



The Mither Tongue

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The auld Scots tung, the leid at's still tae hear in the mou o mony a lad an lass frae the Shetland Isles tae the Mull o Galloway, hes a history as ferliesome as ony o the world's leids.

Tae unnerstaun the life o ony leid, we maun ken twa things. We maun ken the makins o the leid itsel: its souns an its spellin, its gremmar, its words. An we maun ken forbye whit the leid means, an hes ment, tae the fowk at speaks it.

Thare no a leid at hesna cheengit wi the passin o the years: the English o Shakespeare is no the English fowk speaks the day.

A leid can cheenge sae muckle it turns tae anither thing aathegither: French, Italian, Spanish an a curnie mair o Europe's tungs wes aa the sel-an-same leid, Laitin, mony a yearhunner syne. An a leid can jist dee, leain nae smitch nor steid: the Indians o America an Canada maistlins nou hes forgotten thair mither tungs an jist speaks English; an thare mony fowk fears at gin we dinna tak tent, our ain Gaelic and Scots wull gang the same gait.

The Gaelic is sib tae Eirish; the Scots is sib tae English. The meanin o aat is at thare wes yince ae aefauld leid - Auld Eirish for the ae pair, Auld English (whiles caa'd "Anglo-Saxon") for the tither - at sinnert in twa, growein an cheengin in different weys in the kingriks o Scotland an Ireland, or Scotland an England. The leid we cry "Auld English" wes brocht tae the isle o Breitain, bi the reivin Angles an Saxons, lang afore thare wes aither a Scotland or an England, an it wesna nane like the English o the-day: in a curnie weys it wes mair lik German. But as it spreid ower the island, it begoud tae twyne, growein intae deialecs a wee bittie different frae here tae thare tae thonder; an efter mony hunner o years ae deialec frae the northern merch becam the Scots tung we ken the-day, an yin frae the suddron merch, the English. Thare mony fowk speirs gin Scots is a leid in itsel, or a deialec o English.

Aareddies nou we soud ken the repone tae thon. Scots is no a deialec o English gin we tak "English" tae be the leid we hear ilka day frae braidcasters on the

wireless an the television. The English at thay speak an the Scots at we speak (or some o's) baith cam, by different gaits but even-hauns lang, frae Anglo-Saxon. But Scots an English is sib: like til ither, tho no sel an same, sen thay hae the same forebeir. Whaur the souns o Scots words differs frae thair English cognates, it is maistlins acause o cheenges in pronounciation frae langsyne in the historie o the twa leids. The Anglo-Saxon ham, ban, hal, mara, stan hes gien in English home, bone, whole, more, stone; in Scots hame, bane, haill, mair, stane. Frae the auncient god (wi the soun o "goad", no o "God"), toth, mona, sona, comes the English good, tooth, moon, soon; an our ain guid, tuith, muin, suin: words at souns unco different in the sindry airts o the kingrik, wi a Glaswegian sayin gid, an Aiberdonian gweed, a Fifer gade an a Borderer geud.

Gin we say toun, doun, hous, cou whaur the English says town, down, house, cow, we ar yaisin a soun mair like tae the auncient tun, dun, hus, cu nor the ow-soun o English is; an the weel-kent ch at aye gars the English hyter in our bricht, licht, thocht, wecht, dochter is a soun we hae hainit, an the English hes tint, sen Anglo-Saxon times.

We, houbeit, hae tint a l-soun at thay hae hainit, in aa, faa, caa, gowd, gowf, shouther. An mony anither set o cognates shaws hou the Scots an the English leids hes come tae differ in reglar weys: gress, bress, efter, gether tae grass, brass, after, gather; drap, pat, lang, sang, wrang tae drop, pot, long, song, wrong; jine, ile, bile, spile tae join, oil, boil, spoil; want, wash, water hainin the auld a-soun at in the English leid hes cheengit tae an aw.

The maist feck o thon wirds (aa abies the jine set) wes pairt o the Anglo-Saxon leid lang or it sinnert tae gie Scots an English. An een tae our ain days, the feck o the Scots wurd-huird is frae the auncient forebeir. Mony a wurd at nou belongs the Scots alane - wirds at we wad aa lay claim til for guid braid Scots - wes langsyne pairt o English as muckle as Scots.

But an ben is naethin but the Auld English be-utan and be-innan: inbye an outbye. Chaucer, aiblins een Shakespeare, wad hae kent fine whit thole ment, or bide, greet, gloamin or deave. But a braw curnie o Scots wirds hes come frae ither leids; an the story o hou thon leids, an the fowk at spak thaim, upbiggit the Scots tung is pairt o the story o the Scots nation itsel. First, whit we caa the "Scots" tung wesna aye the heidmaist leid o the kingrik, an isna eenou its ae leid.

Gaelic langsyne wes tae hear ower hauf the kintra an mair; an een whaur nae Gaelic hes been hard for mony a hunner year, the mynin o't kythes in a wheen o wirds. Hunners o the names on the map o Scotland is Gaelic: aa the Auchen-, Auchter-, Bar-, Dal-, Kil- names, tae stert wi. Names o the lann an the watter: loch (an wae betide ony Sasunnach at caas it "lock"!), ben, glen, corrie, strath,

craig, cairn; names frae Heiland historie or Heiland dress: clan, claymore, clarsach, brogue, sporran, sgian dubh; words we ken frae Burns an ither screivers at hedna a wird o Gaelic as a leivin tung: clavers, crummock, ingle, sonsie an its conter donsie, clachan.

Twa o the maist kenspeckle o the birds o the Heilands hes Gaelic names: capercaillie an ptarmigan. Thare mony an onlearit loun thinks Scots is sib tae Gaelic or een sel an same: it's no, but thare mair nor a smatterin o Gaelic tae gie the Scots tung its saur. Anither leid at hes gien a fouthie handsel tae the Scots is French.

Aabody at kens onythin o the historie o Scotland kens about the Auld Alliance, an thare nae dout at the lang freinship atweesh the twa kingriks eikit muckle tae the Scots leid; but mony a French wird cam intae Scots, an English forbye, lang afore the Alliance.

Een the wee tait o French at maist o's lernit at the scuil shaws us whaur words lik ashet, aumrie, tassie, dour, douce, disjune or fash cam frae. Rabbie Burns's collie Luath hed a Gaelic name, but his face wes bawsant: a French wird. Thare coudna be a brawer or prouder Scottish ceity nor Aiberdeen, but it hes a French motto, Bon-Accord. Our best-loe'd festival o the year, Hogmanay, hes a French name, houbeit a Frenchman o our ain days micht be haurd pit til't tae cognose the auld French word aguillaneuf in its Scots descendant. An we aa ken whit a body micht hear in the gaits an wynds o Embra no sae langsyne, wairnin thaim tae jouk out the wey o kenna-whit flung out a windae: gardyloo, frae garde l'eau! France wesna Scotland's ae frein among the kintras o Europe: the Netherlands wes ane o our auldest pairtners in traffeckin. An frae the Dutch leid comes mony a Scots wird: our ferms hed (an a curnie aiblins still hes) buchts, cavies, kesarts an haiks; a gemm as Scottish as gowf an a fuid as Scottish as a scone hes Dutch names; een our craig, cuit, dowp an pinkie - or crannie gin we come frae the Nor-Aist - gies a gust o Dutch tae the leid. But the furthiest o aa the leids at gied o thair rowth tae the wird-huird o Scots wes the Scandinavian. (The three Scandinavian leids o our ain day, Norwegian, Swedish an Danish, is een mair sib tae ither nor Scots an English: in the bygane days whan Scots, an English tae, wes takin on hunners o wirts frae the leid o the herriein Vikings, the leid we caa "Auld Norse" wes the leid o aa the Scandinavian kingriks.) Lass an bairn is Norse wirts; neive, luif, lug an harns is Norse.

Whan we flit tae a new hous, whan we tak the gait ower the brae, whan we gang tae the kirk, whan we come tae lowsin time, whan we caa a body a daft gowk, we uise wirts frae the auld Scandinavian tung. The mony fowks at we Scots hae mellit wi throu the lang historie o our kingrik hes aa gied o thair rowth tae bigg our mither tung up tae the feckfu, skyrie leid we ken the-day.

But a frichtsomen mistak at faur ower mony o's hes the wyte o is tae think the Scots tung is naethin but thae bonnie wirds at belongs the Scots alane, frae Anglo-Saxon, Gaelic, French, Dutch or Norse, at nae Sasunnach nor onlearit Scot kens the meanin o. Scots an English, as we hae seen, is sib; an the maist feck o the wurd-huird is skairit atweesh the twa leids. Tak a scance at this verse frae yin o our (an the warld's) best-loe'd sangs. We twa hae paidl'd in the burn Frae morning sun till dine; But seas between us braid hae roar'd Sin' auld lang syne. Twa words, burn an syne, is no tae finn in English ava. A when - twa, hae, paidl'd, braid, auld, lang - is frae the same ruits as the words thay mean in English, but the forms in the twa leids shaws the cheenges frae the forebeir leid at we hae seen til aareddies. An ithers - morning, sun, seas, roar'd - is sel an same tae thair English cognates. But aa thae wirds is equal-aiguals pairt o the Scots tung: thare nane o thaim mair nor less Scots nor ony ithers. Scots is a haill leid: no jist a listin o bonnie wirds. An this leid is our ain heirskip, tae mak a kirk or a mill o. By the time John Barbour screivit his splendant epic sang o Robert Bruce in 1375, it wes aareddies the leid o keing an court; it wes the leid at ane o the wycest an forciest o the Stewart keings, James I, uisit for his laws an Acks o Pailliament, forbye his ain poesie; it wes the leid o Henryson, Dunbar, an the makars o their time; an the leid the pawkie an glib-gabbit James VI tuik wi him tae Lunnon tae caird an flyte at the English pairliament. Syne in the sangs o Ramsay, Fergusson an Rabbe Burns, an in the nouvelles o Sir Walter Scott, the Borderer James Hogg an the Ayrshire callant John Galt - forbye mony a lesser screiver an a curnie nearhaun as gret - it kythed again amang the fouthiest tungs for lear an letters in Europe; an in the twentiet yearhunner an doun tae our ain day it leams an bleezes still, in the scolar-lik "Lallans" o MacDiarmid an the ferliesome bourach o makars at folla'd in his steid (an gin the likes o Tom Scott an Alex Scott, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Douglas Young an Robert Garioch is in an unco-lik eclipse eenou, thare nae dout ava at sic skyrie lights as thaim wull bleeze furth again or lang), or in the mair hameilt vyces o Tom Leonard, Sheena Blackhall, Rhoda Butler an the mingie o bardies frae aa the airts. But Scots is no jist a leid for sangs an tales: it is a leid at fowk speaks, ilka day in ilka pairt o the kingrik. The Glesga patter, the Doric o the Nor-Aist, the lilt o Fife, the souch o the Borders: whaure'er ye gang ye hear the tung at MacDiarmid, Burns or Barbour wad hae kent, houbet the warld thay war pairt o hes gane wi the snaws o fernyear. An tae hain the leid on life, we maun be vogie o't: no blate. The days whan the bairnies at the scuil coud get the tawse for uisin a Scots wurd is gane: thare nocht tae fear frae uisin it, an gin thare still tae finn ony o whit Lang Rob caa'd "split-tongued, nerra-dowped sourocks" at wad gie a geck tae the leid, they maun be latten ken at thare nae rowm for

thaim an thair nories in the Scotland we bide in the day. We maun speak it, sing it, teach it tae our bairns: aye, an gar our Pairliamentarians tak tent o't forbye. Scots is our mither tung; an gin we dinna hain it, thare naebody gaun tae hain it for us.

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