

## PECULIARITIES AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE GAELIC LANGUAGE.

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It is remarkable that for more than a thousand years, the Saxon and the Kelt should have lived together in the same islands with scarcely any accurate knowledge of each other's institutions—still less of each other's language. This fact appears still more remarkable when we consider that in some places the races are separated by small mountain ranges only, in some by streams, and in others by imaginary lines, English being spoken on the one side, and Gaelic on the other. Till very recently there has been scarcely an instance of a Saxon whose curiosity has been excited to know something about the language of the people to the north and west of him. It has been generally treated as a mere jargon, unworthy the serious attention of any man of sense. I shall try to shew, as briefly as possible, that it is one of the most important branches of the old Aryan speech, and nearer the old forms than any other European language. It has a great deal in common with English, although this does not appear on the surface. In using the Indo-European forms for comparison, I have drawn largely from Skeat's Etymological Dictionary.

Before proceeding, however, to such comparison, I wish to direct attention to a few peculiarities of the language itself. A difference in the mode of thought has impressed itself upon many of its forms. To an English ear its idioms are often incomprehensible. A Highlander, for instance, may say: *Tha mi paiteach*, I am thirsty; the ordinary form, however is: *Tha am pathadh orm*, the thirst is on me. Similar forms are used in speaking of hunger, fear, sleep, etc. A young man may say to his sweetheart: *Tha gradh agam ort*, I have love on thee; analysed more closely, it would read. There is love at me on thee.

In describing a man's office or qualities, good or bad, a very singular form is used. In place of saying He is a king, a Highlander

will say, He is in his king, *Tha e 'na righ*, or, It is a king that is in him, *Is e righ a tha ann*. She is a good woman, is expressed in Gaelic by the phrase : She is in her good woman, or, It is a good woman that is in her ; *Is bean mhath a tha innte*. It is not easy to explain how such a form as this came to be used. Perhaps when the language was in process of formation, the ideas of the people in regard to personal identity may have been unsettled. The doctrine of the transmigration of souls and the facility with which, it was believed, witches and others could transform themselves into hares and other animals, may have led to a belief that bodies were not always possessed by the same spirit. It was a common superstition which is perhaps not yet wholly extinct, that there were "little men" living in the hills, at times invisible, who, after stealing children, would transform themselves into their exact image, so that the mothers would take them for their own and nurse them tenderly at the breast until some *fiosaiche*, or seer, would shew them that they were nursing some toothless, grey-haired old man from some neighbouring hill or *bruth*. These legends regarding the hill dwellers or fairies, may have a historical basis, and may be a shadowy remembrance in the mind of the Gaelic race of the aborigines of the west of Europe, whom they, on their arrival, displaced. In Gaelic the idea of possession or ownership is expressed by that of proximity. *Tha sgian agam*—the knife is at me. That knife is mine, is in Gaelic, *Is leams an sgian sin*, It is with me that knife is.

In Gaelic, changes may take place either at the beginning or at the end of a word, and the meaning may be much changed by what is called aspiration. For instance, *tog* means lift ; *thog*, lifted. The possessive adjective *a* may be masculine or feminine, but this is determined by the form of the following word, as *a ceann*, her head, *a cheann*, his head. In Welsh, on the other hand, the word after the feminine adjective is aspirated. It is now known that these changes in the old language depended on other causes.

Gaelic and Irish are so nearly alike that, although the two races have been separated for perhaps thirteen hundred years, any intelligent, educated Highlander can read Irish almost as easily as he can his own language. Manx is also the same language written phonetically. Welsh, Cornish, and Breton, form a group distinct from, but closely allied to, Gaelic and Irish.

I shall now take the Gaelic names of some conspicuous and well known natural objects and actions common to the whole Aryan race, and endeavour to shew, by comparing them with other Aryan forms, how accurately they have been preserved by the Gaelic speaking people.

#### WORDS RELATING TO HEAT AND LIGHT.

Heat and light having been known to all the families of the Aryan race, it might be expected that its different branches would carry the original names of these elements with them to their new abodes.

In Sanscrit, *Gharma* (from the Aryan root, *ghar, gar*, to shine, to heat) means warm, hot. In Gaelic, *gar* means to warm: *Gar do lamhan*, warm your hands; *ghar e 'lamhan*, he warmed his hands." In Sanscrit, *ghri*, means to shine, to heat; in Gaelic the word for sun is *grian*, a *ghrian*, the sun; *griosach* in Gaelic is hot embers; In Sanscrit, *sura* is the word for sun, the shiner, as *grian* is the shiner in Gaelic, *sura* being from *swar*, to shine, as *sol*, the sun, is from the cognate *swal*, to shine. Now, the Gaelic word for light is *solus*, evidently connected with *sol*, the sun, and *swal*, to shine. *Soillsich* is one Gaelic word, meaning to shine, connected with *swal*, to shine; *suil* an eye, and *seall*, or *seoll*, to look, are of the same family. *Helios*, the Greek for sun, and *haul*, the Welsh word seem to be connected. Another Gaelic word for shine is *dearsadh*; and *dealradh*, which is slightly different in meaning, seems to be the same word, as *r* and *l* easily glide into each other, like *swar* and *swal*; *sur* and *sol*. The pronunciation of *dealradh* is peculiar; it is like *djealradh*: *dealanach*, lightning, is a word of the same group and is pronounced in a similar manner; both being probably from the root *ghar* or *qhal*, to shine.

There is a remarkable similarity between the Gaelic *soi*, a particle used in composition, meaning good or easily done, and the Greek particle *eu*, which, a learned friend connected with this Institute informs me, was originally *seu*. The particle in Gaelic expressive of the reverse of this, is *di* or *do*, like the Greek *dys*. *Soi-sguel* in Gaelic means good tidings; *soilleir* in Gaelic means what can be seen, *leir* meaning to see; *do-leir*, dark, what cannot be seen; *saoidh* means good, brave men; *daoii*, bad, wicked men; perhaps *dorcha*, dark, may be formed in the same manner from *do* and a root *arg*, akin to Aryan

*ruk*, light. *Arguna*, Sanscrit; *argentum*, Latin; *argyros*, Greek, and *airgiod*, Gaelic, the various names for silver, are cognate forms, the *arg* in each case expressing the idea of shining, so that in these languages silver must have been regarded as the shining metal.

Another Indo-European root signifying to shine is *div* or *div*; Sanscrit, *deva*, a god. This root has also been well preserved in Gaelic. *Dia*, god is evidently from this root and perhaps *deamhan*, devil. Old Gaelic for day was *dia*, the same as god; modern Gaelic for to-day is *diugh*, and for yesterday, *de*; Welsh has *dyw*, for both day and god. These Keltic words are as near the Aryan forms as *Zeus*, *Deus*, *Theos*. These words may point to a time when the sun, and perhaps light, were objects of worship.

#### WORDS RELATING TO WATER.

The Gaelic *uisge*, again, seems to be more nearly related to Sanscrit *udan*, and to the original root-form *ud*, *us* (to well, to gush) than any of the European forms, *hydor*, *unda*, (wave), *wasser*.

It is possible that *uth*, a cow's udder, (pronounced like *oo* in goose) is connected with *uisge* and with *ud*.

In the word *sruth* (pronounced *sru*) a stream or river, Gaelic has preserved almost intact the original root-form *sru*, which had precisely the same meaning.

In this connection may be mentioned the Aryan verb *snigh*, to wet, to snow, and the form *sneah*, moisture, represented in Gaelic by *snidhe* or *snighe*, meaning a tear, or rain coming through the roof. For example: *Tha snidh air mo shuil*,—the tear is on my eye. The English snow is in Gaelic, *sneachd*.

A most interesting form is that of the Gaelic word *snamh* (pronounced *snav*) meaning to swim, float, bathe. Kindred forms are Sanscrit *navi*, Greek *naus*, Latin *navis*, a ship, all, according to Skeat, from an Aryan root *ka* or *na* which again, is from an older stem, *sna*, to float, to swim, to bathe. It will be here remarked that the initial *s*, which has disappeared in the other Aryan tongues, is in Gaelic retained. Thus, to-day, in the popular speech of the remotest corner of the Hebrides, this venerable form preserves the sound and the meaning which it had, thousands of years ago on the plains of Asia.

## WORDS RELATING TO HEARING AND SPEAKING.

The Aryan roots *kru* and *klu*, to hear, are preserved almost intact in the Gaelic words, *cluas*, ear, *cluinn*, hear; *clai-steachd*, the sense of hearing, and in *cliu*, renown; the Latin *cluere* and the Greek *klu-ein*, to hear, are nearly the same in both form and sense.

It is remarkable that the two forms of the Aryan root *rak* and *lak*, to speak, and the Sanscrit *lap*, to speak, should both be preserved in Gaelic: *labh-air*, speak; *radh*, saying. "*Is fìor an radh so*,"—this is a true saying.

## NAMES OF VARIOUS OBJECTS.

When Skeat traces the words share, shear, shore, and scores of other words to the Aryan root *skar*, and to the base *ska*, he does not seem to know that *skar* or *sgar*, used in exactly the same sense, is one of the commonest words in the living language of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland. For example: "*Sgaraidh e iad o cheile anhuil a sgaras buachaill na caoraich o na gabhraibh*,"—"He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats." The base *sga* may be found in hundreds of words, such as *sgap*, scatter; *sgoilt*, split; *sgireachd*, parish; *sgath*, lop and *sgian*, knife.

Is it a mere accident that thin is *tan-u* in Sanscrit; *tana* in Gaelic; and *ten-uis* in Latin; all apparently from the root *ta* to stretch? Can it be a mere chance that the root *tar* or *thar* and the variant *tra*, to go over or through, and the Sanscrit *tri*, through, should have so many corresponding terms in Gaelic, identical in meaning and form, as *thar*, across (*thar a chuinn*, across the ocean) *trid*, through and *tarsuing* across; *tarsnan*, the rung of a ladder or any cross beam?

*Lagh*, *lag*, the Aryan root meaning to lie down. In Gaelic, *laigh* is to lie down; *lagh* is law in Gaelic, *i.e.*, a thing settled or laid down, like the Latin *leg-s*.

The dog must have been domesticated before the Gaelic-speaking people left the original seats of the Aryan race, as his name in Sanscrit is *evan* or *cuan*; in Greek, *Kuon*; in Gaelic, *cu*; and in Latin *canis*.

The importance of this language for philological purposes cannot be over-estimated. The various branches of the Old Aryan race both in Asia and on the continent of Europe, have been so disturbed and

mixed that the languages must necessarily have been greatly changed and broken up, while the people in the Highlands and in Ireland have been so isolated that their branch of the old language has been, as it were, bottled up, sealed and preserved for the use of the philologist. Words change but little when spoken by the same race, but when pronounced by alien lips they may change so as not to be recognized. The names, Dumbarton and Stirling, in Scotland, conceal their meaning when pronounced by Englishmen, but when pronounced by the Gael, they are still *Dunbreaton*, the Briton's fort, and *Sruithlia*, the rock stream.

The Gaelic system of orthography is so different from the English, that English scholars have been deterred from studying it. The Germans have been the great pioneers in this as in many other studies. It is to be hoped that, they having cleared the way, British philologists will follow, and take a share of the honour of working this interesting mine so long neglected.

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