

Is Manx Dead or Dying?

A WARNING TO THE GAEL

SOME months ago Messrs. Thomas Nelson published the second of a series of monographs being issued by the Linguistic Survey of Scotland. This was "Contributions to the Study of Manx Phonology," by Professor Kenneth H. Jackson, of the Chair of Celtic in Edinburgh University.

Professor Jackson visited the Isle of Man in 1950-51 to investigate the language of the few remaining native speakers of Manx. There were then, it is stated, only ten native speakers left, of whom four have since died, while the ages of the remaining six, if still surviving, range from 77 to 102.

Following upon a review of the book in a Scottish newspaper, a correspondent, writing from Aberystwyth, wrote as follows:

"It is startling and horrifying to read in your issue today that only six native speakers of Manx remain—the youngest of them 77. What a shame and disgrace to the present generation that they have failed to preserve their own tongue! Their vaunted independence and ancient legal ritual, including the proclamation of new laws annually in Manx, are thus become but an empty farce . . .

"It is sincerely to be hoped that the moral

will not fail to be noted in the rapidly shrinking area of Scotland which is still Gaelic-speaking. Far more drastic action than any that has yet been contemplated is obviously called for. There is but one part of Britain where the rot of Teutonisation is beginning to be arrested, viz., Wales; and there it is being done by providing a complete education through the medium of Welsh It is quite clear that this is the only way to re-establish any declining language; this has become obvious to the Welsh people, but how is it that it has not yet become equally so to the Scottish Gaels?

"It would be a terrible pity if the only Celtic language to survive finally were the least mellifluous and the least attractive one (albeit by far the simplest to spell!) If there were no other reason for keeping Gaelic alive than that songs should continue to be sung in it naturally, and not as an artificially fostered pseudo-cultural 'stunt,' this reason would suffice in any world where the sense of values was not already almost hopelessly perverted. For can anyone point to a corpus of folk-song anywhere on the face of the globe that can hold a candle to that of the Scottish Highlands and Islands?"

"Mist on the Hills"

IT is always a pleasure to hear from Mr. Edward McCurdy, than whom the Gaelic Cause has no more enthusiastic or better informed supporter. His home is in Surrey but his 'heart's in the Highlands.'

A recent contribution from his pen tells how, long years ago, he felt the desire to investigate the legend of Saint Brendan, who, according to the story-tellers, voyaged the western ocean in search of the earthly paradise. A poem by Matthew Arnold, on the episode of Brendan's seeing Judas on an iceberg, whetted his appetite. Later he bought a copy of *The Voyage of Bran* by Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt from the latter's own hand in David Nutt's bookshop in the Strand. On Alfred Nutt's suggestion he also bought H. Cameron Gillies's *Elementary Gaelic Grammar* in order to begin the study of the Celtic languages.

"I make no claim to have mastered Gaelic," writes Mr. McCurdy, "but I have gone far enough to see that the study of it is worth all the effort that I can ever hope to give, and more."

He quotes the following words of Alfred Nutt, and remarks that they are as true now as they were fifty-eight years ago when they were written:

"I would urge increased study of the Celtic past by the English-speaking communities. They are pledged to it alike by filial piety and political expediency, for the Celtic element in their civilisation is considerable, and, though it may sometimes change its form, it is not likely to decrease. As far as the purely scientific aspects of the study are concerned, the facts speak for themselves; as far as its interest and beauty are concerned, there again the facts speak for themselves. But I rest my advocacy of the fostering of Celtic studies upon other than scientific or aesthetic grounds; I believe it to be a task, patriotic in the highest sense of the word, as tending to sympathetic appreciation of a common past, to sympathetic union in the present and future of all the varied elements of a common nationality."