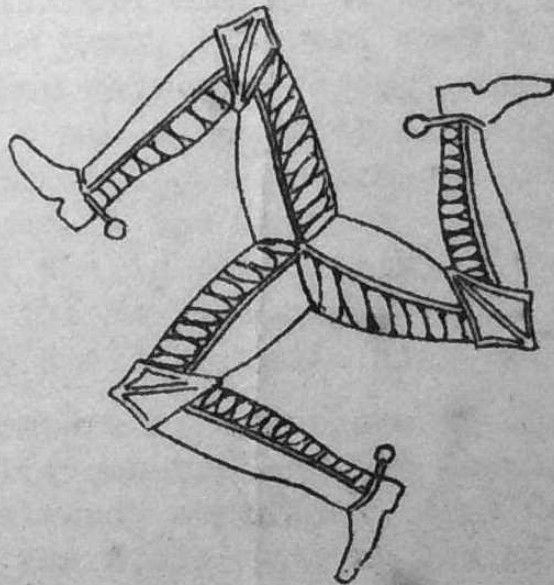

A SKETCH OF MANX GAELIC



by
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1.

Manx Gaelic, or Gaelg Vanninagh as it is called by those who speak it, is a member of the Celtic group of languages, and together with Scottish Gaelic forms the Eastern branch of Gaelic, Irish being the Western; it is also related, though less closely, to the Brythonic branch of Celtic: Welsh, Cornish and Breton, and as an Indo-European language shares a common origin with English, Latin, Russian and Hindu.

The history of the written language dates back to about 1610, when the Book of Common Prayer was translated into Manx by a Welshman, John Phillips, Bishop of Sodor and Mann. The first actual publication in Manx, however, came a century later with the printing of Bishop Wilson's "Principles and Duties of Christianity", for which a spelling quite different to that of Phillips was used, thus providing a prototype for the spelling in use today. Although based on the English and radically differing from the traditional Gaelic orthography, it nevertheless represents the sounds of the Manx language with a greater accuracy than the Gaelic system of spelling could ever do.

Of Manx literature itself there is but little, and what there is favours religious rather than secular subjects. Apart from the two works already mentioned, Manx Gaelic boasts a complete translation of the Bible made in the middle of the eighteenth century, a number of religious tracts, a metrical version of Paradise Lost ("Pargys Cailt") and a genuine folk literature consisting of religious songs known as the Carvals. Secular literature includes a description of the Isle of Mann in verse, a translation of Aesop's Fables, a few ballads, the most notable being the Traditionary Ballad, thought to have been composed at the beginning of the sixteenth century and only committed to writing over two centuries later, and a fragment from the Finn and Ossian cycle which must have been handed down orally for the best part of a thousand years. Since the decline of Manx was halted in the last thirty years, some good literature has again been produced, such as a notable translation of the Chronicles of the Kings of Mann and the Isles, also some short fireside tales.

The extension of English influence to the island and the

growth of the tourist industry resulted in a sharp decline in the number of Manx Gaelic speakers; in 1764 the majority of the islanders were said to be "ignorant of English", but Henry Jenner's questionnaire of 1875, sent out to the island clergy to ascertain the number of Manx speakers, revealed that only 29% of Manxmen, that is 12,350, spoke Manx, and in our own century the decline has continued rapidly as the Census figures show:

(1901)	4,419	(1931)	531
(1911)	2,382	(1951)	355
(1921)	896	(1961)	165

If we project a graph drawn from these figures into the future, the language should reach rock bottom in the 1980's; but this projection would be quite erroneous, because for the first time in many centuries, Manx speakers are actually growing in number, and have been at a steady rate since the mid-1960's, keeping pace with an ever-continuing resurgence of Manx - indeed Celtic - national consciousness. In one decade, a complete new generation of Manx speakers has appeared, having learnt the living language from fluent speakers who were themselves taught by the old native speakers, thus preserving intact the living tradition of the spoken language.

Present indications show that the revival of Manx, far from being an ephemeral popular whim, will proceed at a rate much greater than that of its decline. Consequently Manx Gaelic is now being taught in many schools on the island, and evening class attendances are growing at a rate hitherto unimaginable; it is now once more to be heard in the streets to a limited extent, and even in one of the island's banks, where business can readily be done in Manx. How different the situation now to that of a hundred years ago, when the Rev. Gill of Malew wrote: "It is a doomed language - an iceberg floating into southern latitudes"!

We have already observed that the spelling system differs radically from the traditional Gaelic system, and the following examples, in which the Manx and Scottish Gaelic pronunciations approximate quite well to each other, illustrate this clearly:

(Manx)	(Scot.Gael.)	(English)
loayrt	labhairt	speak
soiaghey	suidheachadh	settle
awin	abhainn	river
dooinney ooasle	duin' uasal	gentleman
y vannish	a' bhanais	the wedding

The pronunciation of Manx is fully explained in Kneen "A Grammar of the Manx Language" and "English-Manx Pronouncing Dictionary" to which the student is referred. The most striking features may however be summarised here: -ey, also -y- in words of words of one syllable, is pronounced like -a in 'sofa'; ea, eh, ei and ai are most often pronounced like French 'été' or German 'geben', whilst aa is like the -ai- in 'fair'. An i or y following a vowel is frequently silent, and serves merely to indicate how the following consonant is pronounced, so that bainney (=milk) is like 'bahn-ya'. A final -e lengthens the preceding vowel, as in English, so lhone (=bare) is pronounced 'loh-m' or 'loh-bm' (see below).

Many consonants correspond fairly well to their English counterparts, but these points should be noted: ch sounds as in Scottish 'loch', but when written ch it is as in 'church'; gh is like Manx ch medially and finally, but initially it is a voiced sound. A prevalent characteristic of Manx pronunciation is a softening or complete elision of medial consonants, so that cappan (=cup) is pronounced 'cah-van' and magher (=field) is sounded 'mahrr'. In recent times also, there has been a tendency for words of one syllable with a long vowel and ending in -n, -m or -ng to develop an intrusive consonant, so that bane (=white) is pronounced 'baedn', lheim (=jump) 'l-yibm' and lhong (=ship) 'l-yugng'. Words are stressed on the first syllable as a rule, but the next syllable takes the stress if it contains a long vowel; thus cláshtyn (=hearing) but arráne (=sor.)

GRAMMAR

Manx, together with the other Celtic languages, often changes the initial consonant of a word. This is called mutation and follows grammatical rules; thus mutation occurs, for example, in the adjective following a feminine singular noun, and after

4. the ordinal numbers: mie (=good) but ben vie (=a good woman), tree punt (=three pounds) but yn trass phunt (=the third pound). Two types of mutation occur, generally known as aspiration and eclipsis, the type depending on the grammatical context, so that the same words may at various times assume two other forms: booa (=a cow), my wooa (=my cow), nyn mooa (=our cow). A list of the changes may be summarised as follows:

	Aspiration	Eclipsis
B	V	M
C, K	CH	G
CH	H	J
D	GH	N
F	(-)	V
G	GH	NG
J	Y	N'Y
M	V	M
P	PH	B
QU	WH	GW
S	H,T	S
T	H	D

Where a consonant would normally undergo aspiration, a vowel remains unchanged, but in an eclipsed position it prefixes n-.

Throughout the course of time the mutations have ceased simply to reflect ease of pronunciation, and are now determined solely by the grammatical context.

NOUNS are masculine or feminine, as in the other Celtic languages, and form their plurals in several different ways. The most common methods are:

1. by adding -yn: thie (=house), pl. thieyn.
2. by changing final -agh to -ee: imbagh (=season), pl. imbee.
3. by changing the root vowel: boayrd (=table), pl. buird.
4. by changing -ey to -aghyn: garey (=garden), pl. garaghyn.
5. in a variety of other ways: billey (=tree), pl. biljyn, sleiau (=mountain), pl. sleityn.

There are only two cases in Manx, the nominative and genitive, the form of the latter being similar to that of the nominative

5. except in a small number of words; e.g. blein (=year), gen. bleaney. In recent times the distinct forms of the genitive case have been abandoned in all but a score or so of nouns, having been replaced elsewhere by the nominative. The dative survives only in single crystallised examples; e.g. ry-chosh (=my foot), dat. of cas (=foot).

ARTICLE Manx has no indefinite article; the definite article is yn (often shortened to y) in all the singular but the feminine genitive, in which it is ny, this also being the plural form. Aspiration occurs in the feminine nominative and masculine genitive singular after the article, and eclipsis was formerly found in the genitive plural. The following examples may serve to illustrate this:

- yn braar (=the brother)
- y vraarey (=of the brother)
- yn chuyr (=the sister)
- ny shuyrey (=of the sister)
- ny braaraghyn (=the brothers)
- ny mraaraghyn (archaic, =of the brothers)
- ny shuyraghyn (=the sisters, of the sisters)

ADJECTIVES mainly follow the noun and are aspirated in the feminine singular. All but a dozen or so common adjectives show no change in the plural. Manx has only one comparative form; e.g. mie (=good), ny share (=better, best), the degree of comparison being shown by the context.

POSSESSIVES show an interesting duality of form, having a literary or formal nuance when preceding the noun; e.g. my hie (=my house), dy hie (=your house), e hie (=his house), e thie (=her house), nyn dhie (=our, your, their house). The ambiguity of the latter form is perhaps responsible for the appearance of an alternative method of expressing the possessive which became the norm in the colloquial language. This consist of the noun

6. preceded by the definite article and followed by forms of the prepositional pronoun 'at'; e.g. yn thie aym (=my house; i.e. the house at-me), yn thie oc (=the house at-them).

DEMONSTRATIVES are three in number: shoh (=this), shen (=that), shid (=yonder), and these follow the noun preceded by the definite article; e.g. yn thaloo shoh (=this land), yn cronk shen (=that hill), y glion shid (=yonder valley).

PREPOSITIONS each form a conjugation with the personal pronoun; e.g. er (=on), orrym (=on me), ort (=on thee), er (=on him), urree (=on her), orrin (=on us), erriu (=on you), orroo (=on them); the simple form of the preposition generally coincides with the 3rd person singular masculine, as in the above example. Manx also has a number of prepositional phrases; e.g. my-dty-chione (=concerning you, i.e. about your head). Any prepositional pronoun or phrase may receive an extra inflexion when stressed; e.g. orryms (= on ME), erriuish (=on YOU).

NUMERALS Counting is based on the score system; e.g. shiaight-jeig as kiare feed (97, lit. 17 + 4x20). The numbers un (1), daa (2), feed (20) and keead (100) and compounds of these are followed by the singular form of the noun.

ADVERBS are formed for the most part by placing dy before the appropriate adjective; e.g. tappee (=quick), dy tappee (=quickly). Comparison of adverbs is identical to that of adjectives, the particle dy being omitted.

PRONOUNS The personal pronouns retain the 'tu/vous' distinction of French in the second person and, unlike most European languages, one form suffices for the subject, object and indirect object functions. Manx has no relative pronouns, and relative

7. clauses resemble the English construction 'the woman you spoke to is here.'

WORD-ORDER in Manx follows the ancient practice of placing the verb first in the sentence; e.g. hie yn aile ass (=the fire went out, lit. went the fire out); the verb in the interrogative is a different word or the same word with different intonation. Except in compound nouns epithets normally follow the word they qualify; e.g. eer-ghuilley (=a mere boy) but cleiy cloaie (=a stone wall).

VERBS each have two basic parts, the imperative which is also used to form the synthetic tenses, and the verbal noun which roughly corresponds to the English gerund, and also supplies the analytic tenses. The verbal noun is in most cases obtained by adding a suffix to the imperative, although for some verbs the two forms are identical.

The preterite, future and conditional have both synthetic and analytic conjugations, which are similar in meaning; style, clarity and facility of use are the factors most likely to determine which form is used in the spoken or written language. The analytic conjugation consist of the verb 'to do' in the appropriate tense and the verbal noun; examples of both conjugations for comparison are: chloie mee / ren mee cloie (=I played), caillmayd / neemayd coayl (=we shall lose), cha vuirragh oo / cha jinnagh oo fuirraghtyn (=you would not wait). The verb 'to be' is the auxiliary used in the formation of the present and perfect tenses, and of the other continuous tenses; e.g. veign cloie (=I would be playing), va mee er chloie (=I had played). This continuous present tense is the only one possible for any Manx verb except 'to be' and 'can'. The present tense of 'to be' is ta for all persons singular and plural, and vel in the interrogative; the past tense has va and interrogative row.

There also exist a certain number of verbal phrases, formed by means of the copula she (= is) in the appropriate

tense together with a noun and prepositional pronoun; e.g. by vie lhiam (=I would like, lit. 'it would-be good with-me'). The copular is also used to emphasise a word at the beginning of the sentence; e.g. she mish ren eh (=It is I did it).

It may be of interest to see a short text in Manx Gaelic with a word-for-word English translation, and for this purpose the Lord's Prayer has been chosen; English words omitted in the Manx are in parentheses:

AYE AIN T'AYNS NIAU, CASHERRICK DY ROW DT'ENNYM;
Father at-us (who) is in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

DY JIG DTY REERIAGHT; DT'AIGNEY DY ROW JEANT ER Y THALLOO MYR
come thy kingdom; thy will be done on the earth as

T'EH AYNS NIAU. CUR DOOIN NYN ARRAN JIU AS GAGH LAA.
it is in heaven. Give to-us our bread today and every day.

AS LEIH DOOIN NYN LOGHTYN, MYR TA SHINYN LEIH DAUESYN
And forgive to-us our offences, as are we forgive to-them

TA JANNOO LOGHTYN NYN OI. AS NY LEEID SHIN
(who) are doing offences our against. And not lead us

AYNS MIOLAGH, AGH LIVREY SHIN VEIH OLK.
in temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The following publications are available for the student of Manx:

Cregeen's Manx - English Dictionary
Kneen's English - Manx Dictionary
Kneen's Grammar of the Manx Language
First Lessons in Manx (Goodwin)
Conversational Manx (Gell)
Kneen's Idioms and Phrases
Gaelg Trooid Jallooghyn (Manx through Pictures)
Chronicles of the Kings of Mann and the Isles
St. John's Gospel
The Principles and Duties of Christianity
(Bishop Wilson)
Skeelalyn 'sy Ghaelg (Neddy Beg Hom Ruy)
Kneen's Place Names of the Isle of Man
The Manx Have a Word For it (Fargher):
Animals, Birds, Insects, Marine Flora and
Fauna, Flowers and Trees.
Manx Hymn Book
Give Your House a Manx Name (Fargher)

A calendar in Manx is produced annually, and in addition to the above a map of the Isle of Mann bearing only Manx names is available.

A society exists for the preservation and promotion of the Manx Gaelic language: Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh (The Manx Gaelic Society), which was founded in 1899, and which has been active in the fields of publishing, arranging instruction in the language and recording for posterity the native speakers of Manx. Membership of the Society is open to all who sympathize with its aims, and costs 50p per annum. Subscriptions from those wishing to join the Society should be sent to the Treasurer at the address given below:

