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**CORNWALL AND THE CORNISH LANGUAGE.**

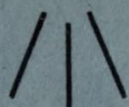
**Awdur: LLALLAWG.**

**THE CAMBRIAN JOURNAL: PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
CAMBRIAN INSTITUTE. 1861.**

**Tudalennau 113-121**



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GWIR YN ERBYN Y BYD.

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VOLUME FOR 1861.

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R. MASON, HIGH STREET.  
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1861.

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tenuity, he said it was impossible to tell, when a comet was first seen, the time it would take to perform its circuit, or whether it would ever return. If its course was a parabola, it would never again be seen by us; but would probably travel on through space, until stopped by some other body. If it travelled at the rate of 668,000 miles an hour, it was plain that its course described a parabola. If it travelled more slowly, and described an ellipse, then we might expect it would visit us again. The comet of 1861 was so near the earth at present, that its orbit could not be ascertained. As a proof of the ethereal nature of the comet's tail, he stated that lately we had passed through it without suffering any inconvenience.

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CORNWALL AND THE CORNISH LANGUAGE.

CORNWALL, at the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, was called *Carnubia*, and the inhabitants of it *Carnabii*—names probably derived from the ancient British *Cernyw*, which is said to signify a projecting ridge, and also a promontory. According to some etymologists the root of *Cernyw* is the Latin *cornu*, or the Celtic *corn*—a term used in allusion to Cornwall being a promontory with many projecting points. Norris, the editor and translator of the *Ancient Cornish Drama*, has the following explanation under the word *Corn*, in his *Ancient Cornish Vocabulary*:—“*Cornubia, Carniu, Kernyw, nomina regionum ob prominentiam. The recent plural was Kernow.*” The plural of the Welsh word *corn* is *cyrn*, and in some parts of South Wales *cyrnau* is also used. *Au* in Welsh, *ow* in Cornish, and *ou* in Armoric, are very common plural terminations of nouns.

The ancient British inhabitants of Cheshire, in the time of the Romans, were also called *Carnabii*, as well as *Cornavii* or *Corinavii*: and so were the occupiers of Caithness, north of the Ale or Ila, which is the north-

eastern extremity of Scotland, named *Carnabii*, because they, in the opinion of some antiquaries, like the *Carnabii* of *Cernyw*, were seated on a promontory. Archæologists are not agreed as to the identity of the *Carnabii*; but those who inhabited Kernyw were doubtless the descendants in part of the ancient Lloegrwys. According to the Historical Triads, vii. and ix., the Lloegrwys, who were descended from the primitive nation of the Cymry, composed the second peaceful colony which reached the shores of Britain. They arrived here probably about a thousand years before the Christian era. But as it is generally believed that the southern coasts of Britain, at the time of the Roman invasion, were inhabited by the Belgæ, it is very possible that the Lloegrwys and other colonies, which subsequently arrived, several of which are mentioned in the Triads, became amalgamated. Beale Poste, in his *Britannic Researches*, p. 148, specifies three invasions of Britain by the Belgæ, the probable dates of which respectively he fixes about 350, 100, and 85 years before the Christian era. This may account for the difference which exists between the two languages of the Britons of Cornwall and Wales, as they have been transmitted to the present time. Norris, in the Appendix to vol. ii. p. 457, of the *Ancient Cornish Drama*, states it as his "opinion, that the Cornish is the representative of a language once current all over South Britain at least." And again in p. 462, he says,— "The close resemblance of the Cornish to the Breton spoken at this day in France, justifies us in believing that a language akin to the Cornish of our oldest manuscripts, was the idiom of South Britain when the Roman departure took place." Was not this the language of the Lloegrwys in general, and of the *Carnabii* of *Cernyw* in particular?

The origin of the modern name, Cornwall, is by some antiquaries ascribed to the Saxons, who designated the Ancient Britons, *Weales*; and those of them who, in defiance of all attempts to subjugate or expel them, retained possession of *Cernyw*, they distinguished by

the name of *Cornweales*, which implies Cornish Welsh; and their country, *Cornweale*, which signifies Cornish Wales.

When Britain was invaded by the Saxons, the Lloegrwys were brought by violence and conquest into confederacy with them, except such as were found in Cernyw and in the north of Britain. The Cornish Britons were successful in maintaining their independence as a distinct kingdom until the beginning of the ninth century, when Cornwall was united to that of England by Egbert. But their entire subjugation does not appear to have been effected until the second quarter of the tenth century, when it was completed by Athelstan. From that time the Cornish language began gradually to decline, until by the end of the last century it became entirely extinct; of the gradual decay of which some notices have been left on record, by several writers who have alluded to the subject.

The name of Dr. Moreman, of Menheniot, near Liskeard, who lived in the reign of Henry VIII., has been handed down, as that of the first person who taught his parishioners the use of the "Lord's Prayer" in English. But Andrew Borde, a physician in the same reign, who wrote during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, states,—“In Cornwall is two speches; the one is naughty Englyshe, and the other is Cornyshe speche. And there be many men and women the which cannot speake one worde of Englyshe, but all Cornyshe.”

From this statement it may evidently be inferred, that the Cornish language was no longer used generally and exclusively by the inhabitants. A period of six or seven hundred years had witnessed the introduction amongst them of “naughty Englyshe,” which may imply a species of mongrel or corrupt dialect of the English.

Another author, whose name was Norden, about the year 1584 wrote a *Survey of the County of Cornwall*, in which he states, —“Of late the Cornishe men have muche conformed themselves to the vse of the Englishe tounge, and their Englishe is equall to the beste, especially in

the easterne partes ; euen from *Truro* eastwarde it is in manner wholly Englishe. In the weste parte of the cuntrye, as in the hundreds of *Penwith* and *Kerrier*, the Cornyshe tounge is moste in vse amongste the inhabitantes, and yet (whiche is to be marueyled) though the husband and wife, parentes and children, master and seruantes, doe mutually communicate in their natiue language, yet ther is none of them in manner but is able to conuers with a *straunger* in the Englishe tounge, vnless it be some obscure people, that seldome conferr with the better sorte : but it seemeth that in few yeares the Cornishe language wilbe by litle and litle abandoned."

Richard Carew, a native of Cornwall, who was educated for the bar, and was appointed a magistrate of the county, in his *Survey of Cornwall*, written in 1602, says,—“ Most of the inhabitants can speak no word of Cornish, but very few are ignorant of the English, though they sometimes affect to be.”

It appears from the foregoing statements of Norden and Carew, that the period of fifty or sixty years which had intervned between their time and that of Borde, had produced a marked improvement in the manner in which the English language was spoken by the descendants of those who had acquired “naughty Englyshe.”

Hals, of Fenton Gympse, author of a *Cornish Interpreter*, and of an *Account of Cornwall*, observed at the beginning of the last century that the use of the old Cornish tongue was retained in the parish of Feock, near Truro, till about 1640, when the Rev. William Jackman was obliged to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in that language, the formula for which has been preserved to this day, because the old people did not well understand, or were not sufficiently conversant with English.

Ray, in the year 1662, said that few of the children in Cornwall could then speak the Cornish language, and that Mr Dicken Gwyn was regarded as the only person who could write in it; and consequently that the language would soon be lost.



Bishop Gibson in his *Additions to Camden's Britannia*, published in 1695, p. 16, states,—"The old Cornish is almost quite driven out of the country, being spoken only by the vulgar in two or three parishes at the Land's End; and they too understand the English. In other parts, the inhabitants know little or nothing of it; so that in all likelihood, a short time will destroy the small remains that are left of it. 'Tis a good while since, that only two men could write it, and one of them no scholar or grammarian, and then blind with age."

In the year 1700, the Cornish language was, however, still spoken by the tanners and the fishermen of St. Just, near the Land's End, and by the inhabitants of the western side of Mount's Bay. And it is stated by Scawen of Molinick, a Cornish gentleman, who wrote towards the latter part of the seventeenth century, that the Rev. Francis Robinson, of Llandewednack, near the Lizard Point, preached to his parishioners in the Cornish language in 1768, it being then the language best understood by his hearers: that was, however, in a remote corner, which had little communication with other parts of the county; and Mr. Robinson is said to have been the last person who preached in Cornish. Scawen further states, that an old woman had died about two years before, that is about 1766, at the great age of 164, who could scarcely speak in any language but in the Cornish; but he also adds, that the Cornish language was then, in general, become quite extinct.

In the latter part of the last century, two aged women of Mousehole, whose names were Jane Cock and Jane Woolcock, are said to have been acquainted with the language: and about the same time, John Nancarrow, of Marazion, is reported to have learned it in his youth. William Bodener, a fisherman, of Mousehole, in 1766, could write both Cornish and English. In a letter, written by him that year in Cornish, which was published in the *Archæologia*, vol. v. p. 83, he says that he was then sixty-five years of age, that he had learned Cornish when he was a boy, and that there were then

not more than four or five persons living in Mousehole—old people, fourscore years old—who could speak the language, which, he adds, was entirely forgotten by the young. Mr. Polwhele, who wrote a *History of Cornwall*, affirms that the same William Bodener died in 1794,<sup>1</sup> and left two sons, neither of whom knew enough of the language to converse in it. But the individual who has the reputation of having been the last of the Cornish Britons who understood it and could converse in it, was Dolly Pentreath, whose death is reported to have taken place in 1778,<sup>1</sup> at the great age of 102. She was interred in St. Paul's Church-yard, near Penzance, where her grave remained, without a tomb to point it out, until last year. Mr. Tompson, an engineer of Truro, who had studied the Cornish language, wrote the following epitaph upon her, and circulated it among his friends, but it was never inscribed on her grave:—

*Epitaph on Dolly Pentreath, in Cornish.*

“Coth Doll Pentreath cans ha deau;  
Marow ha kledyz ed Paul pléu:  
Na ed an eglos, gan pobel brâs,  
Bes ed eglos-hay, coth Dolly es.”

*The above Epitaph in Welsh.*

“Hên Ddòl Pentraeth, cant ha dwy;  
Marw a chladdedig yn mhlwyf Paul:  
Nid yn yr eglwys gan (gyda) bobl frâs,  
Ond yn mynwent yr eglwys, hên Ddoli sydd.”

*The Original Epitaph translated into English.*

“Old Doll Pentreath, aged one hundred and two:  
Deceas'd and buried in Paul parish too;—  
Not in the church with people great and high,  
But in the church-yard doth old Dolly lie!”

The following critical notes on the original epitaph have been kindly supplied by the most proficient Cornish scholar of the present time, the learned author of the *Celtic Dictionary*:—

“*Coth* is a word unknown to the Welsh language, but is preserved in the Armoric—*côz*, old.

<sup>1</sup> If the above dates be correct, it appears that William Bodener survived Dolly Pentreath by a period of sixteen years.

“The Cornish has *dyw*, fem., but often uses the masc. *dew* with fem. nouns.

“In Welsh the copulative *a* was formerly *ha*. *Cledhys* is the part. pass. *Ed* is a late form for *yn*, which is always used in the Classic Ordinalia.

“*Plwyf* is from the Lat. *plébs*, Welsh, *wy* = *é*; thus the Welsh word *eglwys* is from the Lat. *ecclésia*; *Canwyll* = Lat. *candéla*; *Cwyr* = Lat. *céra*; *Rhwyd* = *rête*, &c. *B* changes regularly into *f* (*v*).

“*Hay* is the Saxon *haya*, an inclosure.”

Last year a monument to the memory of Dolly Pentreath was put up in the church-yard of St. Paul's, near Penzance, by Prince Lucien Bonaparte, who is well known for his extensive acquaintance with the several branches of the great Celtic language, which bears on it the following inscription:—

“ Here Lieth interred  
Dorothy Pentreath  
who died in  
1778.

Said to have been the  
Last person who conversed  
in the ancient Cornish  
The peculiar language of  
This Country from the  
Earliest records  
Till it expired in the  
Eighteenth Century  
In this Parish of  
Saint Paul  
This Stone is erected by  
The Prince  
Louis Lucien Bonaparte  
in union with  
The Rev<sup>d</sup> John Garrett  
Vicar of S<sup>t</sup> Paul  
June 1860.

Honour thy father and thy mother :  
that thy days may be long upon  
the Land which the Lord thy God  
giveth thee. Exod. xx. 12.

Gwra Perthi De taz ha de mam :  
mal de dy thioiw bethenz hyr war

an tyr neb an arleth de dew  
ryes Dees.<sup>2</sup> . Exod. xx 12.”

The above inscription is on the side nearest the public road, known as Mousehole Lane. On the side of the monument facing the south porch of the church and principal entrance, the following is inscribed:—

“ Dorothy Pentreath  
who conversed  
In ancient Cornish  
Died in  
1778  
This stone is erected by  
The Prince  
Louis Lucien Bonaparte  
and the  
Rev<sup>d</sup> John Garrett  
1860.”

The letters of the inscription are in the style called “Pica Doric.” Near the base of the monument, the name of the sculptor, “Martin Teague,” is inscribed in small characters.

The reasons assigned by Bishop Gibson, in the *Additions* already referred to, for the decay and extinction of the Ancient Cornish Language, are principally the following:—

“ 1. The suspension and loss of commercial intercourse and correspondence with the Armoricans under Henry VII., previous

<sup>2</sup> With reference to this extract, the author of the *Celtic Dictionary* states, that if properly rendered, it would be thus:—

“ Gwra perthy dhe dâs ha'th vam  
Mal y fydh dhe dhydyow hir  
war an tir, neb an Arluth dhe Dhew  
a rôs dhyso.

The Welsh version of this would be as follows:—

“ Gwna berchi dy dâd a'th fam  
fel y bydh dy dhydhiau hir ar  
y tir yr hwn yr Arglywydd dy Dhew  
a roes i ti.”

Mr. Williams further observes:—“The Cornish texts of the two epitaphs are of the latest form, and consequently very much corrupted: they are of little importance in a philological point of view.”

to which time mutual interchanges of princes and families with them occurred.

“ 2. The general introduction of the use of the Liturgy in English into the parish churches, when the Act of Uniformity was passed.

“ 3. The discontinuance of the *Guirremears*, or mystery-plays, which had been performed in Cornish at the great conventions of the country.

“ 4. The settlement among the inhabitants of English artisans, tradesmen, ministers and others.”

The above causes, together with the lack of village and parochial schools, in which the Cornish might have been taught, as well as the want of a translation of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Book of Common Prayer into the vernacular speech, combined with the increasing apathy of the people themselves as regarded the continuance of the aboriginal language, contributed very materially, no doubt, to its general neglect. Had the Prayer Book and the Bible been translated into Cornish, as they ought have been, at the Reformation, and copies of them circulated among the inhabitants in general, and the services in the parish churches conducted in that language, it might have been a living speech to this very day, and possibly might have continued to be spoken for many future generations. And the labour and difficulty attending the study of a defunct speech, with the view of acquiring a competent knowledge of it, would have been avoided.

This article cannot be concluded in better terms than in the language of the following reflection on the decline and extinction of the Cornish, taken from *The Illustrated Itinerary of the County of Cornwall*, by Cyrus Redding :—

“ In the death of a language there is something painfully striking—as being the medium through which, for perished ages, perished generations of men communicated alike wants the most trivial, or the thoughts that wander through eternity.”

LLALLAWG.

## DIWEDD

Gweler hefyd y tudalen ar ffurf tudalen IAH = Iaith Arwyddnodi Huperdestun / Hypertext Markup Language = HTML:

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