A VOCABULARY OF THE ANGLO-MANX DIALECT REVIEWED BY P.W. CAINE (1924)

A Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect, newly published by Mr Humphrey Milford from the Oxford University Press, at the price of 25/-, is a delightfully entertaining book—the sort of volume you can pick up at any casual moment of mental lassitude, when your brain demands to be pleased, and not to be exercised. Of its scientific value, one has some little doubt; and this notwithstanding the immense appreciation one has of the unceasing labours of its compilers, the late Mr A.W. Moore, the late Miss Sophia Morrison, and Mr Edmund Goodwin. The outstanding usefulness of dialects, to the philologist, is that they perpetuate many and many a word which once was part of the current and correct speech of the country, and which bears a family resemblance to other words still enjoying life and honour. In these poor relations may often be discerned the lineaments of the original ancestor, obscured in those processes of evolution which, in Tennyson's phrase, "merge in form and gloss the picturesque of man and man." The student who applies himself to the task of relating sound with sense, of discovering how—he will never discover why—certain radical consonantal forms were employed to express variations upon certain primitive ideas, will obtain immense assistance from a knowledge of many dialects. But English is a language which Manx people got only second hand, at a late stage in their history. Members of the present generation remember men and women who spoke no English, or spoke broken English. No quaint survival, therefore, is likely to be found in the Anglo-Manx dialect that is not present in other dialects—particularly the dialect of Lancashire, the county where our first teachers in English came from. The uniquenesses of Manx dialect, its inverted syntax, its single words which are undiscoverable in the dictionary, are almost invariably translations from the idiom of the Manx Gaelic, oddments which the Manx people, moving from the old house into the new, were never able to replace with anything just as good.

The most common provincialism to be met with in the Isle of Man, in fact, is an exact reproduction of the possessive case in the grammar of the original Manx tongue. When a Manx man, in country or in town, remarks, "That's a fine house at him," meaning, "He has a fine house," he is saying word for word, and in the same order of words, what his grandfather would have said in the Manx. The same remark applies to such phrases as, "I'll be putting a sight on you," "Man! how he took joy of me," "Take rest, now, and be quiet," "I wouldn't come over the things she said," "I dont believe the like is in," "A woman can't give up working on Sunday itself," and that very compendious expression, "Thou'll get lave." Then there are a considerable number of nouns and adjectives which Manx people use in utter ignorance of the English equivalent, perhaps in utter ignorance of the fact that any English equivalent

ISSN 1351-2293

is in existence. Every native-born reader will recognise them—CHIOW, CHIOLLAGH, CUR-DA, BRABBAG, BOGHNID, BIDDHAG, BART, CLADDAGH, CRONK, DOAIAGH, SOCARAGH, DHOORAGH, DROLLANE, GILLYA, JEEL, JESH, KISHAN, KIARTAGHS, MOAL, PRINJEIG, SKEET, SCOODHAN, SHEEBIN, TREIH, and so on. As tabulated in this vocabulary, the number of them is startling, and to this extent, at least, the scientific value of the book is beyond question. Then, long lists could be compiled and they have indeed been compiled in previous publications by Miss Morrison, collaborating with friends who have taken up this or that branch of the subject as their speciality—of the native names of plants and birds. How many perfectly educated Manx people, noticing the golden splash of "braslagh" in the fields, or listening to the praises of the medicinal virtues of "luss-y-chialg," could give the correct names for the plant so designated? And nearly every specimen of the animal creation, it seems, had two names—for the old-time fishermen held that it was courting trouble to call the hare, or the cat, or any other sentient creature, by his proper name when you were at sea.

Then the book contains numerous phrases, illustrative of the use of some particular word, which abound in a refreshing shrewdness or delicious quaintness. How often will you hear the goodman of the house refer to his wife as "this woman," or "Herself here"? Who does not know the farmer who had the same boy working for him for 30 years," or the sons who were called "Sayle's boys" until they were nearly 60? Everywhere in the Island one will hear the Deity spoken of as "the good Man," or "the Dear"—"the good Man knows," "the Dear be good to me." When something is done well, it is "done with a bit of beauty," or "done with a taste"; in a hospitable house there are always "lashins of lavins," or even if the house be not lavishly provisioned, the casual guest is always sure that "there'll be a bit of roughness going." A bustling woman is "a regular scutcher," and very often goes about with " a terrible glisther on her." The Manxmen is perhaps not more given to the use of intensives than is his English neighbour, but possibly the words he employs are even more ludicrously incongruous. The English say that something "is awfully jolly," and that he is "frightfully bucked," whereas the Manxman speaks of "a shocking nice gel," a performance that was "clever scandalous." "I'm busy ahl" contains an elisic of the Manx word "aggle," meaning "fear," a synonym for which is "atchim"—"she was good to me atchim." An interesting development has occurred upon the expression 'clever anointed.' The word containing the essential idea has been dropped, and the intensifying expletive retained—thus, "wasn't it nineted of her to be getting the money and never letting on?" One derives an undiluted joy from such phrases as, "Juan is good to take a prayer; aw yes, he can pray wicked," or, "I give it to him sweet; it's the sweetest lickin' he ever got with a stick." It may be remarked in passing that "lickings," particularly those administered by mothers to delinquent small boys, are an idea which the Manx fancy particularly loved to play upon; also that one knows the identity of the friend to whom Miss Morrison is indebted for a delightful

collection of children's rhymes and children's games. Here are a few more phrases which Manx exiles will savour over and over in their mouths with an infinitely tender smile:

"I was the boy-drid of the family, and the measles never had time to catch me."

"What for did ye tell her that? Did she give you a butter-cake for the news?"

"He thought he had done a fayt (*i.e.* feat) when he gave me a half-penny."

"The state that house is in is a show to the living."

"Butter goes mad twice a year"—*i.e.* it becomes either too hard or two soft to spread on the bread.

"They were sitting together in the gallery as proud as jugs on the dhresser." Similarly, "He was cocked up on the platform there like a shag (cormorant) on a half-tide rock."

"All mixed up like a pig's breakfast."

"He skyowed the meat" (*i.e.* cut it shapelessly) "so that I couldn't put it on the table again." "She tuk a skyow out of it with the scissors."

"Navar sweepin' under the bed, and slut's wool in fis'fuls gathering in every corner."

"Windy people they are, and never of the same notion two days hand-running."

The humour is accidental, but positively sublime, in "She wore a frock with plates on it," "A gansey fit for the King to wear," and in Tom Brown's "Gels is stickier till boys"! "Stickier", in this case simply means more constant, more capable of "sticking to" any pursuit they have set their hands to.

Has the Manx dialect any hope of surviving? As one who, without endowing it with any special virtues, loves "the dear familiar speech"—as one who delights in a care-free hour to utter it—as one who has practised the writing of it, believing that the authentic, natural thoughts of simple people can only be expressed in simple words, the present writer confesses that he has often "feared for it as a lover or. a child." The schoolmaster—the secondary-school master—is abroad; Manx farmers' sons, even those who afterwards return to the farms, go into town and become grocers and drapers, Manx shopkeepers and master tradesmen have in numerous cases worked as journeymen across the water, and half the girl clerks in Douglas come in each morning by train or bicycle from the country. In other respects than the fashion of their speech, one sometimes mourns to look in the rural districts for the refreshingly plain, homely ways of yore, and to find them not. Possibly in the next generation all that remains of the Manx dialect will be the intonation, the raising of the voice on the last syllable of the sentence that always awakes the amuse interest of the stranger. Well, 'tis my faith that native, original thought. expressed directly and downrightly, will always be found, whatever the precise form of words may be that clothes the thought. The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.

P.W.C.

P.W. Caine [initialled as "P.W.C."]. "Manx Dialect." *Isle of Man Examiner* 13 June

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