Last month I wrote about Manx English and the Manx accent, and I said that we should support and value them as a legacy and an inheritance which grew out of the Manx language itself, and while we are reviving and promoting Manx Gaelic we shouldn’t neglect the language which is the mother tongue of almost all Manx people today, and the uniquely Manx variety of it which older people still possess. There are some who do not have the opportunity or the ability to learn Manx, and the Gaelic-speaking Manxman should not look down on the Manxman who only speaks English. However, this month I am going to discuss learners of Manx, and the connection between Manx English and the Manx Gaelic of the present day.

Learners are often advised—in the beginning of the First Thousand Words for instance—to base their pronunciation of Manx on the accent of Manx English, since the echo of Manx can be heard in that accent. This is good advice to an extent, but we should be careful. The accent of most of the young people today in the Isle of Man is not much like that of Manx Gaelic at all, and even for rural older people, a hundred years may separate them from the generation who used Manx on a regular basis and mixed Manx in their English. I am not saying that this is a bad thing, for every
language variety changes naturally; but you cannot simply say ‘I am from the Isle of
Man, therefore whatever accent I have in English, that is good enough for Manx’.

It is fine to look for the Gaelic echo in Manx English, but it is better still for
the learner to listen to the recordings we have of cradle Manx speakers, and in
addition, to learn at least a smattering of Irish and Scottish Gaelic and to listen
carefully to their pronunciation. Learning the other Gaelic tongues (which is not
difficult if you have Manx) will help you to understand what is ‘behind’ the Manx
spelling and aid you when the pronunciation is not clear from the written form. I will
return to this topic in the future.