ARCHAEOLOGIA CORNU-BRITANNICA; OR, AN ESSAY TO PRESERVE THE ANCIENT CORNITH LANGUAGE; CONTAINING THE RUDIMENTS OF THAT DIALECT, IN A CORNISH GRAMMAR AND CORNISH-ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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WILLIAM PRYCE

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By WILLIAM PRYCE, M. D.

OF REDRUTH, CORNWALL.

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AND

CORNISH-ENGLISH VOCABULARY,

COMPILED FROM A VARIETY OF MATERIALS

WHICH HAVE BEEN

INACCESSIBLE TO ALL OTHER AUTHORS.

WHEREIN

The BRITISH ORIGINAL of ſome Thouſand ENGLISH WORDS in common Uſe is demonſtrated; together with that of the PROPER NAMES of moſt TOWNS, PARISHES, VILLAGES, MINES, and GENTLEMEN'S SEATS and FAMILIES, in WALES, CORNWALL, DEVONSHIRE, and other Parts of ENGLAND.

By WILLIAM PRYCE, M. D.

OF REDRUTH, CORNWALL,

AUTHOR OF MINERALOGIA CORNUBIENSIS.

SHERBORNE, PRINTED BY W. CRUTTWELL;

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M DCC XC.

TO

SIR JOHN ST. AUBYN, BART.

SIR,

CONVINCED as I am, that it is not in my power to heighten, in the ſmalleſt degree, the celebrity of your character, I feel myſelf, nevertheleſs, irreſiſtibly impelled to embrace this opportunity of teſtifying my profound reſpect for thoſe diſtinguiſhed virtues, with which it is adorned. And although, Sir, I have not given you the ſlighteſt intimation of my deſign, yet the well-known generoſity of your ſentiments encourages me to hope that you will pardon my preſumption in dedicating the following work to your protection; a work intended to reſcue from oblivion the Original Language of a County, which hath long prided itſelf in the name of *St. Aubyn*.

To your favour, then, Sir, I beg leave to conſign this ſingular Eſſay; and profeſſing, at the ſame time, the utmoſt veneration for the noble independency of your conduct, and the bright example of your private life, I have the honour to ſubſcribe myſelf, Sir,

Your moſt faithful

And moſt obedient humble ſervant,

Redruth, May, 1790. WILLIAM PRYCE.

THE

EDITOR's PREFACE.

I OWN it may appear unneceſſary to the learned at this period to attempt an inveſtigation of the high antiquity of the Britiſh language, of which the Corniſh is moſt incontеſtably a very pure dialect. The ſubject hath been already ſucceſsfully treated by many diligent and able writers, to the entire ſatisfaction of thoſe who delight in reſearches of this kind.

Yet, it muſt be acknowledged, that a local inquiry and diſquiſition into the antiquity of our Corniſh-Britiſh language has not been ſo particularly attended to as it deſerves. And 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 upon 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 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.

The Chaldean, Syriac, Egyptian, Arabic, Phenician, Celtic, Gauliſh, Welſh, and Corniſh languages are all derived from the original Hebrew tongue; and in their deſcent one from the other, in travelling from the Eaſt to the Weſt, have branched themſelves into ſo many different dialects from one and the ſame root.

The Hebrew and Chaldee are very nearly the ſame; and the Syriac is next to the latter. The former flouriſhed from the beginning of the world to the Babyloniſh captivity, 3400 years: But in our Saviour's time, the Jews ſpoke the Syriac language, and Chriſt and his Apoſtles converſed in it.

As from the Hebrews to the Canaanites or Phenicians, ſo from the Phenicians to the Greeks came letters and arts: And accordingly, from the Phenician character, the Greeks appear to have compoſed their letters, and the Latins progreſſively from the Greeks.

So likewiſe, our ancient and true Corniſh appears to be moſtly derived from the Greek and old Latin tongues, as it participates much of their cadence and ſoftneſs, with leſs of the guttural harſhneſs peculiar to the Hebrew and Chaldee. This is the more eaſily accounted for, as the Phenicians, about the time of the Trojan war, firſt diſcovered the Scilly Iſlands, and the weſtern ſhores of Cornwall; with the natives of which they traded for tin, and ſold it to the Greeks. 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.

It is affirmed by writers, that the inland parts of our iſland were firſt planted from the German continent, about eight hundred years after the Flood, and not from the Gauls: And indeed it is very poſſible that the body of the ſouth-weſtern part of the iſland was peopled from the Belgic and Gauliſh countries both, on account of their propinquity to our oppoſite coaſts and inlets of ſafety. Nevertheleſs, our dialect in Cornwall muſt certainly have obtained that purity, for which it is celebrated, from its immediate introduction by the Phenician navigators; eſpecially as the character and orthography are ſo greatly ſoftened, and the language is diveſted of that rough guttural pronunciation, which is retained

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to this time by the Cambro-Britons. In fact, the Cornish and the Armoric dialects are the most nearly allied in character, orthography, and sound, of any two of the British dialects. The Welsh, Irish, and Erse differ from each other greatly; and the two latter differ from the Cornish and Gaulish very much. Indeed the Welsh is closely related to us, and would appear more so, if it were deprived of those numerous combinations of consonants, with which it is, to us, perplexed and entangled.

Hence we may easily account for the similarity existing between the Cornish and Armoric-British; for 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. This is evidenced by the colloquial resemblance to this day subsisting betwixt the Cornish on the south-western margin of the county, and their opposite neighbours at Morlaix, and other parts of Bas Bretagne, where the low French and the Cornish seem almost one and the same dialect. If I had not been otherwise 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, I believe, is, 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 was ordered on shore with another young man to buy some greens, and not knowing a word of French, as he thought, he was much surprised to find, that he understood a great part of the conversation of some boys at play in the street; and upon further 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 used that dialect. I am well satisfied of the fact, as he is quite an illiterate man, and could have neither the temptation nor the ingenuity to invent a story so useless to himself.

So many centuries having elapsed since the ancient and true dialect hath been spoken, it is now become altogether obsolete, if not totally dead: I have therefore made a distinction between the ancient and modern Cornish in some pieces, such as the Creed, Lord's Prayer, Proper Names of Places, &c. as more notorious and useful for critical inspection: And in the Vocabulary throughout, I have sedulously preferred and extracted from the MSS. which I have collected, all the ancient Cornish I could find in them, divested of Saxon words with Cornish accents and terminations, imposed by oral and illiterate tradition.

The old British language being superseded by the adoption and general cultivation of the Teutonic or Saxon tongue, in process of time became unintelligible and useless in the body and bulk of this island, whence it was driven to the borders and extremities, such as Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall, where it still maintains a reverence and footing among the respective inhabitants, in the dress of differing dialects. Indeed, the veneration in which it is held in Wales is sufficiently shewn by the preservation of it among the natives; many thousands of the peasantry scarcely knowing how to make themselves understood, in the Saxon or English. To such a height of enthusiasm is it revered by many of the inland inhabitants, 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.

Had the Cornish been equally pertinacious with them, we should not have had reason to lament the loss of our native language for those many ages during which it has been almost

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