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ARCHIBALD CREGEEN, THE MANX LEXICOGRAPHER
(1890)

[181a] As no memoir of Archibald Cregeen has hitherto appeared, it seems just to the memory of that able Erse scholar to record a few facts relative to his life, though meagre indeed these must necessarily be.

Near the prettily situated hamlet of Colby, in the parish of Arbory, Isle of Man, is a little cottage, which in the close of the last century was occupied by William Cregeen and Mary his wife. The cottage, together with a small piece of land attached to it, was his patrimonial estate. William was a native of the Isle, but Mary, whose maiden name was Fairclough, was a native of Ireland. He was a cooper, and from his trade and the proceeds of his little farm derived a modest but respectable livelihood. They reared a family of four sons, of whom Archibald, the subject of this brief memoir, was next to the youngest. Archibald was born in the end of October or the beginning of November, A.D. 1774, and was baptized in Arbory Church on November 20 in that year. He was taught from his infancy the Manx tongue, which was generally spoken in the locality in which his parents resided.

Education was not, even at the close of the last century, very much valued in the secluded villages [181b] of the isle. Whether there was then a school in the immediate vicinity of Archibald's home is doubtful, but it is certain that he was for the most part his own instructor. His boyhood was chiefly spent in rural occupations. He had selected marble masonry as his trade, for the pursuit of which it was, of course, necessary that he should acquire the ability to read, spell, and write English. During the term of his apprenticeship he spent much of his leisure in the study of English grammar and literature. That term had not very long expired before he began to examine critically the structure and idiomatic characteristics of the Manx dialect. The scanty literature which it afforded was by him carefully read and considered. This was mainly composed of the Manx translation of the Holy Scriptures, the Manx translation of the Book of Common Prayer, and a Manx translation, by the Rev. Thomas Christian, of selections from *Paradise Lost*, besides Manx ballads and carols, the last-mentioned translation having then been recently published. It has been estimated that about two-thirds of the Manx tongue have been preserved in the translation of the Scriptures and that of the Church Liturgy.

On March 8, 1798, his marriage with Jane Crellin, who then resided at Peel, was solemnized in the parish church of German. By her he had eight children six girls and two boys. Cregeen pursued his trade, and it was only during intervals of leisure that he was enabled to continue to gratify his literary taste.

Subsequently to his marriage he built in the neighbourhood of Colby, and near to his father's residence, a cottage, which he and his family occupied until his death.

In the year 1813 he was appointed coroner of Rushen Sheading, an office which he continued to hold every alternate year for many years. The duties appertaining to this were at that time somewhat important. Besides the holding of inquests of death* and the impanelling of juries in certain other cases, the Sheading coroner served summonses and other processes, levied fines and executions as directed by the temporal courts. Some of his official duties were irksome. Cregeen had no fondness for the infliction of legal terrors, and exercised with mildness the authority with which he was invested. He was intellectually very superior to any who had held, then held, or have since held, a similar office. It seems strange that a man of his mental capacity could have tolerated the monotonous, disquieting, and painful technicalities which he was officially obliged to perform. It is, moreover, remarkable that he could subject himself to the taunts which, in the early part of the present century, it was [182a] deemed essential to the importance of the insular bench to inflict upon the minor officers of the court. Cregeen bore with philosophic calmness the judicial chidings with which he was occasionally assailed, thus evincing a consciousness of superiority over the presiding functionary.

About the year 1814 it occurred to Cregeen to prepare for publication a vocabulary of the Manx dialect. No such work had as yet appeared. Dr Kelly's "Manx and English Dictionary" had, indeed, long been written, but had not been published. It was not printed until the year 1866. Cregeen's work first appeared in 1838, though the date given on the title-page is 1835. Kelly's "Dictionary" was published, under the editorship of the Rev. William Gill, by the Manx Society. Along with it, in the same volume, is an "English and Manx Dictionary," edited by the Rev. J.T. Clarke. Both these works have been enriched by large additions from Cregeen and by some from a MS. by Mr John Ivon Mosley. The additions from Cregeen, as acknowledged by the editor, amount to between 800 and 900 words. Cregeen had not access to Dr Kelly's MS., nor is it to be regretted that he had not. If he had been able to avail himself of it, much of the originality and philosophic character by which his own work is marked would probably have been wanting. He diligently studied the *Manx Grammar*, published by Dr Kelly in the year 1804.

Cregeen foresaw the research and labour which his projected compilation would involve, and it was after much hesitation that it was begun. He mentioned to two or three of his friends that he had commenced to prepare a dictionary of the Manx tongue. Among these was the Rev. John Harrison, a native of the isle, and then vicar of the parish of Jurby. He was thoroughly conversant with the Manx dialect, and urged upon Cregeen perseverance in the preparation of his work. He offered him, too, any help which it was in his power to give. Indeed, it is not improbable that the preface to the book, and also the first six paragraphs of the "Introduction," were written by Mr Harrison. Quiggin, the printer and publisher of the work, believed

* These inquests are now held by the four High Bailiffs within their respective districts.

that they were. The third paragraph of the “Introduction” is a verbatim abstract (unacknowledged) from the preface to T. Connellan’s *English-Irish Dictionary*. The dictionary progressed slowly. Slip after slip was filled, copied, and recopied word after word was added; and for the few scraps carried by Cregeen in his pocket were soon substituted sheets of paper, on which words were alphabetically arranged.

Cregeen constantly invaded the cottages of the native islanders for the purpose of obtaining the information he desired. Night after night he repaired to some rural abode where his favourite language was spoken, and there the portly form of the Manx lexicographer might be seen occupying [182b] a three-legged stool at the *chiollagh*. There, beneath the spacious chimney, he elicited from his intelligent, but unlettered, host valuable philological knowledge. Many Manx proverbs with which his work abounds, and which enhance its value, were thus raked up and collated. Several of these are, indeed, similar to those of different countries, but others are marked by originality, and evince peculiar traits of the native character.

Cregeen worked thus sedulously during a period of nearly twenty years. His philological labours were not always agreeable to his wife. She naturally considered that domestic enjoyment was somewhat marred by her husband’s seclusion consequent on the occupation of his leisure, which she thought ought, for the most part, to be spent in association with herself. He, however, bore with complacency the pardonable strictures which devotedness to his lingual pursuits had evoked.

In the year 1827 Cregeen met with a serious accident, which caused him to be confined to his bed for many weeks. When returning to his cottage on a frosty day, he slipped on the ice and fractured his leg. When laid up in consequence of this accident a large portion of his time was devoted to his dictionary.

Cregeen’s dictionary is the result of profound and indefatigable research, and a work of great philological value. Its arrangement is more scientific than that of Dr. Kelly’s ‘Dictionary.’ It has one prominent feature the indication of the radical initials of words given throughout the work. After every non-radical word is placed its mutable radical initial, *eg.*, “*Feer-vane*, a., very white. B.” The letter B. here denotes the radical word *bane*, the initial letter of which (*b*) has been changed into *v*. Some of the interesting introductory remarks on the linguistic peculiarities of the Manx tongue have been borrowed from Dr Kelly’s *Manx Grammar*, but are not given as quotations. The numerous original prefatory observations of Cregeen are replete with learning, and indicate an accurate knowledge of the idiomatic characteristics of the dialect. The numerous conditions under which initial and other verbal changes occur are lucidly pointed out and explained.*

I am one of the very few living persons who had the privilege of knowing Cregeen intimately. He was a man of middle stature and heavily made. His broad forehead,

* The Rev. Robert Williams, in his admirable *Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum*, seems to have largely utilized Cregeen’s *Dictionary*, from which he has been enabled to discover and point out the Manx words cognate with the Cornish and other dialects.

dark, protruding bushy eyebrows, the left brow lower than the right, or bent; downwards, are still distinctly pictured on my memory. From under these bushy brows peered a pair of small dark-brown eyes. Cregeen always [183a] wore a low-crowned broad-brimmed hat, which gave him a Quaker-like appearance. He was a profound thinker, and uttered his thoughts and opinions slowly and in few words. He was exceedingly unassuming and modest. He was an agreeable companion, and delighted to converse on topics connected with his native tongue or with the manners and customs of the Manx peasantry. Though he had not made the Scotch Gaelic the subject of special study, he could construe it without great difficulty. I once heard him translate at sight with apparent ease some Ossianic poems.

Cregeen died on Good Friday, 1841, in the sixty-seventh year of his age. His grave is in the pretty little churchyard of Arbory, and his tomb bears the following inscription:

In Memory of
 Archibald Cregeen, of this parish,
 who departed this life on the 9th
 of April, 1841,
 in the 67th year of his age.
 He was the author of the Manx Dictionary,
 lived respected and died lamented.

Cregeen's wife is also buried in the same churchyard, and, according to the inscription on the tomb, she died on May 3, 1844, aged sixty-eight years.

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 Isle of Man.

J.M. Jeffcott, "Archibald Cregeen, the Manx Lexicographer," *Notes & Queries* (7th ser.) x.10 (1890), 181–83. Reproduced as "Archibald Cregeen, the Manx Lexicographer," *Yn Lioar Manninagh* i.9 (1891), 302–04. Further, as "Memoir of Archibald Cregeen," in *Cregeen's Manx Dictionary*, ed. J.J. Kneen, (Douglas: Brown & Sons, 1910), v–vii.

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