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PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

THE CORNISH LANGUAGE.

By HENRY JENNER, Esq.

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CORNISH LANGUAGE.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE PHILOLOGICAL
SOCIETY, MARCH 21st, 1873.

BY
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THE

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THE CORNISH LANGUAGE.

By HENRY JENNER, Esq.

A good deal has been done by the Philological Society on the subject of the Cornish Language, and the present paper aims chiefly at supplementing this, to some extent, by a general survey of the grammar, literature, and history of the language.

I.

The Cornish Language joins with the Welsh and Breton in composing the Cimbric branch of the Celtic family. It holds its place, philologically as well as geographically, about midway between the other two, inclining more if anything to the Breton than to the Welsh. In some points it differs from both of them, but these differences will mostly be found to arise, either from a greater contact with English, or from the fact of the language having been confined almost entirely to the lower and uneducated classes, and thus becoming more easily corrupted. The chief peculiarity seems to be a general tendency to soften down the hard and harsh sounds that still remain in the other Celtic languages. This tendency, preserving exactly the same form, may be traced

from the earlier records of Cornish down to its last stages, the effects thereof of course gradually increasing. Though very general, the changes may be easily reduced to a very small number.

a. Where in Welsh a word ended with *d* or *t*, in Cornish it ended with *s*, as *Gwynt* (wind), Cornish *Gwyns*. *Tad* (father), C. *Tas*. *Nant* (valley), C. *Nans*. Eventually this change was extended to a *d* or *t* in the middle of a word, as *cresy* (believe), for *credu*. *Dewsys* (divinity), for *Duwdod*.

β. In later Cornish this *s* became *j* or soft *g*, as *cregy* for *cresy*; *carenja* for *carensa*; and this change of *s* or *z* to *j* is still prevalent in names of places in Cornwall. Thus there is a farm near St. Columb the name of which is always spelt and occasionally pronounced *Trebolzue*, but it is almost invariably called by the people of the neighbourhood *Trebijew*. Thus again *Carn-idjack* and *Carn-izeck* are used indiscriminately for the same place (a hill in Zennor parish near St. Ives).

γ. The guttural *ch*, particularly at the end of a word, becomes *h*, and eventually vanishes altogether. This belongs to the second stage of the language, and applies to other words besides those derived from Welsh. In the earlier books one finds *ch* and *gh* constantly. The word *Bochodoc* (poor) is a very good instance of this and the preceding change. In the Cottonian Vocabulary we find *Bochodoc*, later on, *Bochosoc*, *Bohesoc*, and *Bochesoc*, then a little later *Bohajeck*, and lastly (in William Bodenor's letter of 1776) *Boadjack*.

δ. Where in Welsh or Early Cornish an *n* or *m* occurred, later Cornish had *dn* and *bm*, as *Pedn* for *Pen*; *Cabm* for *Cam*; and this change was even applied to borrowed English words, for one finds *bargadnia* (to bargain). The earliest instance of this occurs in the beginning of the sixteenth century, but by the seventeenth it had become quite common.

ε. Occasionally an initial *t* becomes *ch* (pronounced as in the English word *church*). Thus the Welsh and Old Cornish *ty* (a house) becomes *chy*. A similar change may be observed in the Manx language.

The Welsh *ll* is not known, unless the *thl* in the name

Beheathlan may be looked upon as an attempt at representing it, and the initial *y*, so common in Welsh words derived from Latin ones beginning with an *s* followed by another consonant, as in *yscrifenu*, *yspryd*, etc., is never found, so that the Celtic dislike to pronouncing an initial *s* under such circumstances (as mentioned by Prof. Max Müller) does not apply to Cornish.

These are the chief differences that distinguish Cornish from Welsh. A few grammatical ones will appear in the following short sketch of the grammar.

The first thing that strikes one in the grammar of a Celtic language is the system of what is called *Initial Mutation*, that is to say, certain partly euphonic and partly grammatical changes of the first letter of a word. Those in Cornish incline rather more to the Breton than to the Welsh. The latter has three classes of mutation—(1). The *Middle* (I use the names given to them in Rowland's Grammar), in which P, C, T become B, G, D; B, G, D become V (written F), G omitted, Dh (or *th* as in *thy*, written *dd*); M becomes V, and *ll* and *rh* respectively *l* and *r*. In Cornish and Breton the first mutation is the same as this, except that in both of them *ll* and *rh* are wanting, and in Breton *D* becomes *Z*, and *G* (unless followed by *w*, when it is omitted as in Welsh) becomes *c'h* (guttural). The second class in Welsh is called *Nasal*; in this P, C, T become *mh*, *ngh*, *nh*; and B, G, D, *m*, *ng*, and *n* (the other letters do not take this form). This class is entirely wanting in Cornish and Breton, unless one may consider the solitary case of the mutation of *doar* (the earth) to *noar*, which occurs in Cornish, to be an instance of it. The third class in Welsh is the *Aspirated*, in which P, C, T become *ph* (*f*), *ch*, *th* (the other letters remaining unchanged). In Cornish the only difference is that C becomes H, and in Breton T becomes Z. In addition to these mutations there occurs, in both Breton and Cornish, a form called by Zeuss, in his "Grammatica Celtica," *Provection*. By this B, G, D, take a sort of backward change into the corresponding surd forms, P, C, T. The only approach to this sort of thing in Welsh seems to be the change of

ll, rh, to l, r, and a final mutation in the case of compounds, as, from Tebyg is formed Tebycach, gwlyb, gwlypach, Tlawd, Tlotach.

The rules for the use of mutations are almost identical in Cornish and Breton, but Welsh seems to differ considerably from both of them. In the later times of Cornish these mutations became very irregular, and it often happened that words were only known through one of their mutations, the radical form being never found.

The definite article in Cornish, as in Breton, is *an*. It is indeclinable, and when preceded by a particle ending with a vowel, always coalesces with it, as *than* for *tha an* (to the), *han* for *ha an* (and the). In other cases the conjunction *ha* (and) becomes *hag* before a vowel.

Substantives.—In later Cornish these were indeclinable as to case, cases being formed by means of prepositions; but in the earlier stages of the language there frequently appears a genitive formed by modifying the last vowel. Thus *mark* (a horse), *Rèn verh* (a horse's mane). In later Cornish, and generally in earlier, the genitive was formed by placing the noun in apposition to the preceding word, as in Welsh, it being noted that the preceding noun does not take an article. The plural has several forms. Lhuyd enumerates five.—1. The commonest in *ow* (like the Welsh *au* and Breton *ou*), as *lyfyr* (a book), pl. *lyfyrow*. 2. In *i* or *y*, as *arluth* (a lord), pl. *arluthy*. 3. In *ion* (Welsh *ion*, Breton *ien*), with the last vowel modified, as *mab* (a son), pl. *mebion*. 4. In *eth* (later Cornish *es* or *ez*), with the vowel modified (Welsh and Breton *edd*), as *ail* (an angel), pl. *eleth*; *floh* (a child), pl. *flehes*. 5. By modification of the vowel, as *men* (a stone), pl. *meyn*; *broder* (a brother), pl. *breder*. A few words originally English, as *honours*, *scriptours*, *persons*, etc., form the plural in *s*. There is also a dual, referring only (as in Welsh and Breton) to double parts of the body. This is compounded by prefixing the numeral *dyw* or *du* (two). Thus, *duscoth* (shoulders), from *scoth*, *dewlagas* (eyes), *deuglyn* (knees), *dufron* (breasts), etc.

Adjectives usually follow their substantives, and form their

feminine by taking the *middle* mutation. Thus, *Den braz* (a great man), *Benen vraz* (a great woman).

The comparative ended originally in *agh*, which later became *ah* and *a*, as *tek* (fair), *tekagh*, *tekah*, and *teka*. The superlative takes *a*, as *uhel* (high), *uhella* (highest).

In numerals the chief peculiarity is that the nouns following them are always in the singular, as *pemp lyfyr* (five books), not *pemp lyfyrow*. The curious clumsy method of forming the numerals between fifteen and twenty in Welsh (*pymtheg*, *un ar pymtheg*, *dau ar pymtheg*, etc.) is not found in Cornish, these numbers being formed in the ordinary way. Andrew Borde, writing in 1542, has the following curious fact about Cornish numerals, but I have doubts about his accuracy. "No Cornyshman doth number above 30, and when they have told 30, they do begin agayne, one, two, three, and so forth, and when they have recounted to a hondred they say *kans*, and if they number to a 1000 they say *mil*."

The personal pronouns may be tabulated as follows:—

	1 Nominative.	2 Accusative, or as <i>moi, toi</i> , etc.	3 Combined with a particle ending in a vowel.	4 Combined with a preposition.
Sing. First Person	mi, me.	vy, evi	'm	'f, 'm as <i>yynof, thym</i>
Second "	ty	sy, gy, dy	'th, 'd	's as <i>yynos, thys</i> .
Third (masc.)	e, ef	ef, o	'n	'o as <i>yyno, thocho</i> .
Third (fem.)	hi, hai	hy, y	's	'y as <i>yyny, thythy</i> .
Plur. First "	nei, ny	ny	'n	'n as <i>yynn, thyn</i> .
Second "	why	why	's	'ough, 'eugh, as <i>yynough, theugh</i> .
Third "	gy, dshei	y	's, 'ns	'e, 'ns, as <i>yne, thythyns</i> .

The possessive pronouns are:—

Ma, ow (my), taking the aspirate mutation, as *ma* or *ow thermyn* (*termyn*), my time
Da, the, tha (thy), taking the middle mutation, as *the dermyn*, thy time.

Y (his), with the middle mutation, as *y dermyn*, his time.

Y (her), with the aspirate mutation, as *y thermyn*, her time.

Agan, later *gan*, and *gen* (our), without mutation, as *agan termyn*, our time.

Agas, later *gys*, and *gas* (your), without mutation, as *agas termyn*, your time.

Aga, ge, and *gei* (their), with the aspirate mutation, as *aga thermyn*, their time.

Frequently the noun with which these pronouns agree is followed by the second form of the personal pronoun, as

Agan tas ny (Our Father), in the Cornish version of the Lord's Prayer.

The ordinary relative pronoun is *a, neb* or *nep*. The latter seems to have become *leb* in later Cornish. A construction similar to the Hebrew use of אֲשֶׁר when in the accusative is often found with these. Thus, א thanfonas E, "whom he sent," (lit. "whom he sent him," אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַח אֹתוֹ).

The verb resembles the Breton rather than the Welsh in its arrangement, though in its personal terminations it inclines rather to the latter. It has three forms of conjugation, which may be termed the Inflected, the Impersonal, and the Compound.

1. The Inflected form is composed of the root with certain personal terminations, very similar in most instances to the third and fourth forms of the personal pronouns, suffixed. The following is an example of the first tense (used for both present and future) of the verb *caré* (to love) in Welsh, Cornish, and Breton.

Cornish. Caraf, ceryth, car. ceryn, carough, carons.

Welsh. Caraf, cari, car. carwn, carwch, carant.

Breton. Karann, kerez, kar. karomp, kerit, karont.

2. The Impersonal form is made up of the personal pronoun (first form) joined to the third person singular of the requisite tense of the verb by the particle *a*, the verb being in the middle mutation, as *mi a gar, ty a gar*, etc. I use the name generally given to it in Breton grammars, but *uninflected* would perhaps be a better word, for the pronoun is decidedly a *nominative*. This form was very common in the later stages of the language, and, with the compound, almost entirely superseded the inflected. In Breton a precisely similar form is used, but in Welsh it seems to be confined chiefly to the passive and interrogative.

3. The Compound form is made up by means of the auxiliary verb *gurthil* (to do). The impersonal or inflected form of this is joined to the infinitive of the verb. It does not imply any emphasis, as in English, and is sometimes even found in the future; thus *guraf care*, I will (do) love;

mi a 'ura care, I love, etc. Besides this, there is a compound future made up of the verb *menni* (to wish), used in much the same way as *gurthil*. This belongs to the later period of the language, for though the verb is found in the Ordinalia and Mount Calvary used in such a manner as that it might be translated as a future, still there is always some idea of emphasis upon the *will*. Thus in the Ordinalia, Pharaoh, referring to the Children of Israel, says, "ME A VYN *aga sywe, ha warbarth age lathe*" (I will follow them and altogether kill them). And again, "*Ni VENNAF onan sparye*" (I will not spare one). And in the second stanza of "Mount Calvary," "*Suel A VYNNO bos sylwys*" (whoever will be saved), an exactly parallel instance to the use of *vult* in the first verse of the Athanasian Creed. In the later Cornish writings this form becomes simply a future, and entirely takes the place of the first tense, which, as I mentioned before, was originally used as a future. Thus in the story of John of Chyanhur, given by Lhuyd (see Appendix), we find, "*Mi VEDN laveral diz*" (I will tell you), and in another 18th century specimen, "*Rag hedna VEDN bos cowsas*" (for that will be spoken).

In both these verbs, when used in the Impersonal, the *a* was dropped in later Cornish. Lhuyd gives *mi 'wrig guelaz* for *I did see* (thence contracted into *mi riguelaz*), not *mi a 'wrig guelaz*; and in the letter of William Bodenor (1776) we find *me 'rig deskys* for *I learnt*.

Pronunciation and Accent.—Of course the spelling in the old MSS. was very uncertain, the same word being spelt in all sorts of different ways; but this very circumstance makes it easier to judge of the pronunciation.

The vowels had much the same sounds as in Italian, with the addition of the sound represented in English by *aw*. This last was written variously, sometimes *o*, sometimes *aw*, and *oa*, and Lhuyd writes it by an inverted *a*. Thus we find *môs*, *moaz*, *mawz*, *mëz*, representing the same word. The consonants had much the same value as in English, excepting the guttural *ch* and *gh* (afterwards softened into *h*), and a certain confusion between *s* and *th*, which seems to point to a lispng pronunciation of *s*. The accent, as in

Welsh, was generally on the penultimate, never thrown further back, but sometimes, in dissyllables, on the *ultimate*,— a tendency still to be found in the Cornish pronunciation of English.

II.

The existing specimens of the literature of the Cornish language are not extensive. The earliest known MS. is a Latin and Cornish Vocabulary, in the Cottonian Collection in the British Museum. Next to this come the Miracle Plays in the Bodleian Library; the Poem of the Passion, generally known as "Mount Calvary"; the Life of St. Meriasek, a play recently discovered among the Peniarth MSS. by Mr. Whitley Stokes; "The Creation of the World," by William Jordan; and a number of songs, proverbs, and smaller pieces collected by William Gwavas and others in the early part of the last century. I will now give a short sketch of each of these MSS.

The Cottonian Vocabulary (Bibl. Cott. Vesp. A. xiv.).

This MS. was written a little anterior to the year 1200, as far as one can judge from the writing. It consists of about seven pages, preceded by a calendar containing the names of several Celtic saints, apparently in the same hand. The words are to a certain extent classified under various headings. It begins with heaven and earth, men and the various parts of the human body; then birds, beasts, and fishes, herbs, trees, and ecclesiastical terms; and lastly a number of adjectives. It has been claimed for both Welsh and Breton; but Lhuyd, in the Cornish preface to his *Archæologia Britannica*, shews it to be undoubtedly Cornish. The following is his criticism:—

"Besides these three MSS. above mentioned (those in the Bodleian), Mr. Anstis found in the Cottonian Library of London a British Vocabulary written many ages ago, and wrote to me about it. When I had seen the book, I knew very well that it was not a Welsh vocabulary, as it appeared by the Latin title, 'Vocabularium Wallicum' written at the end of it, but a Cornish vocabulary. This will be

admitted, it seems to me, by any British reader who will look at the translation of these Latin words:—Angelus, *ail*, Stella, *steren*, Membrum, *esel*, Supercilium, *abrans*, Collum, *conna*, Palatum, *stefenic*, Mentum, *elgeht*, Tibia, *elescher*, Puer, *flogh*, Senex, *coth*, Bufo, *crinnoc*, Rana, *guilschin*, and many others which are not known among us Welsh folk.” Then he goes on to dispose of the Breton theory, by giving examples of non-Celtic words which are undoubtedly of Early English or Saxon origin, thus:—Comes, *yurl*, Lector, *reddior*, Hamus, *hyc*, Fiala, *harfel*, Saltator, *Lappior*, Sartor, *sewyad*, Contentiosus, *strifor*, Fibula, *streing*, Raptor, *robbior*, and others, and by giving a few words which differ entirely from the Breton, as *Glastannen* (an oak), Breton *gwezen deró*, *Eythinen* (a bramble), Breton *lann*, *Scovarnec* (a hare), Breton *gád*, *Mín* (a kid), Breton *gavr bian*.

The greater part of the rest of the volume is taken up with lives of what are called in the modern index *Welsh* saints, but really in most instances *Cornish*, and clearly the work of a Cornish writer. In these occur occasionally names of places, the meanings of which are given in Latin, and these, as far as I have seen, are invariably Cornish. One of these lives, that of St. Cadoc, mentions what it pleases to call the *Punic* name of St. Michael’s Mount, viz. *Dinsol*, but this it does not venture to interpret. The vocabulary has been printed by Zeuss in his *Grammatica Celtica*, as it stands in the original, and by Norris, with his *Cornish Dramas*, arranged alphabetically, and Lhuyd and Pryce have incorporated it with their vocabularies.

The Poem of Mount Calvary (Harl. MS. 1782).

This is a versified account of the Passion of Christ, and consists of about 2000 lines divided into stanzas of eight seven-syllabled lines. The story begins with the Temptation, going on almost immediately to the week of the Passion. Most of the incidents are taken directly from the Four Gospels, but one or two (such as the legend of the holes bored in the Cross, and the curious account of the death of Judas) are taken from either the Pseudo-Gospel of Nico-

demus or some similar work. There are five MS. copies of this book in existence. One (probably the original) in the British Museum, two in the Bodleian Library, one in the Gwavas Collection of Cornish writings in the British Museum, and another in private hands (Mr. Whitley Stokes, in his reprint of the poem for the Philological Society, states that he was unable to discover the present owner). The Museum copy is a small quarto on vellum, written in a by no means good hand of the fifteenth century. It is embellished with rude pictures, representing the Trinity, Adam and Eve, and the various incidents of the Passion, somewhat in the form of what are usually called the "Stations of the Cross," and in one instance there is an attempt at a translation at the bottom of the page. Besides these copies, there is a fragment of one with a Welsh and English translation (the latter being part of the translation made by John Keigwin) in Add. MS. 14,934 in the British Museum. This is dated 1759, and forms part of Dr. L. Morris's Welsh Collections. As the poem has been published for the Philological Society already, it will not be necessary for me to describe it more fully.

The Ordinalia (Bodleian Library).

These consist of three Dramas, collectively known under this title. The first play, called *Origo Mundi*, begins with the Creation of the World, the Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, etc., this being followed by the building of the Ark and the Flood, the story of the Temptation of Abraham closing the first act. The second act gives us the history of Moses, and the third represents the story of David and of the building of Solomon's Temple, curiously ending with a description of the martyrdom of St. Maximilla, as a Christian (!), by the Bishop placed in charge of the Temple by Solomon. Villemarqué, in the Preface to his translation of the Breton Miracle Play, *Barzud braz Jezuz*, conjectures that this last incident may refer to the death of Joan of Arc (particularly as the Bishop is made to speak a mixture of French and

English), and this of course might tend to fix the date of the play. The second play represents the history of Christ from the Temptation to the Crucifixion, and this goes on without interruption into the third play, which gives an account of the Resurrection and Ascension, with the death of Pilate. As in the Poem of Mount Calvary, the Pseudo-Gospel of Nicodemus is largely drawn upon.

The metre of the three plays varies considerably. At first the stanzas consist of eight seven-syllabled lines rhyming alternately, the same pair of rhymes being continued throughout the whole stanza. Thus :—

(Deus Pater loquitur) Eñ tās ā nēf y'm gylwyr
 Formyer püb trā a výt gurys
 Onan ha try on yn gvyr
 En tas, ha'n map, ha'n spyrys
 Ha hethyw me a thesyр
 Dre ou grath dalleth an beys
 Y lavaraf nef ha tyr
 Bethens formyys orth ou brys

The next metre that appears consists of six-lined stanzas, rhyming AABAAB. Thus :—

(Deus Pater loq.) Nynsyw da yn pur certan
 Bones un den y honan
 Heb cowyth py cowethes.
 Ke growet war an dor gulan
 Ha cosk byth na saf yn ban
 Er na fo cowethes gures.

Occasionally the third and sixth lines are only four-syllabled, as in the following :—

(Lucifer loq.) Oṽ bännēth theughwhȳ püb prȳs
 Mār thā ȳ wreugh ōw nȳgȳs
 Prēst ȳn püb lē
 Gorreugh an fals nygethys
 Gans Abel a desempys
 The yssethe.

Some of the stanzas have eight lines, rhyming AABAAAB, and there occurs one instance of five-syllabled verses.

Aha Belsebue aha
 On otte un purvers da
 Lēmŷn whārfēthŷs
 Awos ol roweth Adam
 Bys thy'n umma yn un lam
 Ef ā vŷth kŷrhŷs.

A few passages are written in a four-syllabled metre, generally with alternate rhymes, though sometimes rhyming AABAAB.

The language of this play is very similar to that of the Vocabulary, very few words being much modified or corrupted, but the MS. itself is of about the middle of the fifteenth century. The grammatical structure agrees almost entirely with the Poem of Mount Calvary, and the mixture of Saxon words is comparatively small, in fact, scarcely so great as in the Welsh of the present day, except of course where whole sentences of English occur.

The Life of St. Meriasek.

This play, which was written in the year 1504, as appears by the colophon, was discovered by Mr. Whitley Stokes a year or two ago among the MSS. of the Peniarth Library. It represents the life and death of Meriasek, called in Breton Meriadec, the son of a Duke of Brittany. The language of the play is later than that of the Ordinalia, the admixture of English being greater, while a few of the literal changes, such as the substitution of *g* (soft) for *s*, and in one instance (*Bednath* for *Bennath*) the change of *nn* to *dn*, begin to appear. The grammar has not changed much, but the use of the compound and impersonal forms is more frequent, and the verb *menni* has begun to be used as a simple future auxiliary. The metre is much the same as that of the Ordinalia, so it will be unnecessary to describe it more fully.

The Creation of the World, with Noah's Flood,
by William Jordan, 1611.

This play marks the beginning of a new period in the language. The influence of English has been greater, as one sees by the increased number of borrowed words, and by the more frequent use of the before-mentioned verb *menni* or *medni* as a future auxiliary. The gutturals have mostly been softened down, the change of *nn*, *mm*, to *dn*, *bm*, has become general, and the substitution of *j* or soft *g* for *s* or *z* seems to be the rule. The plan of spelling has altered, and has very much conformed itself to the English use, as in the instance of mute final *e*'s for lengthening the preceding vowel, etc. The construction of the play is very like that of the first act of the *Origo Mundi* (the metres are exactly the same), and the author has sometimes borrowed whole sentences from it, but as a whole Jordan's play possesses far greater literary merit. Occasionally sentences of several lines in English are introduced, and it is curious to note that whenever this is the case they are invariably given to Lucifer or one of his angels, and in such a manner as to seem as if the author meant to imply that English was the natural language of such beings, and that they only spoke Cornish when on their good behaviour, relapsing into their own tongue whenever they became more than ordinarily excited or vicious. Four complete copies of this play are known, two of which are in the Bodleian, one in the British Museum (Harl. MS. 1867), and a fourth in private hands, (bound up with the MS. of "Mount Calvary" already mentioned). Besides these there is a fragment, in a similar hand to that of the complete Museum copy (probably that of John Keigwin, who translated the play in 1693 at the request of Sir Jonathan Trelawney, then Bishop of Exeter), in the Gwavas collection in the British Museum. In a list of books published in *Welsh* (as it is expressed), given in one of Bagford's collections for a History of Printing (Lansdowne MS. 808, British Museum), I find mention made of this play. No date is given, but the names of the books are

arranged chronologically, and this comes between one of 1642 and one of 1662.

The Gwavas Collection (Add. MS. 28,554).

William Gwavas, a gentleman living at Newlyn, near Penzance, in the beginning of the last century, collected a number of songs, proverbs, epigrams, etc., which (bound up in a volume with notes on the language and a few letters) were presented to the British Museum in 1870.

In this volume there are several short songs, some by one Jenkins, of Alverton, the last poet of the language; another (which Polwhele compares to the 27th Idyll of Theocritus, to which it certainly bears strong resemblance) may be easily recognised as the *original* of a well-known nursery-song, though an exact translation of its Cornish form would not be very edifying for nursery use, some of the verses being not exactly "proper." The first verse runs thus:—

Ple a wra why mos, môz, fettow, tek,
Gen 'gas bedgeth gwin, ha 'gas blew melyn,
Mos tha'n ventan, sarra whek
Rag delkyew seve 'wra moyssy tek.

(LITERAL TRANSLATION.)

Where do you go, pretty maid, he said,
With your fair face and your yellow hair?
Going to the well, sweet sir,
For leaves of strawberries make maidens fair.

Then there are two or three versions of the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Commandments, a translation of the first and third chapters of Genesis, and of the fourth and seventh of St. Matthew, of the Hundredth Psalm, Sternhold and Hopkins' version (almost literal), and of King Charles's Letter to the People of Cornwall, together with a few other scraps of no particular importance. The notes accompanying these are sometimes very good, and the whole volume is of the highest importance to a student of the language. Of course a great many of the pieces, being composed when Cornish

was in a dying state, shew a very conspicuous absence of anything like grammatical accuracy, and a considerable mixture of English.

It is said that a Life of St. Columba of Cornwall, the patroness of the two parishes of St. Columb, once existed in Cornish, but no remains of it have as yet been discovered. These, then, represent the whole literature of the language.

III.

Until the time of Henry VIII. we have no reliable information about the state or extent of the language. It is highly probable, from the number of names of places still retaining undoubtedly Celtic names, and retaining them in an undoubtedly Celtic form, that until at least the fifteenth century the Tamar was the boundary of English and Cornish. In the reign of Henry VIII. we have an account given by Andrew Borde in his "Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge," written in 1542. He says, "In Cornwall is two speches, the one is naughty Englysshe, and the other is Cornysse speche. And there be many men and women the which cannot speake one worde of Englysshe, but all Cornyshe." He then gives the Cornish numerals and a few sentences of ordinary conversation. These are much mixed with English, and were probably such as might have been heard on the borders of Devon, for he probably did not penetrate very far, being doubtless deterred by the impossibility of obtaining drinkable beer, a circumstance which seems to have much exercised his mind in describing Cornwall.

Then we find, as mentioned by Carew, Polwhele, Davis Gilbert, Borlase, and others, that in the time of Henry VIII. Dr. John Moreman, the parson of Menheniot (a small town near Liskeard) was the first to teach his parishioners the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Commandments in English, these having been "used in Cornish beyond all remembrance." This same Dr. Moreman is mentioned in the petition (or rather *demand*) presented to Edward VI., by the Cornwall

and Devon insurgents, in favour of the old form of worship. One paragraph of this is as follows:—"We will not receive the new service, because it is but like a Christmas game. We will have our old service of Matins, Mass, Evensong, and Procession as it was before; and we the Cornish, *whereof certain of us understand no English*, do utterly refuse the new service."

In Carew's Survey of Cornwall, written about 1600, we read, however, that the language had been driven into the uttermost parts of the county, and that very few were ignorant of English, though many affected to know only their own tongue. It seems, however, from what he says further on, that the *guaries*, or miracle plays, were then commonly acted in Cornish, and that the people flocked to them in large numbers, and evidently understood them.

In a survey of Cornwall, by John Norden, entitled, "*Speculum Magnæ Britanniae, pars Cornwall*," addressed to James I., the following account of the language is given.

"The Cornish people for the moste parte are descended of British stocke, though muche mixed since with the Saxon and Norman bloude, but untill of late years retayned the British speache uncorrupted as theirs of Wales is. For the South Wales man understandeth not perfectly the North Wales man, and the North Wales man little of the Cornish, but the South Wales man much. The pronounciation of the tongue differs in all, but the Cornish is far the easier to be pronounced." (Here he goes on to compare the sound of it with the Welsh, to the disadvantage of the latter.)
 "But of late the Cornish men have much conformed themselves to the use of the English tongue, and their English is equal to the best, especially in the Eastern partes; even from Truro eastward is in a manner wholly Englishe. In the west parte of the county, as in the Hundreds of Penwith and Kerrier, the Cornishe tongue is mostly in use, and yet it is to be marvelled that though husband and wife, parents and children, master and servauntes, doe mutually communicate in their native language, yet there is none of them but in manner is able to converse with a stranger in the English

tongue, unless it be some obscure persons that seldom converse with the better sort."

The next account we find in a diary of the Civil War, written by Richard Symonds, one of the Royalist army in Cornwall in 1644. He gives a short vocabulary of common words, together with four short sentences. To these he appends the following note:—

"The language is spoken altogeather at Goonhilly (in Meneage, not far from the Lizard), and about Pendennis and the Land's End they speak no English. All beyond Truro they speak the Cornish language."

Much about the same time the Vicar of St. Feock, near Falmouth, Chaplain to Pendennis Castle during its siege by the rebel troops, was in the habit of using Cornish for the words of administration of the Sacrament, because the old people did not understand English.

Writing in the latter part of the reign of Charles II., William Scawen, a Cornish antiquary, gives a long account of the state of the language in his time, in a treatise in which he laments the decline thereof (accounting for it by no less than sixteen elaborate reasons). According to this the inhabitants of the western promontories of Meneage and Penwith, or the Lizard and Land's End peninsulas, were in the habit of speaking the language, so much so that the parson of Landewednack, Mr. Francis Robinson, used to preach in Cornish, as being the only tongue well understood by his parishioners. Scawen also mentions one or two Cornish MSS. that have since disappeared, one of which he calls a "Matins," which I conjecture to have been an attempt to translate the service of the Prayer Book into Cornish.

The next authority is that excellent Celtic scholar, Dr. Edward Lhuyd, sometime Librarian of the Bodleian, who published his *Archæologia Britannica* in the year 1707. He gives the following list of the parishes in which the language was spoken (I give the present usual spelling of their names):—St. Just, Paul, Buryan, Sennen, St. Levan, Morva, Sancreed, St. Madron, Zennor, Towednack, St. Ives,

Lelant, Ludgvan, and Gulval, and along the coast from the Land's End to St. Keverne (this would include St. Breage, Germoe, Mullion, Gunwalloe, Ruan Major and Minor, Landewednack, Grade, and St. Keverne), adding that many of the inhabitants of these parishes, especially the gentry, do not understand it, "there being no need, as every Cornishman speaks English."

Then the language quickly receded, until, in 1735, there were only left a few old people at Mousehole, Paul, Newlyn, St. Just, and other parishes along the coast between Penzance and the Land's End, who even understood any of it. It was about this time that Gwavas and Tonkin made their collections on the subject, and the language they found was a most irregular jargon, the chief peculiarity of which was a striking uncertainty of the speakers as to where one word left off and another began.

In 1746 Capt. Barrington, brother of Daines Barrington the antiquary, took a sailor from Mount's Bay, who spoke Cornish, to the opposite coast of Brittany, and found him fairly able to make himself understood; and in 1768 Daines Barrington himself writes an account of an interview with the celebrated Mrs. Dolly Pentreath, popularly supposed to have been the last person who spoke the language. Daines Barrington also mentions a letter received in 1776, written in Cornish and English, from William Bodenor, a fisherman of Mousehole. The writer states that not more than four or five people in his town, and these old folk of 80 years of age, could speak Cornish (see Appendix). Dolly Pentreath died in 1778; but both Pryce, in his *Archæologia Cornu-Britannica* (1790), and Whitaker, Vicar of Ruan-Lanihorne, in his *Supplement to Polwhele's History of Cornwall* (1799), mention the fact of two or three people still living who were able to speak Cornish, though theirs is only hearsay evidence. Some time ago I came upon a letter in the British Museum, addressed to Sir Joseph Banks, dated 1791, in which the writer mentions his own father as the only living man who could speak it.

Thus the old language died, but its ghost is still lingering

about in the names of places and people, and in a few words here and there mixed up with the talk of the common people, more especially in mining terms. Its influence, too, is clearly visible in the accent and pronunciation of the people, and in various idioms and expressions. The curious use of the verb *to do* as an ordinary auxiliary, and without any sign of emphasis, in fact quite unaccentuated, is, I think, certainly a relic of the use of *gurthil* described above, as "they *dō* *sáy*," for "they say," etc. Again, one finds phrases literally translated into English, as "French nuts" for "walnuts" (Cornish *Cwyfyn frence*), "Whitnack" for weasel (Cornish *Codna gwidn* = white neck), "Black-head," a boil (Cornish *Pedn du*), and sometimes mixed expressions, such as "cheeld vean" (*little child*, vocative), and others. I have also noted down a few words in common use which are undoubtedly Cornish, and I have no doubt many more might be found in the extreme west, these being mostly from the neighbourhood of St. Columb, and almost all of them words which I have myself heard used. *Cowal* (a basket), *Bowjey* (a sheepfold, *Bow-chy*=cow-house), *Quoit* (a druidical stone), *Gweens* (periwinkles), *Croggans* (limpets), *Guilskin* or *Wilkin* (a frog), *Bal* (a collection of mines, *to go to Bal* = to go to work in a mine), *Wheal* (a mine, from *huela*, to work), *Stean* (tin), *Kibbal* (a mine bucket; Breton *kibal*), *Pryan Ore* (loose ore mixed with *Pryu*, i.e. clay), *Ore* (from *an noar* = the earth, an irregular mutation of *doar*, earth, which ultimately was spelt *an oar*), *Tomals* or *Tummuls* (heaps, probably originally from the Latin *tumulus*), *Soce* (a sort of vocative equivalent to "old fellow," probably originally from *socius*), *Sew* (in the expression "gone to sew" = gone dry, applied to a cow, *dry* in Cornish being *segh*, or *zeh*), *Pure* (used in the sense of *very*).

In local names Cornish words are the rule, those beginning with the well-known *Tre* (a house or town, or perhaps more exactly what is now called in Cornwall a "town-place," i.e. a farm with its outbuildings), *Pol* (a pool), *Rose* (a valley), *Car* (a fortress or city), *Lan* (a church), *Pen* (a head), greatly predominating. In making researches for a glossary of

Cornish names, Dr. Bannister, of St. Day, near Gwennap, Cornwall, collected upwards of 2000 names beginning with *Tre*, and various large numbers, ranging from 1000 to 200, with each of the other prefixes.¹ Many names have been curiously corrupted into similar sounding English ones, often thereby giving rise to strange and far-fetched legends. Thus the rocks off St. Keverne, now called the *Manacles*, were once *Mên eglos* (the church rocks, probably from their shape). *Brown Willy* (a hill near Camelford) was *Bryn uhella* (the highest hill); *Marketjew* was *Marghasiow* (the markets, another plural being *Marhasion* or *Marazion*²); *The Nine Maidens* (a row of Druidical Stones, giving a name to a hamlet in St. Columb parish) was *Naw Medn* (the nine stones); *Penny come quick* (another name for Falmouth, about the origin of which a very improbable story is told) was *Pen an cwm cuic* (the head of the creek valley); *Come to good* (near St. Mawes) was *Cwm ty coed* (the valley of the wood house); *Mousehole* (a place I have already had occasion to mention more than once) was *Môz hayle* (the Maiden's brook). In the Scilly Isles there is a rock called the *Man of War*, where they even go so far as to point out what, by a stretch of imagination, may be called the three masts, but there is little doubt that this was originally only *Men an Vor* (the great rock). Then there is another class of names, in which the Cornish and an English translation thereof have been combined, but these are not common. Such are *Castle-andinas* (a British encampment near St. Columb), the *Main Stone* or *Men Stone*, the *Hayle River*, *Pentire Point* or *Headland* (*Pen tir* = head land), and a few others. To shew how very general the use of Cornish names is, I may mention that in the large parish of St. Columb (I give this one because I know it best), out of the twenty or more names of hamlets and farms, I do not remember a single one of other than Cornish origin. There is, however, a great tendency to alter the names to English ones; and looking at the Ordnance Survey, I find many places, that I have known of all

¹ Max Müller's Chips from a German Workshop.

² Max Müller.

my life by Cornish names, figuring under some new appellation.

The pronunciation of Cornish names has been very well preserved, particularly in the case of compounds, where the compounded character is kept clearly visible, so as to make the component parts appear almost like two words. In such names as *Tregurrian*, *Penryn*, *Trekening*, *Nanswhydden*, *Nanskivel*, *Carloggas*, *Bosworgy*, *Bedruthan*, *Halvear*, *Coswarth*, *Carworgy*, *Lanhengy*, and many others, the prefixes, *Tre*, *Pen*, *Car*, *Cos*, *Nans*, etc., are clearly regarded as separate words, and accentuated accordingly.

There is one curious indirect effect of the former existence of the Cornish language. The English spoken by the lower classes, instead of being a dialect derived straight from Saxon, and growing up side by side with classical English, as is the case with most provincial English, is remarkably good and pure, and this is easily accounted for by the fact that English was introduced at a comparatively modern period by the upper classes. I was particularly struck by this when visiting the Lizard last summer. The English spoken there, where Cornish had prevailed until so very lately, is, as far as *words* are concerned, particularly good, though the accent and tone are peculiar. In the translations of the Song of Solomon into various English dialects, made under the direction of Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte, the Cornish version differs less than any from the Authorised Version, indeed the chief peculiarity of Cornish-English is the constant use of words in the sense that they had in the time that our translation of the Bible was made.

This, then, is all that can be found at present on the subject of the Cornish language. I have done much more in the way of *compiling* than of originating anything, for the subject has been pretty well exhausted by other writers; and unless some new book should turn up, very little of any importance remains to be done.

I ought, perhaps, to mention that I have been greatly indebted to the following books for a great deal of infor-

mation upon this subject, and they will certainly prove very useful to future students of the Cornish language:—

The Cornish Drama, with a sketch of Cornish Grammar. By Edwin Norris. Oxford, 1859.

Lexicon Cornu-Britannicum. By the Rev. R. Williams, of Rhydygroesau (Llandoverly and London, 1865). This is a most excellent work, and invaluable to the student of Celtic languages in general.

Dr. Whitley Stokes's editions of "Mount Calvary," Jordan's "Creation," and the Life of St. Meriasek.

Dr. Edward Lhuyd's Archæologia Britannica, 1707. This is a very useful book, though somewhat marred by an eccentric system of spelling.

APPENDIX.

SPECIMENS OF THE CORNISH LANGUAGE AT VARIOUS PERIODS.

15th century (the end of the play, Origo Mundi).

Y vennath though yn tyen	His blessing to you wholly
Keffrys gorryth ha benen	As well to men and women
Flogholeth	(And to) children;
An guare yu due lymmy	The play is done now,
Ha the welas an passyon	And to see the passion
A Jhesus hep gorholeth	Of Jesus without delay
A worthevys Crys ragon	Which Christ suffered for us,
A vorowe deug a dermyn	To-morrow come in time;
Hag eus pub dre	And go all (of you) home. [pray,
A barth a'n Tas, Menstrel a ras	In the name of the Father, minstrels, I
Pebough whare.	Pipe at once.

Early 17th century (the end of Jordan's "Creation").

Dewhe a vorowe a dermyn	Come to-morrow in time,
Why a weall matters pur vras	You shall see matters very great
Ha redempeon grauntys	And redemption granted
Der vercy a Thew an Tase	Through the mercy of God the Father
Tha sawya neb es kellys	To save him who is lost.
Menstrels, growgh theny peba	Minstrels, do to us pipe,
May hallan warbarthe downssya	That we may together dance,
Del ew an vanar ha'n geys.	As is the manner and the sport (guise).

Circ. 1700 (from a Cornish story given by Lhuyd and Pryce).

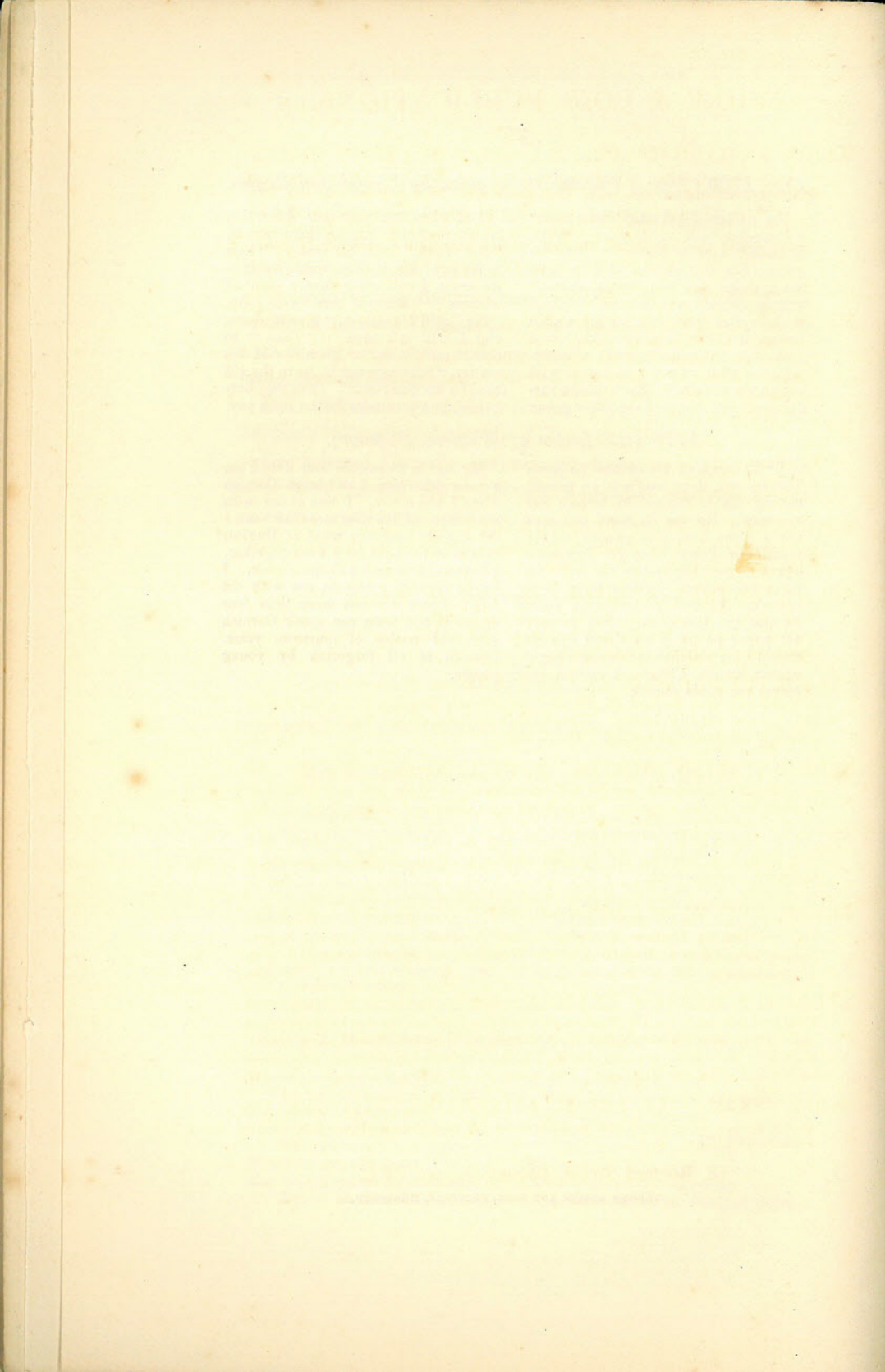
Ha pa tera diuad an vledan e vester a disquedaz daedo an trei pens. "Mîr, Dzhuan," med e vester, "ybma de guber; bez mar menta rei dem arta, me a deska diz ken pointa skians." "Dreu hedna," med Dzhuan. "Na," med e vester, "rei dem, ha me a vedn laveral diz." "Kemeran dan," med Dzhuan. "Nanna," med e vester, "Kamer with na rey gara an vor goth rag an vor noweth." Enna dshei a var-gidniarag bledan moy rag pokar guber.

And when the year was done, his master shewed to him the three pounds. "See, John," said his master, "here is thy pay; but if thou wilt give it to me again, I will teach thee a point of wisdom." "Bring it here," said John. "No," said his master, "give it to me, and I will tell thee." "Take it to thee," said John. "Then," said his master, "take care not to leave the old road for the new road." Then they bargained for a year more for the same pay.

1776 (the Letter of William Bodenor).

Bluth vee ewe try egance ha pemp Theatra vee dean boadjack an poscas, me rig deskys Cornouack termen me vee maw. Me vee de more gen cara vee a pemp dean moy en cock, me rig scantlower clowes eden ger Sowsnack cowes en cock rag sythen war bar. No rig a vee biscath gwellas lever Cornouack. Me deskey Cornouack mous da mor gen tees coath. Nag es moy vel pager pe pemp en dreau nye ell classia Cornish leben, poble coath pager egance blouth. Cornouack ewe all neceaves yen poble younck.

My age is threescore and five, I am a poor fisherman, I did learn Cornish when I was a boy. I was at sea with my father and five men more in a boat, I did scarcely hear one word of English spoken in the boat for a week together. I have not ever seen a Cornish book. I learnt Cornish going to sea with old folk. There are not more than four or five in our town can speak Cornish now, old people of fourscore years. Cornish is all forgotten by young people.



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