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20-06-2019

Review (1791) (author unknown) of

Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica; or, an Essay to preserve the Ancient Cornish Language, containing the Rudiments of that Dialect, in a Cornish Grammar and Cornish English Vocabulary, compiled from a variety of materials which have been inaccessible to all other Authors.

William Pryce, M. D. of Redruth, Cornwall. 1790.



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THE  
MONTHLY REVIEW;  
OR,  
LITERARY JOURNAL,  
ENLARGED:

From SEPTEMBER to DECEMBER, *inclusive*,

M, DCC, XCI.

With an APPENDIX.

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“ —You who seek to give and merit Fame,  
“ And justly bear a Critic’s noble name—  
“ Be niggards of advice on no pretence,  
“ For the worst avarice is that of Sense.  
“ With mean complacence ne’er betray your trust,  
“ Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.  
“ Fear not the anger of the Wise to raise;  
“ They best can bear reproof, who merit praise.” POPE.

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VOLUME VI.

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# T A B L E

OF THE

TITLES, AUTHORS' NAMES, &c. of the Publications reviewed in this Volume.

N. B. FOR REMARKABLE PASSAGES, in the *Criticisms* and *Extracts*, see the INDEX, at the End of the Volume.

☞ For the Names, also, of those learned Foreigners who are the Authors of new Dissertations, or other curious Papers, published in the MEMOIRS and TRANSACTIONS of the Royal and other Scientific ACADEMIES on the Continent, and also for the Titles of those Dissertations, &c. of which Accounts are given in the Review,—see the *Index*, printed at the End of this Volume.

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though his power of illustration may not be fully equal to the task of delineating Grecian philosophy under its most engaging aspect.

\* \* \* Those who may incline to peruse the former works of Dr. Walter Anderson, will find references to our accounts of them, by consulting our General Index, under the class of HISTORY.

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ART. II. *Archæologia Cornu-Britannica*; or, an Essay to preserve the Antient Cornish Language, containing the Rudiments of that Dialect, in a Cornish Grammar and Cornish English Vocabulary, compiled from a variety of Materials which have been inaccessible to all other Authors. By William Pryce, M. D. of Redruth, Cornwall, Author of *Mineralogia Cornubiensis* \*. 4to. pp. 236. 1l. 1s. Boards. Dilly. 1790.

DR. PRYCE remarks, in his preface to this elaborate composition, that

'As the discovery of an original language is the first and leading step to the progressional examination of all other antiquities of a country, it follows of course, that the oldest tongue ought to be studied and understood previously to our entering on the remains and records of less remote ages. On this consideration, I am inclined to believe that a work of this tendency will be very acceptable both to the antiquarian and the philologist; especially as I can very safely assert that the old Cornish-British, which is here distinguished very precisely from the modern Cornish dialect, is the most pure and nearest the original, of any speech now used in Armorica, or the northern provinces of France, Great Britain, and Ireland.'

We agree with the Doctor that, to the studious and exact antiquary, an acquaintance with the original language, if it can be attained, is likely to prove highly conducive to the illustration of other subjects which fall under his notice; yet how many are there who take pleasure in archæological inquiries, and have neither the leisure nor the means for such an acquisition? they are therefore indebted to those authors who endeavour, as in the work before us, to facilitate their progress.

It seems to be allowed, and with great reason, among those who have most closely investigated the point, that the Hebrew is the general source whence other languages have originated: the Phenician (or Canaanitish) was no doubt connected with it, or rather formed on it. From the Phenician, as this writer, together with others, remarks, the Greeks, and afterward the Latins, composed their letters; and from the Greek and old Latin tongues, our author supposes the ancient and true Cornish is mostly derived:—but here we are inclined to ask, why

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\* See Monthly Review for October 1778, vol. lix. p. 268.

he should apply to them, when there is a probability at least, that, anterior to the Greeks and Romans, the Phenicians visited Britain, and particularly the coasts of Cornwall? If, about the time of the Trojan war, they first discovered these shores, as he apprehends, and traded for the tin which they produced, it is natural to conclude that their language would in some degree be communicated; and this indeed the Doctor afterward appears to acknowledge, when, treating more generally on the British isle, he adds,—‘The language at that time spoken in other parts of this island, having travelled across a vast continent, was compounded and impure, and therefore we may boldly infer, that the superior purity of the ancient Cornish is chiefly to be ascribed to its genuine introduction from the shores of Greece and Sidon.’—Though Greece is here united with Sidon, it should seem likely that the intercourse with the latter was prior to that of the former:—but this is a point which we leave to be determined by those who can afford it more attention.

We have been accustomed to consider the Erse, the Manse, the Welsh, and perhaps the Irish also, as dialects of the ancient British; with these we are to join the Cornish, to which, we are told, what is termed the Armoric-British bears a considerable similarity; for, as this writer remarks, ‘the coasts of Bretagne, Normandy, and Picardy, are opposite to the shores of Cornwall, Devon, &c. so that the first commercial discoverers of those lands, in their sailing up the British channel, had equal opportunities of communicating their Grecian and Roman dialects of the Syriac root.’—It is however well known, that, when our British ancestors were compelled to retire before their hostile intruders, numbers of them crossed over to France; the province of Bretagne, in particular, seems to have received its name from that circumstance, which alone would be sufficient, we apprehend, to account for some colloquial resemblance; although we are not unwilling to allow that it might, in a degree, have had a higher original. The low French, and the Cornish, in Bas Bretagne, Dr. Pryce remarks, appear almost one and the same dialect:

‘If I had not been otherwise (he adds) well apprized of this fact, yet my opinion would have been confirmed by what I have heard from a very old man now living at Moushole near Penzance, who is, I believe, at this time, the only person capable of holding half an hour’s conversation on common subjects in the Cornish tongue\*. He tells me, that above threescore years ago, being at Morlaix, on board a smuggling cutter, and the only time he was ever there, he

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\* See Monthly Review for Dec. 1775, vol. liii. p. 497; for Feb. 1780, vol. lxii. p. 109.

was ordered on shore with another man to buy some greens, and not knowing a word of French, as he thought, he was much surpris'd to find, that he understood part of the conversation of some boys at play in the street; and on farther inquiry, he found that he could make known all his wants in Cornish, and be better understood than he could be at home, when he us'd that dialect. I am well satisfied of the fact, as he is quite an illiterate man, and cou'd have neither the temptation nor the ingenuity to invent a story so useles to himself.'

The old British language, after the success of the Saxons, became unintelligible and useles in the body of this island, whence it was driven to the borders, such as Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall; where, we are told, it still maintains a regard and footing among the respective inhabitants, in the dress of different dialects. However this may be, it is a fact that the Welsh alone have manifested this veneration to the purpose of preserving it among the natives: many thousands of them, it is here observed, and we believe with justice, scarcely knowing how to make themselves understood in the Saxon or English. It is no new remark, that numbers of our Welsh neighbours have carried their enthusiasm in this respect to a great height indeed; which some among them, we are here informed, still maintain; so that, 'they hold all other speech in the utmost contempt, preferring their own predilection with the most stubborn perverseness, and shunning in the most contumacious manner every sort of interlocution and communion with any other tongue, till overcome by the pressure of their necessities, and the unavoidable intercourse of mankind in trade and business.' Dr. P. laments that the inhabitants of Cornwall had not possessed such a degree of this pertinacity, as might have prevented the ancient dialect from becoming altogether obsolete, if not totally dead, as he fears is now the case.

'Such has been the inattention of our ancestors, and the deprecation of time, that our primitive speech was nearly annihilated before the art of printing could perpetuate the memory of it to posterity. So habitually inattentive were they, that many years after the discovery of this art, they never adverted to the preservation of the MSS. in their language, so that the only MS. extant, was that found in the Cotton Library, now about 800 years old, from which time no other MS. appears, till about the fifteenth century, when we meet with one, which exhibits three ordinalia or interludes taken from Holy Writ, the originals of which, with two or three more, are in the Bodleian Library.'

Dr. Pryce presents us with a short account of the few who have preceded him in these inquiries. Among others, Mr. Scawen of Molinick, Vice-warden of the Stannaries, applied himself late in life, about 1678, to the subject: but it could only



only be expected from him that he should, in his own phrase, *hoc digito monstrare viam*: "If, (the old gentleman writes,) I should say, that these endeavours of mine, would be totally useful and successful to the recovery of the speech, as ill qualified as I am, I know well it must be thought more vain and censurable in me, now at 84, than it was in Tully to attempt the Greek tongue at 60 years."—We cannot but be pleased to observe, at that advanced period, a spirit disposed for such an investigation, though it produced no great effect; for he died in the same year, and left his papers on this and other subjects in a disordered state;—which possibly might, in part at least, be owing to his survivors.

After a pause of about twenty years, Mr. Lhuyd, about the beginning of the present century, entered on the inquiry, and made some progress in conjunction with others in elucidating the subject. He was well qualified for it: but, in the year 1709, death frustrated his design: 'the greatest loss, (observes this writer,) to this pursuit that it ever had, or ever will meet with, on account of his profound learning and singular attachment to the recovery of our primitive language. In his hands, particularly fitted as he was for the undertaking, and supplied with every essential article of erudition from surrounding libraries, not only the recovery of this dialect would have been effected, but it would have been adorned with every elegance and improvement, from the unceasing labours of such a consummate philologist.'—Such is the tribute paid to the memory of Mr. Lhuyd: it is introduced with propriety, and we dispute not the justice of the eulogium: we think also, the reader may perceive in it somewhat of that enthusiastic warmth, without a degree of which a man will hardly have attention and resolution sufficient for works of this nature. Mr. Lhuyd's MSS. were committed to the care of Sir Thomas Sebright, who died in the year 1736: his heir being a minor, and the trustees unmindful of such things as were not obviously and immediately connected with the benefit of their charge, those collections, it is said, were eventually buried, and lost to all future public inspection.

Mr. Hals of Fenton Gymps, is another labourer in this business, to whom the public expectation, we are told, was directed about the 15th year of the present century, but it was by no means answered. Indeed he appears to have been an ignorant and unqualified man, who supposed that learning consisted in a huge collection of words without order, sense, or meaning: for we are here informed that 'he took uncommon pains to heap together a mass of them, which he entitled *Lhadymer ay Kernow*, or the Cornish interpreter:—It is farther added,—

' Mr.

‘Mr. Hals’s Lhadymer is a most strange hodge-podge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and British words, confusedly heaped together, and in such a manner as not only to shew his want of method, but also to expose his great deficiency in those learned languages which he lugged in to support and illustrate his etymology; it being common with him to write *tempora regnum Augustus*; *ostium fluvius*, &c.’—The reader will be as much surprized, as we have been, that a man of such slender attainments should have employed any efforts in this kind of science: but it sometimes happens that, where there is little knowlege, there is much conceit. Dr. Pryce, however, observes that even this farrago contained some intelligence not unworthy of his notice, and that he has taken care to select from it all that was valuable and proper for his purpose.

On the demise of Mr. Lhuyd, some Cornish gentlemen, who had endeavoured to promote his success, found other associates, who united to maintain ‘a correspondence in their native tongue, as well as they could, by collecting all the mottoes, proverbs, and idioms, on which they could lay their hands.’ The result of this coalition was an alphabetical arrangement of words, together with other papers on the subject under discussion, to which our author has had access by means of the descendants or connections of the late Mr. Tonkin, who appeared at the head of the association.

Such is the relation which we here find of the manuscript ground-work of this undertaking: the Doctor confesses an implicit submission to the works of Mr. Lhuyd, and also of the late Dr. Wm. Borlase, ‘who,’ he adds, ‘in the interval betwixt the death of the late Mr. Tonkin, and the delivery of his papers into my custody, published, at the end of his *Antiquities of Cornwall* \*, an epitomised vocabulary, which has furnished a few useful additions to my larger collection. It is likewise with singular satisfaction that I acknowledge my obligations to the Rev. Mr. Whitaker, of Ruan Lanyhorn, for his communications, and his criticisms on the British language, a gentleman whose warm defence of our ancient tongue deserves the grateful applause of his country.’

We have only farther to observe, that the Vocabulary, found in the Cotton Library, has proved of use in the completion of the present work; and that Mr. Martin Keigwin, and his son, Mr. John Keigwin, both inhabitants of the little fishing village of Mouthole, were ready on all occasions to clear up any doubts that might arise, and were generally fortunate in removing the difficulties which embarrassed those gentlemen who were united

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\* See Monthly Review, vol. x. p. 415.

with

with or succeeded to Mr. Tonkin, &c. in this development.

These short extracts from the preface, and the remarks which are added, will afford the reader some idea of the nature of the volume before us, and also of the difficulty with which its completion has been attended. For his farther satisfaction, the best method which we can take, is to insert the concluding paragraphs of this introduction, or as the Doctor modestly terms it, the *Editor's* preface; and editor he is, as he would not wish to be regarded as an inventor of words and phrases: but for collecting, arranging, and illustrating them, he appears to have employed sufficient thought and industry to give him some claim to the higher name of *author*, which we have therefore occasionally bestowed; and the passages which now follow, tend to confirm us more in its propriety.

' After much consideration, how to render my performance so full and complete as to engage the approbation of the public, and as the curious nature of the undertaking demands, I determined to make it a digest of the Cornish-British language, by introducing in the first part the marrow of Mr. Lhuyd's grammar, with some additions, in which are incorporated his instructions for the reading of old British MSS.—I hope this very learned introduction to Philology, which I have reprinted at the entrance of my book, will not be found out of its place.—The second part contains my vocabulary, consisting of several thousand words collected and arranged from the materials already mentioned. This hath employed the labour of many years; and perhaps a work of a drier kind hath seldom been undertaken by any *harmless drudge*\* whomsoever. As the whole of the Cotton Vocabulary is inserted, I have taken care to note each word from that ancient remain, with this mark †.—The third and last part consists of the Cornish proper names of hundreds, parishes, villages, &c. with their distinctions of the old and modern Cornish, set forth in the concise manner I could adopt, so that the reader may, at a single glance, apprehend the difference. This is followed by the Creed, Pater-noster, and Decalogue in both ancient and modern Cornish; and also mottos, proverbs, and sayings in the vulgar Cornish; with the last correspondence between Mr. Lhuyd and Mr. Tonkin.

' I wish, indeed, it had been within the compass of my knowledge, to have rendered the Vocabulary perfect and complete; but the scanty and limited materials I had to consult rendered every hope of that kind abortive: for according to the best information I have been able to procure, there are no other Cornish MSS. to be met with any where, beside those I have already mentioned; from which I have extracted those words in the Vocabulary, which are to be found in them, illustrated by numerous quotations from them, which are familiar to the language of Scripture and the popular idiom.

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\* See Dr. Johnson on the word *Lexicographer*.'

'As for the vulgar Cornish now spoken, it is so confined to the extremest corner of the county, and those ancient persons who still pretend to jabber it, are even there so few; the speech itself is so corrupted; and the people too, for the most part, are so illiterate; that I cannot but wonder at my patience, and assume some merit to myself for my singular industry in collecting the words which I have accumulated from oral intelligence, especially as hardly any of the persons whom I have consulted, could give a tolerable account of the orthography, much less of the etymology, or derivation, of the words which they use; for they often join, or rather run, two or three words together, making but one of them all, though their pronunciation is generally correct: as for instance, Merastadu, which they pronounce in one breath, as if it were a single word: whereas it is a contraction of four, Meor'ras tha Dew, *Many thanks to God*, anciently written, Maur gras tha Dew: and Merastawy, *Many thanks to you*; a contraction of Maur'ras tha why.'

To this necessary detail of the rise, progress, and completion, of the work before us, it may be acceptable to many readers, and is certainly proper, to affix a few specimens from the Vocabulary.

'Boos, *food*;—see Boz and Buz; also *drink to excess*; hence boozy, boozing.

'Carn, carne, *pl. carnou, carnon, an high rock, a shelf in the sea*; properly, *an heap of rocks, a rocky place, as carne in verrian.*

'Col, the *binder part of the neck, also the ridge or neck of a hill*, by corruption from kil, as, colquite in St. Maben, the *neck of the wood*, anciently Kilcoid, &c. collibiggan, the *small neck*.

'Credza, to *believe*; an credgyans abes telath, the *apostles' creed*.

'Cul, to *make, to do*; Johan, gueres ou cul tan; John, *help me to make the fire*.

'Derrick, a *sexton, a grave-digger*. Nomen familie.

'Dég, dég; *ten*: deg uar igans, *thirty*: q. d. *ten upon twenty*.

'Dizhunéy, a *breakfast*; in French, déjeuné, to *break the fast*.

'Dron, a *throne, also, a bill*; the Gundron, in Gulvall, the *Downs hill*.

'Dzhyrna, a *day*, from the old word, journee, which word we still retain in journeyman: an dzhyrnama uar zeithan, *this day seven nights*.

'Ennis, ennes, enys, the *island*; ince, ynes, ynys.—Also a *peninsula, or half island*, made so by a river, or the sea. Nomen familie.

'Fas, *faith, truth*; in fas, *in truth*; also, *strength, vigour*; kerthes in fas, *walk in strength, or well in the faith*.

'Ford, a *way*; fos, a *blow*; fos, *bragging*; fos, fossa, a *ditch, an intrenchment*.

'Glyn, a *woody valley*.—Go, *at, to, also little*; go dol, a *little valley*.—Perhaps, Godolphin, means a *little valley of springs*.

'Gothoam, fools; Christ casos gothoam yn lan, *Christ found fools in the temple*.

'Grew

‘ Grew, a *crane*; Killigrew, the crane’s grave. Nomen familiaræ.

‘ Grup; this Mr. Keigwin hath translated, to *gripe*; but it must signify, to *pierce*; a grup yn empyn yon, *will pierce even to the brains*.

‘ Guêr, *green, lively, flourishing*: I take Geare, by which name singly, many places in this county are called, to be no other than a corruption of this, and to signify a *green, flourishing, or fruitful place*. Thus tregeare, the *green, or fruitful town*.

‘ Harlot; this word is generally used by way of reproach, to signify, *rogue, villain*; though sometimes it be the same as *arluâb, a lord*.

‘ Keffyl, kevil, an *horse*; still retained in the names of several places.

‘ Keverel, cheverel, a *kid, or little goat*; whence Keverel in St. Martin’s by Loo, gave that for his arms.

‘ Kopher, a *coffer*; kopher braz, a *great coffer, a chest*.

‘ Mab lyen, a clerk, a clergyman; q. d. the son of Linen, I suppose from the *surplice*.

‘ Ost, an *army, an host*.—Ost, Oster, an *host, an hostess*; ostel, an *inn*.

‘ Les, lis, in the Armoric, is a *court, hall, &c.* Lhuyd’s *Archæol.* p. 206. We often meet with this word in the names of our places; and I believe it sometimes doth signify the same as in the Armoric, as *les* or *liskard*, which I interpret the *castle court*, from its castles, one of the ancient seats of the Dukes of Cornwall.

‘ Lesfik, lesfek, lessick, Mr. Gwawas interprets *bushy*: so trelesek, or trelessick, in St. Earth, &c. the *bushy town*, from the Irish, *treilliseack*, or else from ledsek, a *heifer*, the heifer’s town.

‘ Pen, the *head*, pedn brauze, pedn maur, a *great head, a jolt headed fellow*; pednouiz, *heads of corn*.—Note, that pen or pedn, in the British of all countries, signifies an *end*, as well as a *head*; so kynz pedn zythynis, *before the end of the week*; pedn viz, pedn vlathan, the *end of the month, the end of the year*. Pen, pedn, *pl. pennou*, doth often signify, a *bill*.

‘ Pens, poyns, *pl. poynsew, a pound in money, or twenty shillings*.

‘ Peth, pith, *pl. pethou, pytho, riches, wealth*. Nanpetho, the *rich valley*.

‘ Pleg, plek, a *plait, or fold*, also, *to bow down to any one*.

‘ Rachan, a *rake*.’

Here we wish to ask the author; whether, by the word *rake*, is to be understood the instrument of that name employed in gardening, &c. or whether a *rakish fellow* is meant? If the latter, it naturally reminds us of the Syriac word, *Raca, Matth. v. 22*.

‘ Rees, dho rees, to *flit, or slide away, to rush out*; hence our common word and expression, *conreefing*, and the names of many of our places, as rees, in St. Peran Sabulo, the *fleeting (rather flitting) ground*; penrice, *olim penrees, head of the fleeting ground, trerees*,

as anciently written, the *fleeting ground*; *refas*, *flowing*, *gusted out*, *rushed out*.

' *Stean*, *tin*; *stean coose*, in St. Agnes, *wood of tin*; *pulstean*, *a tin pit*.

' *Soa*, *suet*, *tallow*; *soath*, *fat*, *green*; *nan soath*, *fat valley*.

' *Tre*, a *town*, *village*, *dwelling*, *gentleman's seat*: this is the most common word prefixed to our names of places, and I believe is an original British word; it signifies the same in Wales, Cornwall, and Armorica.

' *Trev*, a *house*; *trevifa*, *lower house*; *trevanion*, *town in a hollow plain*.

' *Tron*, a *nose*, from whence it comes to mean a *promontory*, a *head-land*; in Welsh, *truyn*, and still preserved by the French, who call it a *copper nose*; thus, *rouge trogne*.

' *Vethe*, the same as *verth*, *green*, *Carveth*, in St. Cuby, the *green town*.

' *Redruth*, *dre-druith*, the *Druid's town*, which it undoubtedly signifies from its vicinity to Carn Brea, that celebrated station of Druidical superstition, where at this time are to be seen a multifarious collection of monumental Druidism.'

Thus we have endeavoured to assist the reader in forming a judgment of this performance: we have extended the article, perhaps too far, at least for our own confined limits; yet it seemed to require some particular attention.—Deficiencies the work must have from its very nature. The Doctor has laboured to supply them as far as he could, and he is certainly commendable for his assiduity, and, we are inclined to think, for his exactness also. The different uses to which his collections may be applied, must be left to those who have greater leisure. Two remarks, among others, we particularly made as we proceeded:—one is, that the collector does not point out derivations from the old Greek, nor from the Hebrew. Latin resemblances are easily perceived; we thought that we could, now and then, discern some of the Grecian and Hebrew languages.—The other remark is, that from the few asterisms which we observed in the Vocabulary, and by which *obsolete* words are said to be distinguished, we have been almost tempted to infer that the aggregate of *true ancient* Cornish words is at least not very large; since we should suppose, from the accounts before given, that the original language is now, for the greater part, become wholly *obsolete*.

The Philologist will, without doubt, reap advantages from these researches of Dr. Pryce, who has laid a foundation on which some of his successors or contemporaries may improve.

ART.

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