks language differs no more from Irish than the Scotch from English, and that both are different idioms of the Erse, or Highland. Bishop Philips, a native of North-Wales, who translated the Prayer-book into Manks, observes, that most of the radices were Welsh, and that, but for his native language, he could not have perfected the work.

Mr. S. found in some words an analogy to the Latin; as *qui fer a tye*, for *qui vir tecti*, with an abbreviation common to the Irish. He remarked, that the utensils and terms of art were frequently English, with a Manks termination, as *dorus* for *door*; thus they say *jough a dorus*, for *drink at the door*. In the northern side, they speak a deeper Manks than in the south, being less corrupted with English.

Professor Thorkelin visited the island in 1790, sent by the express order of his Danish Majesty, to investigate the remains [62] of Danish power and dominion formerly in the island. Mr. Townley informs us, that a gentleman of Castletown presented him with some Danish medals found in the neighbourhood, and amongst them one of Canute.

Mr. Pennant made some parochial inquiries in the island a few years since; but the liberal arts find few votaries here: science is disregarded, and polite literature little

cultivated. A stranger will not learn a language so limited in its extent. And such is the state of the lower order of the Manks, that

“Each with contracting fits him to the soil.
His hard condition, with severe constraint,
Binds all his faculties; forbids all growth
Of wisdom; proves a school in which he learns
Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate,
Mean self-attachment, and scarce ought beside.”

Of the publication of the scriptures, the following sentiments (published in 1769, in an address to the public) give us the progress, &c.

“On the accession of Bishop Hildesley, he found us in a condition of the most unfortunate singularity, destitute of the scriptures in our native language. And though a design had been formed by Bishop Wilson, for having the New Testament in the Manks tongue, and the Gospels and the Acts had been translated, yet they were not printed,² except a few [63] copies of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Bishop Hildesley, by his exertions and application to persons of eminence, and to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, who generously approved the plan, was enabled to gratify the people with the New Testament intire; the Common-Prayer; the Christian Monitor, Lewis’s Catechism, and a Form of Prayer for the Herring Fishery, all in Manks.

It is impossible to describe the avidity (observes the same writer) with which these books are sought; with what joy and gratitude they are received: as masters of families, and others, can now read to the ignorant and illiterate the sacred oracles in their own language; whereas, before, they never did, nor could hear, or know more of them than what they could learn from crude and often extempore translations. To the younger clergy this was a task difficult and discouraging; as it required the practice and experience of some years, to make them tolerably expert at such expositions. And after all, every man had his own different manner, and different explanation, to the subversion of an order and uniformity in our public Liturgy; but from this inconveniency and disorder we are now totally delivered, as the publick worship of God is everywhere performed with all the decency and good order of the best-regulated congregations; thanks to the indefatigable zeal of our good diocesan, supported as he has been by the contributions of several munificent benefactors.

² Dr. Walker, of Ballaugh, had a principal share in this translation. Bishop Philips’s translation of the Common-Prayer, in 1605, was obsolete.

The Common-Prayer in Manks was printed by *Oliver*, London, 1765. The Gospel and the Acts the same year. The Epistles and Revelations were printed in Manks at Ramsay, in 1767, by Sheppard of Whitehaven, in 8vo. and the Common-Prayer, in 12mo, Manks, at Ramsay, 1768; Lewis’s Catechism, and Prayer for the Fishery, in Manks, the same year at Ramsay. Mr. Ware, of Whitehaven, printed in the language, between the years 1772 and 1776, the Bible in 4to.; and in three vols. 8vo.; also the Common Prayer in 4to and 12mo.; and Bp. Wilson on the Sacrament, in Manks and English.

Animated with these successes, and his own zealous heart, the bishop is encouraged to promote and set on foot a translation [64] of the whole Old Testament into the Manks language; that his diocese, in common with other Christian churches, may enjoy the full blessing and benefit of the whole sacred canon compleat; a work in which his clergy are now engaged, with a view that his lordship may be farther enabled, by future benefactions, to carry on and execute so laudable and necessary an undertaking, and to perpetuate the same to future generations; that the light and benefit of divine knowledge, enjoyed by all other protestant communities, and reformed churches, may be extended to this diocese also. A diocese which, though so happily situated in the very centre of his Majesty's British dominions, and a suffragan see to the metropolitanical jurisdiction of York, has yet been, through a series of ages, deprived of a benefit so essential to the very existence of genuine Christianity.

We justly blame, and even reproach the church of Rome for locking up the Scriptures from her people in an unknown tongue: but how little different, and no less to be lamented, in our own case, where the bulk of the common people understand very little, and many thousands nothing at all, of the English language: though we have never been without the English scriptures, since the reformation took place in these nations; yet our people, in general, like their neighbours, the ancient Britons, still retain their veteran, aboriginal language."

The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, in 1763, gave out proposals for printing Bibles, Common-Prayers, and other religious books, in the vulgar tongue of the Isle of Man; and by the encouragement they met with, they were enabled to print and disperse gratis, among the inhabitants, 2000 Church Catechisms; 1200 Christian Monitors; 2000 Lewis's Exposition; 1000 copies of the New Testament in 8vo.; 1550 Common-Prayers, 8vo. and 1000 [65] in 12mo. Likewise 2000 copies of the Old Testament in 8vo. and the same number of the New, the former impression being inadequate; and they intend to proceed in this charitable work, and to supply the island with good books and tracts, or new editions of those already published.

By the society's books, for 1777, I also find 3500 copies of Bishop Wilson's Treatise on the Sacrament, with the original in the opposite columns; and 3000 Common-Prayer-books, were printed.

Of the monies raised by the publick, the Society have a fund, unexpended, of 1:100l. New South-Sea annuities, 500l. of which was left by Lady Gower, as a perpetual fund for the supply of the Manks scriptures, &c. As the interest has been accruing for some time, and as some years have elapsed since the last distribution, it may not be deemed amiss to solicit the attention of the society to this subject, as I am credibly informed that a new edition of the Bible, &c. is much wanted at present.

I was surprised to see Milton's Paradise Lost in Manks dress, and a clergyman assured me that it possessed merit. I subjoin, as a specimen of the language, the

Morning and Evening Hymns of Bishop Kenn,³ translated by the Rev. Mr. Corlett, of Lez-ayre, whose correct knowledge of the language is generally allowed; he attended the Rev. Mr. Moore, in correcting the press in London when the scriptures were printing, and I am under many obligations to him for a variety of information. [66]

HYMN son y *VOGHREY*.

O Annym, dooisht, as lesh y Ghreean
 Roie kiart dty chourse gys y vea veayn;
 Crie jeed meerioose, as irree traa,
 Dy eeck da Jee dty wooise dagh laa.

Dty hraa deyr cailt, dy-leah eie thie;
 Lhig da dagh laa ve ceaut dy-mie;
 Dty churрым freill gys rere dty phooar;
 Jean oo hene cooie son y laa mooar.

Bee ynrick ayns dty ghlaare dagh traa;
 Dty chree freill glen myr Greean ‘vunlaa
 Slane traa dy vea toig kys ta Jee
 Sheer fakin smooinaght’ dowin dty chree.

O Annym, dooisht, trogg seose dty chree,
 As marish *Ainlyn* moyll uss Jee,
 Ta fud ny hoie sheer goaill arrane,
 Coyrt gloyr as booise da Chiarn dagh chiarn.

Gloyr hoods t’er vreyll mee saucht ‘syn oie,
 As ren lesh cadley gooragh’ mee;
 Gliall, Hiarn, tra ghooisht-ym seose veih baase,
 Dy voym gys niau mårts Yee ny ghrayse.

My vreearey, Hiarn, neem’s yannoo noa;
 My pheccaghyn skeayl myr lieh-rio;
 My smooinaght’ freill uss imlee, meen,
 As lhieen mee lesh dty Spyrryd hene.

Coyrlee, as leeid mee yn lea jiu,
 Ayns dagh nhee yus-ym veih dty ghoo;

³ The Hymns are those well known ones, beginning, “Awake, my soul, and with the sun, &c.,” and “Glory to Thee, my God, this night, &c.”

Lesh bree my niart, as mooads my phooar,
Dy vodd-ymns gloryragh' dt' Ennym mooar.

Gys Jee, fer-toyrt dagh gioot, ard ghloyr!
Moyll-jee eh, dam cretoor jeh' phooar!
Moyll-jee yn Ayr, shiuish *Ainlyn* smoo!
Moyll-jee yn Mac, 's yn Spyrtyd Noo!

[67]

HYMN son yn *ASTYR*.

GLOYR hoods, my Yee, nish as dagh traa,
Son bannaghtyn dty hoilshey brâ;
Freill uss, O freill mee, Ree dagh ree,
Fo scaa dty skeean dy saucht ayns shee.

Leih dou dagh peccah, jiu, Hiarn vie,
Er graih dty Vac, eer Mac dty graih;
Rhym pene, yn seihll, as rhyts, O Yee,
My gadlym noght, dy vod v'aym shee.

Leeid mee 'sy read sheer lhisin 'reih,
Nagh lhiass dou aggle 'ghoall jeh'n oaie;
Kiare mee son baase, dy vod v'aym pooar
Dy heet gys gloyr ec y lea mooar.

My-varrant slane ta orts, my Yee,
Lesh cadley meen jean 'ooragh' mee,
Lheid as nee yannoo mee breeoil,
Dy hirveish oo ayns aght gerjoil.

Tra ta mee dooisht my lhie 'syn oie,
My annym lhiene lesh smooïnaght' mie;
Dagh Dreamal olk freill voish my chree,
Pooar'yn y Noid nagh boir ad mee.

Dty *Ainlyn* noo cur hym, Hiarn deyr,
Dy reayll mee saucht veih dagh dangear;
Lesh graih as booise, O lhiene my chree,
Dagh smooïnaght' broghe freill voym, O Yee.

O cuin yioym rea rish cadley'n theihll,

Ayns niau dy vodd-ym mârts ve reill,
As marish *Ainlyn* sheer goaill aynr,
Coyrt gloyr as booise da Chiarn dagh chiarn?

Gys Jee, fer-toyrt dagh gioot, ard ghloyr!
Moyll-jee eh, dagh cretoor jeh' phooar!
Moyll-jee yn Ayr, shiuish *Ainlyn* smoo!
Moyll-jee yn Mac, 's yn Spyrriyd Noo!

[68]

To these I add a few questions, with the English.

How do you do, friend?	<i>Kys ta shiu charrey?</i>
I am very well.	<i>Ta mish feer vie.</i>
I have lost my way.	<i>Ta mee er choayl my raad.</i>
Which is the road to Ramsay?	<i>Crevel yn raad gys Rumsaa?</i>
I cannot talk Manks.	<i>Cha noddym loayrt Gailck.</i>
I want a bed to-night.	<i>Ta mish laccal lhiabbee noght.</i>
I want some meat, or eggs, and ale.	<i>To mish laccal bee ennagh, ny oohyn, as iough-lhioon.</i>
What is your parson called?	<i>Cie ta ennym yn saggirt cuish?</i>
Where does he live?	<i>Cre'n raad t'eh cummal?</i>
I want a boat.	<i>Ta mish laccal baatey.</i>
Yes, sir—no, Sir.	<i>She vainshtyr—cha ne vainshtyr.</i>
Can you speak English?	<i>Vodd uss loayrt Baarl?</i>
Where does Mr. H. live?	<i>Cre'n raad ta Mr. H. cummal?</i>
Can you read?	<i>Vodd shiuish lhaih?</i>
I thank you.	<i>Gy row mie eu; or, Ta mee kainlt booise diu.</i>

A Manks Proverb.

Tra ta yn derrey vought cooney lesh hought elley ta see hene garaghtee:—When one poor man relieves another, God himself rejoices at it; or, as it is in the original, laughs outright.

The Lord's Prayer in Manks.

AYR ain t'ayns niau, casheric dy row dt' ennym, dy jig dty reeriaght, dty aigney dy row jeant er y thaloo myr t'yh ayns niau; cur dooin nyn arran jiu as gagh-laa, as leih dooin nyn loghtyn, myr ta shin leih dauesyn ta jannoo loghtyn nyn [69] 'oi. As ny leeid shin ayns miolagh, agh livrey shin veih olk. Son lhiat's yn reeriaght, as yn phooar, as yn ghloyr, son dy bragh as dy bragh. *Amen.*

Of writers on the subject of the Island may be mentioned Governor Challoner; Mr. Blundel, of Crosby, during the civil wars, in MS. Another MS. written in 1648, when, says the author, wearied with being so often awakened at midnight by the King's and Parliament's troops, both equally feared because equally plundering, I resolved to banish myself for a time to the Island of Man, where divers nobility had been banished by our Kings, &c. Mr. Moore, of Douglas, politely favoured me with a view of this MS. To these may be added, Lord Coke, Drs. Heylin, Camden, Sacheverel, Wilson, and Grose.⁴ A MS. by Mr. Alex. Ross, who died in 1753, a copy of which is in the hands of G. Tollet, Esq. Betley-Hall, in Staffordshire. See also notices of the Isle of Man, in Waldron's *Works*; Willis's *Cathedrals*; Ductor *Historicus*, vol. ii; *Formulare Anglicanum*, Form 211. 1 Peere Williams's Reports, 1329. Kelway, 202. King's *Vale-Royal*. Prynne on the 4th Inst. Selden. Tit. Hon. 24. Mich. 21, 22 Edw. I. rot 21, Turr. Lond. Campbell's *Polit. Surv.* and probably in Gough's *British Topography*, 4to. but this I have not seen.

Other works of a later date, either in Manks or relating to the Island, that have come within my knowledge, are as follows:

1. *A short View of the present State of the Isle of Man, humbly submitted to the consideration of the Lords of the [70] Treasury.* By an impartial Hand. London: Johnson, 1767. 6d.⁵

2. *Aght Ghiare dy heet gys tushthey jeh'n Chredjue Chreestree; Ny as toiggal jeh catechism ny Killagh kiarit son ymmyd sleih aegey ellan vannin.* 24mo. 1778. This publication may be very proper for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to adopt in their next distribution; as it is a short summary of the Christian religion, or an explanation of the church catechism; and was translated into Manks by Daniel Cowley, of Kirk Michael, who was educated by Bishop Hildesley, and by him apprenticed to a printer. He published also Mr. Wesley's Hymns in Manks, for the use of the Methodists in the island.

3. Rolt's *History of the Island*, 12mo. 1782.

4. *Sharmaneyn liorish, Thomase Wilson, D.D. Chiarn aspick Sodor as Vannin; dy Kiaralagh chyndaít veih Bayrl gys Gailck.* Bath, prentit liorish R. Cruttwell, 8vo. 1783.—This work, comprising one volume of Bishop Wilson's Sermons,⁶ translated by the Rev. Mr. Corlet, was printed at the expense of the Rev. Dr. Wilson, his son.

⁴ In Grose's *Antiq.* vol. iv. royal 4to. are, A view and plan of St. German's Cathedral; a view of the ruins of St. Patrick's Church; Peele Castle; two views of Castle-Rushen; and one of Rushen Abbey taken in 1774, with short descriptions.

⁵ A pamphlet was published in 1751, entitled, "Liberty invaded, &c." occasioned by one Mrs. Hingstone, being imprisoned in the island for a debt of her husband's: the subject was again resumed in 1756, in another pamphlet, by J. Baldwin, esq. 8vo. with this singular title, "British Liberty in chains, and England ruin on the anvil, in the Isle of Man, now commonly called Little France, &c." The author represent. the Manks as enemies to the interest of Great-Britain, and inveighs against them for their treatment of this lady.

⁶ Bishop Wilson, in 1699, and 1707, published some small works in Manks and English.

5. *Memoirs of the House of Stanley, from the conquest to the death of James, late Earl of Derby, in 1735*; also a full description of the Isle of Man, &c. 4to. p. 238. Harrop, Manchester, 1783. (By Mr. Seacombe.) [71]

6. *Antiquitates Celto-Normanicae, containing the Chronicle of Man and the Isles; abridged by Camden, and now first published complete from the original MS. in the British Museum; with an English translation and notes. To which are added, Extracts from the Annals of Ulster, &c. &c.* By Rev. James Johnstone, M.A. rector of Maghera-Cross; and M.S. Edin and Copenhagen, 4to. Copenhagen, Aug. Fred. Stein, 1786.

Mr. Gough, in his edition of Camden, 3 vols. folio, 1789, prefers Mr. Camden's copy of the Chronicle of the Kings of Man, to that published in 1787 by Mr. Johnson, from a fine old MS. on vellum in the Cottonian library, marked Julius A. VII. 3, because in the former the dates are all right in the original, whereas in the latter they are made so by the editor in his margin. Mr. Camden's MS. begins with the death of the Confessor, rightly putting it A.D. 1065, Mr. Johnstone's begins forty-seven years sooner, or, as he has corrected it in his margin; fifty-one years. Mr. C's begins at A.D. 1065, and ends at A.D. 1266; but has been continued in a later hand, to 1316. Mr. J.'s copy begins at A.D. 1000, or 1015, and ends 1376, and contains some additional matter foreign to the history of the island.—A slight comparison of the two publications will show them to have been printed from different MSS.⁷

7. *Literary Lovers; an original Manks novel*, by J. Briscoe.

8. Various Poems by Mr. John Stowell; viz. *The Sallad, a satire*, 4to. 20 pp. 1790. *The Retrospect*, 8vo. pp. 55, 1790; a political local satire. *Beauties of Tounley*, versified, 4th. 16 pp.

9. *Belville and Julia*, a Manks novel, by Mr. T. Ashe. [72]

10. *A Journal kept in the Isle of Man, giving an account of the wind and weather, &c. &c. &c.* 2 vols. 8vo. by Richard Townley, esq. Whitehaven, Ware, 1791.

11. *A general View of the Agriculture of the Isle of Man, with observations on the means of its improvement.* By Mr. Basil Quayle, farmer at the Creiggans, near Castletown; drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal improvement. 4to. pp. 40, 1794.

12. *The Report of his Majesty's Commissioners for the Isle of Man*, 1792, large folio.

N.B. Neither of these last two works were published for sale.

13. *A Tour through the Isle of Man; to which is subjoined, a review of Manks History.* By David Robertson, esq. large 8vo. plates, 1794.

14. *The Statutes and Ordinances of the Isle of Man now in force, alphabetically arranged.* By Thomas Stowell, advocate; inscribed to the Hon. Alexander Shaw, Esq. Lieutenant-Governor and Chancellor. 8vo. Douglas; Briscoe, pp. 170: 1792.

15. *Paradise Lost*, by Milton; translated into Manks by the Rev. Thomas Christian, of Ballakilly, K. Marown. Douglas, Briscoe, 12mo. no date: (probably 1796)

⁷ Gough, vol. iii. 705.

16. *Clara Lenox, or the Distressed Widow; a novel founded on facts. Interspersed with an Historical Description of the Isle of Man.* By Mrs. Lee. Dedicated to the Duchess of York, 2 vols. 12mo. Parsons, 1797.

17. In the *Poems by Gentlemen of Devon and Cornwall*, 2 vols. crown 8vo. are two short odes on the Isle of Man, from the classical pen of the Rev. Mr. Polwhele.

18. *The Statute Laws of the Isle of Man*, from the original records. By C. Briscoe, 8vo. 1797, pp. 240. Douglas.

John Feltham, Letter v, 59–72 in *A Tour through the Isle of Mann, in 1797 and 1798* (Bath, 1798).

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A reproduction of Letter v, “On Literature—Language—Printers—Scriptures—Hymns—English and Manks Publications on the Island,” from John Feltham’s *A Tour through the Isle of Mann, in 1797 and 1798* (1798). Note on page 68 (see 7 here) handy phrases in Manx for the English-speaking visitor to the Island.

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