

**AN ATTEMPT AT A
GLOSSARY OF SOME
WORDS USED IN CHESHIRE**

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An Attempt at a Glossary of Some Words Used in Cheshire by Roger Wilbraham

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C H E S H I R E.

Read before the Society of Antiquaries, 8th May, 1817.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

ALTHOUGH a Glossary of the words peculiar to each County of England seems as reasonable an object of curiosity as its History, Antiquities, Climate, and various Productions, yet it has been generally omitted by those persons who have undertaken to write the Histories of our different Counties. Now each of these counties has words, if not exclusively peculiar to that county, yet certainly so to that part of the kingdom where it is situated, and some of those words are highly

beautiful and expressive; many of their phrases, adages, and proverbs are well worth recording, and have occupied the attention and engaged the pens of men distinguished for talents and learning; among whom the name of Ray will naturally occur to every Englishman at all conversant with his mother-tongue, his work on Proverbs and on the different Dialects of England being one of the most popular ones in our language. But there is a still more important benefit to be derived from this custom, were it practised to its full extent in a publication comprising all the provincial Dialects of England, as they would, when united all together, form the only true and solid foundation for a work much wanted, a General Dictionary of the English Language*.

Far be it from me to attempt in the least to depreciate the wonderful powers displayed by Dr. Johnson in his Dictionary, although it is now pretty well ascertained that he was himself much dissatisfied with it; but as an Etymological Dictionary, it certainly has no claim whatever to praise;

* This deficiency no longer exists; as the new edition of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary, by the Rev. H. J. Todd, now forms a most comprehensive and satisfactory vocabulary of the English language. So that the author of this little provincial Glossary may truly say, in the words of the great poet of Italy, "*Poca favilla gran flamma secunda.*"



for the learning of Dr. Johnson, extensive as it was, yet did not embrace a knowledge of the Gothic, Teutonic, or Anglo-Saxon languages, nor of the other various Northern sources of our language; and moreover, he seems to have had very little acquaintance with the old French or Norman languages. By following the traces of Junius and of Skinner, he has indeed, though not very successfully, attempted to supply the former deficiency; but to remedy the latter, namely, his ignorance of the old French language, was not so easy a task; his own labour and industry in that branch of learning being absolutely necessary, as there is scarcely a single Lexicographer of the English tongue, who, though aiming at Etymology, seems to have possessed a competent knowledge of the old French language.

Had life, health, and the avocations of politics afforded to another gentleman, one of the most acute grammarians, and of the most profound etymologists that ever adorned this or possibly any other country (I mean, the late Mr. Horne Tooke), sufficient leisure to accomplish his great plan of a general Etymological Dictionary of the English language, we should certainly have at this time a clearer view into the origin of our mother-tongue than we have at present.

Most of the leading terms in all our provincial

Dialects, omitting those which are maimed and distorted by a coarse or vicious pronunciation, are not only Provincialisms but Archaisms also, and are to be found in our old English authors of various descriptions; but those terms are now no longer in general use, and are only to be heard in some remote province, where they have lingered, though actually dead to the language in general.

Ut silvæ foliis pronos mutantur in annos

Prima cadunt, ita verborum vetus interit ætas.—*Hor.*

The truth of this observation of the poet is fully illustrated by an example taken from this very Cheshire Dialect; there being several words recorded by Ray as belonging to it, which are even now no longer in use, at least as far as it could be ascertained by the investigations made by the writer of this; so that they have actually perished since the time of Ray.

Provincial words, accompanied by an explanation of the sense in which each of them still continues to be used in the districts to which they belong, would be of essential service in explaining many obscure terms in our early poets, the true meaning of which, although it may have puzzled and bewildered the most acute and learned of our commentators, would perhaps be perfectly intelligible to a Devonshire, Norfolk, or Cheshire clown.

Some of our provincial Dialects, as the North-Devon, Lancashire, and a few others, are already in print, though in a very imperfect state; but by far the greatest number of them, either have not yet been collected, or, if they have, exist solely in MS.

To bring these all together, as well those which have already been published, as what might be collected from different MS. copies, as well as from individuals now living, is a most desirable object, and would, when accomplished, form a work eminently useful to any English philologist who might have the courage to undertake and the perseverance to accomplish a General Dictionary of the English language.

In a letter I formerly received from the late Jonathan Boucher, vicar of Epsom, (a gentleman who, had he lived to execute his plan of a General English Dictionary, would probably have rendered the observations here made quite superfluous.) he mentions the great similarity in many instances between the Dialects of Norfolk and of Cheshire, though the same similarity does not subsist between either of them and those of the interjacent counties, and expresses his wish to have some reason given for this circumstance. His observation I knew at that time to be well-founded, but I professed myself unable to explain it; however,

having since that time reflected a good deal upon this singular circumstance, I will endeavour at least in some measure to account for it.

The truth of the observation made by the same learned gentleman, that all Provincialisms are also Archaisms, to those who are well acquainted with our old English authors, is too evident to stand in need of an illustration. Now the county palatine of Chester, having been in great measure a separate jurisdiction till the days of Queen Elizabeth, had very little intercourse with the neighbouring counties; the principal families of the county, and much more those in a middle station of life, for the most part intermarried among each other, and rarely made connections out of the county,—a practice which is recommended in an old Cheshire adage* : so that the original customs and manners as well as the old language of the county have received less changes and innovations than those of most other parts of England.

The inhabitants of Norfolk too, living in an almost secluded part of England, surrounded on three sides of it by the sea, having little intercourse with the adjoining counties, have consequently retained in great measure their ancient

* It is better to marry over the moor than over the moor :
i. e. your neighbour's daughter rather than a stranger.