

“STANDING ON THE BORDERLINE” (6)

“AN ENGLISH TRACT WAS ENTIRELY
ABOVE HIS COMPREHENSION”

(1837)

[3b] SIR,—Much satisfaction has resulted to the natives of this country from a paragraph which appeared in one of your late numbers, announcing that a new edition of the Manks Prayer-book is about to be printed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.¹ Some anxiety, however, still prevails as to the two following points: 1st, Will the expected edition be supplied gratuitously to the Manks people, or will a price be demanded for it? And, 2dly, will the edition in question be one of an octavo size, and executed with a large type, so as to be capable of being used by the aged, who, as they are less acquainted with the English language, require a Manks Prayer Book more than any other class of the community; or will it be one similar, in respect of size and type, to the last edition, which has been in a great measure useless to any but persons enjoying the blessing of unimpaired vision.

Should any of your correspondents be able to furnish the Manks public with authentic intelligence relative to these particulars, by communicating it through your columns, or through any other of the insular journals, they will very materially oblige a large number of the native inhabitants of the Island. are now, and have for many years, been receiving the sum of £42 per annum from a fund established for the exclusive purpose of providing us with books in our native tongue, so long as books of this kind I shall continue to be needed by us. It is also well known that we have received no such books from that Society since the last edition of the Manks Liturgy, the edition of 1808, issued from the press. It is, therefore, expected, and as I would suppose, expected not without reason, that no price will be demanded from us for the new edition; and that this edition will be one of such a nature as that all descriptions of persons may reap the benefit of it. It is likewise expected, and I should think that the expectation cannot fairly be regarded as unreasonable, that it will be printed on good paper, and that the binding will be sufficiently substantial to survive the lapse of many a future year: so that instead of having soon [3c] to call on the Society for a further edition, we may see the £42 per annum expended by them on other Manks publications.²

There are some of the Society tracts which, if translated into Manks, might with advantage be circulated amongst our peasantry; and there are several of our clergy who would gladly undertake the task of translation, without any other recompence for their labour than the pleasure attendant on the consciousness of being instrumental in promoting the spiritual welfare of their countrymen. A clergyman who resides not far from Douglas, lately offered one of the English Tracts published

by the religious Tract Society, to a parishioner, whom, being able to converse in English on ordinary subjects, he supposed to be capable of comprehending an English Tract; but the tract was immediately refused by the Manksman, who observed that had it been Manks, he would have accepted of it most thankfully, because he would have been able to understand it; but that an English tract was entirely above his comprehension, and consequently altogether useless to him. Persons who have had much intercourse with the peasantry of this Island, cannot but be aware that most or nearly all of them who are acquainted with English are acquainted with it as this individual is; that is, they understand colloquial English, while they can by no means clearly comprehend the language in which a sermon is composed, or in which a conversation on topics of a spiritual nature is expressed.³ Such publications as Gastral's *Divine Institutes*, Scowgal's *Life of God in the Soul of Man*, and some others on the Society's list, if translated into Manks, would I am persuaded, be received with avidity, and read with profit, by numbers on whom English works, however edifying as to their matter, and attractive as to their style, would be but thrown away.

Whatever variety of opinion may exist amongst Christians, with respect to the celebrated George Whitefield, I cannot help thinking that all who are conversant with the history of that extraordinary person, will concur in believing him to have been a truly pious man, as well as an eminently eloquent and laborious preacher of the gospel. In one of his discourses, which was delivered near the close of his life, Whitefield states that when he was in his sixteenth year, and studying at the University of Oxford, he was presented by his friend Charles Wesley, with a copy of Scowgal's *Life of God in the Soul of Man*; and that this treatise was the means of effecting his conversion.⁴ How desirable is it that this little work and a few others of a similar stamp, which have been published by the Christian Knowledge Society, should be presented in a Manks dress to the peasantry of the Isle of Man.⁵ I remain your obedient servant,

A NATIVE.

Kk. Braddan Vicarage,

July 27, 1837.

¹ Have the Society employed a Manksman, either here or in London, to correct the press? If they have not, is the new edition of the Manks Prayer-book likely to prove an accurate one?

² I am not sure that the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge would consent to admit Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into the number of their publications; but could they be prevailed on to do this, and were they to publish that performance in Manks, they might easily and immediately procure a Manks translation of it, as one of the clergy of the Island has not only commenced translating the *Pilgrim's Progress* into Manks, but proceeded so far with the undertaking, that the labour of but a few weeks would now suffice for its completion. Banyan was a non-conformist; but such likewise was Watts, whose *Hymns for Children*, if I mistake not, have been repeatedly published by the Christian Knowledge Society.

³ A clergyman intrusted with the charge of one of our Southern parishes, some months since gave a printed copy of an address delivered at a Temperance Society meeting, to an intelligent farmer resident in his parish. As the address was extremely simple, and expressed in language remarkable for its plainness; and as he had often heard the farmer converse in English, he entertained little doubt as to his capability of comprehending it. But in a few days, the farmer returned it, declaring himself wholly incompetent to understand it, and begging that it might be explained to him.

⁴ See Whitefield's *Discourses*, ser. 72.

⁵ Is it not much to be wished that some assistance should be afforded out of the Manks fund to our gifted countryman, Mr Archibald Cregeen, to enable him to publish an English-Manks Dictionary: a work for the compilation of which his late important publication proves him to be admirably qualified? Though such a work would not be one of a religious character, yet, as it could not fall of proving an invaluable aid to clergymen, in composing their Manks discourses, and in translating religious tracts into Manks, it doubtless would be greatly calculated to further the interests of religion; and consequently, might be considered as falling within the class of publications with which it was the intention of Bishop Hildesley, in establishing the Manks fund, to enrich the native inhabitants of his diocese.

Pseud [signed as "A Native"]. "[Letter to the Editor] To the Editor of Mona's Herald." *Mona's Herald* 1 August 1837: [3]b-c.

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