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Source: *The Celtic Review*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Jul., 1905), pp. 34-45

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30069858>

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VARIATIONS OF GAELIC LOAN-WORDS

CHARLES M. ROBERTSON

THE Gaelic language, both in its literary form, and especially in its spoken dialects, possesses many illustrations of the truth that words taken from other languages conform, at best, only irregularly and uncertainly to the phonetic laws of the borrowing language. A borrowed word may on occasion conform in every particular to the laws in accordance with which the changes undergone by the native words of the adopting language have proceeded, but it is quite as likely to disregard and violate those laws. It may also appear in two or more different forms, and may conform to some phonetic law in one of the forms and violate it in another, or it may both observe and violate the law within the compass of the same form. The law of aspiration, for example, in Gaelic phonetics is that a single consonant standing originally between vowels has been aspirated. This happens to be observed in *saighead*, from Latin *sagitta*, where the single *g* is aspirated and the double *t*, though reduced to *d*, is not. So with the middle consonants in *saoghal* from *saeculum*, *sabhal* from *stabulum*, *umhal* from *humilis*, *uibhir*, Irish *uimhir*, early Irish *numir* from *numerus*. So also *aoradh* for *adhradh* from *adoratio*, *iomhaigh* from *imago*, and so on. In *nollaig* for *nothlaig*, Early Irish *notlaic* from *natalicia*, *t* has been aspirated and *c*, though standing alone, has not. So *trionaid*, Old Irish *trindóit* from *trinitatem*. It may be observed in passing that there has been somewhat of a tendency to preserve the last or stem consonant, case endings being dropped, and to slur, aspirate or drop middle consonants, and that in modern spelling in such cases final *tenues* are very generally replaced by the corresponding *mediae*. Examples not bearing upon our immediate purpose need not be multiplied as the words intended to be dealt with in their various forms

provide a sufficiency of instances, but one may be noticed here. Patricius is found in modern Gaelic in four different forms. In Pàdruig *t* and *c* are unaspirated but reduced to the corresponding mediae. In Pàruig for Pàthruig *t* has been aspirated and lost and *c* made into *g*. Para, a curtailed form of the last, is used with a defining term following which carries the accent, and thus accounts for the shortening of the first vowel, as Para Mór, Big Peter or Patrick; Para Piobaire, Peter the Piper. In Arran, etc., the form is Pàdair, both in common use and in names like Kilpatrick, 'Cill-Phàdair.' The name has been confused in popular use with Peter and is usually so Englished. Peadair as a personal Gaelic name is hardly, if at all, known out of print.

Native words themselves, it is true, sometimes appear in more than one guise, but in their case differences of form exemplify with precision the laws and changes to which borrowed words run counter or conform at random. Piuthar, sister, for example is found in Irish as siur and in Early Irish as both siur and fiur, and in all its forms has come from a single original form svesôr, from which have come also Sanskrit svâsar, Russian sestra, Latin soror for solor, and English sister. Till, return, appears also as pill, and in Irish as fill, and our Scottish fill, fold, may well be the same; the root is svelni, turn round, which has also given us the word seal, a while. The same root has given another group of variations in the case of its derivative seillean, a bee. This word is

seillean	in literature.
teillean	„ east Perthshire and in Lewis.
seinnlean	„ Kincardine on Oykel.
„	„ Sutherlandshire, Creich.
seinnlear	„ „ Rogart.
tainnleag	„ „ Helmsdale.
tuinnleag	„ „ Reay Country.

Nn is not pronounced, being assimilated to *l*, in those

forms in which it is written, but it has left its mark in a nasalisation and lengthening of the preceding vowels and a doubling of *l*, as *seillean*, *tailleag* with *ei* and *ai* as a diphthong and long. In the Reay country form *ui*, as in many other instances in Sutherland *e.g.* *uidh*, *ruighe*, etc., has the sound of Gaelic *i* only, but *u* is necessary in spelling to show that *t* is sounded broad. The Rogart form merely shows the characteristic change of *n* to *r* in the vicinity of other liquids in Sutherlandshire Gaelic. All those seeming vagaries in respect to initial letter really exemplify the known fact that when a root began with *sv*, the Gaelic word derived from it may begin with *s*, with *t*, with *f*, or with *p*.

Variations of other but still native kinds are exemplified by the word for nettle which appears as *neanntag*, *eanntag*, *ionntag*, *feanntag*, and *deanntag*, and by that for a bat, *ialtag*, *ioltag*, *eitleog*, *dialtag*, *mioltag*, *ealtag* *leathraich* (Arran), *dialtag anmoch* (Perth), *dealtag anmoch* (Badenoch), and *mioltag leathair* (Irish). Variations such as those, though they are extreme cases, do not violate but exemplify the phonetic laws of the language, and once a word is known to be native the limit of its variations is determined by those laws.

The vagaries of borrowed words, on the other hand, have an uncertainty about them that keeps the inquirer ever on the outlook for strange and unexpected forms. Those forms are so numerous in some cases as to recall the proverb, 'Tha uiread de ainmean air ris an naosg,' (he has as many *aliases* as the snipe), and one of the many names of that bird is a case in point. *Budagoc* or *budagochd* is sometimes heard as *budragochd*, *budag*, and in Mull even as *gudabochd*. The word is from the English 'woodcock,' and though sometimes used rightly as designating that bird, is often misapplied to the snipe. The Gaelic equivalent to 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper,' etc., is :—

'Gob fad air a' bhudagochd
'S am budagochd gun ghob.'

The English 'warning,' in which also *w* becomes *b*, appears

in Gaelic in different districts as bàrnaig, bàirneigeadh, bardainn, bardaig, bairlinn, or bàirleigeadh. 'Gardener' is gairnlear, gairnear, and gairlear, as well as gairneilear. The familiar 'gooseberry' is in Gaelic gròiseid, in East Perthshire gròiseag, but in West Ross crobhsag, and in East Ross crobhsag. The two first forms are based, of course, on the Scottish which appears variously as grozet, grozer and grozel, and comes from French grose, groseille. The English gooseberry is for grooseberry and also comes from the French grose. German has krausbeere and krauselbeere. Crobhsag, though it is not directly, may be remotely connected with groiseid, grozet, and groseille.

Diversities of form are not confined to such modern borrowings as those, but are found in the older loan-words from Latin. The extent to which variations, though of a subordinate kind, may go, is well shown so far as number is concerned, in the case of the Latin manica, a sleeve. This word appears in Gaelic in the following forms:—

muinchill	muilcheann	muinichill	muilicheann
muinchille	muilchinn	muinicheal	muilichinn
muincheall	muilchill	muinicheall	muinle

moilcheann in Sutherland.
 muilchceann „ West Ross-shire.
 muilchear „ East Perthshire.
 muille „ Arran.

The word is munchille in Early Irish, and metathesis and substitution of one liquid for another account for nearly all the forms. The middle *i* in some of the forms is merely the parasitic vowel heard in pronunciation between the preceding liquid and *ch*. Muinle and muille arise from the elision or silencing of slender *ch* that is characteristic of the Gaelic of Arran, Islay, etc. The *c* which stands between two vowels in the Latin word was aspirated in Gaelic and is lost altogether in the Arran form. In the next case *c*, though

it did not stand between two vowels, was aspirated in the more usual form of the word. The Latin *axilla*—in Irish *ascall*, *oscul*, and *ocsal*, Middle Irish *ochsal*—is best known in Gaelic as *achlais*, but it also appears as *asgall*, in Arran *asgaill*, in Perthshire *aslaic*, or better, *aslaig*, and in dictionaries as *aslaich* and *asgnail*. *Sasunn*, Irish *Sagsona*, in Arran *Sasgunn*, England, from Saxon may be compared in passing.

Some of the oldest Latin loans ultimately associated with the early church show two or more substantially different forms. 'Officium,' which is not purely ecclesiastical, is in Gaelic *oifig*, with minor variations such as *ofaig* in Argyle, Sutherland, Lewis, etc., and *afaig* in Arran. A widely used, though rarely written, form of the word is *ofhaich*, with a derivative *ofhaichear*, an officer. Duncan Ban Macintyre has the latter written *oighichearan*, officers, in his 'Song to the Argyleshire Regiment.' *Tigh-ofhaich*, 'office,' is used for an outhouse. The special ecclesiastical meaning of *officium*, a formulary of devotion, etc., is recalled in one usage. 'Cha'n eil *ofhaich ann*,' There is nothing in it, literally, there is not an office in it, is said in Atholl of, for example, a disappointing book, and suggests a time when no value was set upon any books but those of devotion and religious exercise. If *offic-ium* had been a native word *f*, being double, would not aspirate, and *c*, being single, would, but both are aspirated in *ofhaich* and both unaspirated in *oifig*, etc. In 'apostolus,' Old Irish *apstal*, Gaelic *abstol*, *p* has remained unaspirated, perhaps in this case because pushed up against *st*, but in another form of the word it has been not only aspirated but lost entirely. In North Inverness and East Ross this word has become *ostal*, in Sutherland *astal*, and resembles the Manx form *ostyl*, older *austyl*. The Gaels, it would appear, were also under the necessity of borrowing the word *infernum* from Latin, but, whatever inference may be drawn from the fact, they were not content with having it one way, but must needs have it in two ways—*ifrinn* and *iutharn*. *Ifrinn*, Irish *ifrinn*, is the Old Irish *ifurnn* with a little

shifting of letters. The Manx is *iurin*, which would very well represent the Perthshire pronunciation of *iutharn*. *Diabolus* appears as *diabhol*, which is appropriated to religious use, and *diall*, which is profane. The former is perhaps to be regarded as a purely literary form, and the latter as the form of common speech.

The diversities of many borrowed words centre round the letter *p*. This consonant seems to have been at all times a troublesome one to the Gaels, as to the Celts in general, and with its peculiarities and laws is of the first importance in Gaelic phonetics. In loan-words it often takes the place of, or is replaced by, *b* or *f*. An initial *b* is often made into *p*: 'blanket' is in Gaelic *plangaid*, and *Biobull*, English 'Bible,' Latin 'Biblia,' is sometimes written and is usually pronounced *Piobull*. A medial or final *p* on the other hand occasionally becomes *b*, as in *òb* from Norse 'hóp.' The interchange of *p* and *f* is found in several instances. 'Flower' and 'flour,' which are the same etymologically, both appear in Gaelic as *flùr* and also as *plùr*, with diminutives for the former meaning *flùran*, *flùirein*, *plùran* and *plùirean*. The same change of *f* into *p* is seen in *plod*, a fleet, raft, etc., from Norse 'floti,' while the allied Norse *fljóta* has given *fleodradh*, floating, and *fleodruinn*, a buoy; and in *punntainn* and *funntainn*, benumbment by cold, from Scottish *fundy*, funny, to become stiff with cold. The converse is found in *feòdar* and *peòdar*, from 'pewter,' and also in *fleòdar* and *pleòdar*, whether these come from the same word or from 'spelter.' *Flodach*, lukewarm, and *plod*, scald, have both been referred to Scottish 'plot,' to scald. *Fìreas* in North Inverness and *pìreas* in West Ross and in Sutherland apparently come from and mean 'appearance.' The Latin *plecto* has given *fleachdail*, flowing in ringlets, and in West Ross *pleachd*, a roll of wool ready for spinning. Gaelic *fùdar* and Irish *pùdar*, from 'powder,' may be noted. *Feòcullan*, a pole-cat, may be heard in East Perth as *pòcullan*. The Norse *hjálm*, helm, has given *failm*, *falmadair*, and *palmailr*.

P, when aspirated *ph*, sounds *f*, and *f*, when aspirated *fh*, is silent, and often is lost. By a combination of those two processes we have in one instance *p* in different forms appearing as *p* and as *f*, and disappearing altogether. 'Peacock' is found in Gaelic as *peucag*, *peuchdag*, *feucag*, *eucag*, *euchdag*. The way the word has been dealt with in the language is interesting in several ways. *Péabh-eun*, *péa-choileach* or *peubh-choileach*, and *péa-chearc* or *peubh-chearc*, in which the specific 'pea' has been separated from the subjoined terms indicative of gender, do not call for remark except that *péabh* and *peubh* suggest a direct borrowing by Gaelic from the Latin *pavo*, a peacock, from which the English 'pea' has come through Anglo-Saxon 'pawa.' For the rest all the forms in Gaelic have been taken from 'peacock,' to the utter exclusion of the more homely hen. Not only so, but owing to the similarity in sound of the termination to the Gaelic feminine diminutive suffix *-ag*, the word has changed both its gender and its denotation. *Peucag* or *peuchdag* is, indeed, said by some authorities to be masculine and feminine, but by others it is set down as feminine only, and by all it is translated *peahen*, never *peacock*. The other forms are unhesitatingly dealt with as feminine. Popularly the word is feminine, so much so that when the male bird is meant *coil-each-peucaig* is not infrequently used. With the change of gender the word readily lent itself to employment by bards and wooers as a poetic metaphor and an endearing term. Extensive use of the word as a term of endearment, when it is usually preceded by *mo*, *my*, thus: *M' fheucag*, meaning etymologically *My peacock*, and sounded *M' eucag*, or, in some dialects, *M' euchdag*, accounts both for the loss of the initial consonant and for a seeming change of signification in the case of the decapitated forms. So completely was the connection of *eucag* or *euchdag* with *feucag* and *peucag* forgotten that Gaelic lexicographers have recorded them with no other signification but 'a charmer, a fair or lovely female,' and our foremost authority on etymology has explained *euchdag* as 'featsome one' from *euchd*. The identification of *euchdag*

with peucag is easily confirmed. The existence of the form eucag is against a connection with euchd. The renderings given for peahen are eucag, feucag, peucag, etc., and for peachick, isean na h- eucaig, and 'a beautiful woman' is given as one of the meanings of peucag. The hold that the word has taken of the language is shown further by the adjectives feucagach, peucagach, peuchdagach, peacock-like, beautiful as a peacock, abounding in peacocks, and peucach, gaudy, showy, and may justly be regarded as an index of the susceptibility of the Gael to the impressions of resplendent hues.

Two more words fall to be noticed as having *p* and *f*. The first, bùlas, is from Scottish bools, a pot-hook, or rather a separable pot-handle with a joint in the middle; pùlas is given in dictionaries as a dialectic form. The other, feursann, a warble, a tumour in the hide of cattle, containing the larvae of a fly, is, notwithstanding the difference of meaning, clearly the Scottish fersie, English farcy, farcin, a disease of horses.

bùlas	in literature.	feursann	in literature.
pùlas	dialectic.	féirseag	„ Arran.
buthal	in Arran.	peurtanan	„ Strathspey.
bùthals	„ East Perthshire.	fiartanan	„ N. Inverness.
bùlsg	„ Strathspey.	fèurtainean	„ Reay Country.
bùilisg	„ Skye.	fiarslanan	„ Lochcarron.
pùlais	„ South Sutherland.	fiaslanan	„ Gairloch.
fòlais	„ Reay Country.	féursnan	„ Skye.

All the dialectic forms of feursann, except the Arran one, are plurals.

In one instance *p* and *g* are found in two different groups of forms of the same word, but both represent an original *b*. Pronnasg, brimstone, comes from the Scottish brunstane. This word is derived from brun or bren, the old Scottish form of burn, and means burning-stone or fire-stone. The Norse 'brennisteinn,' and the English brimstone, old bremstone,

brenston, are similarly derived. In Gaelic it appears as :—

pronnasg	in literature.
pronastal	„ M'Eachen's Dictionary.
pronnastair	„ Arran.
proinistear, proinstear	„ Perth.
pronnastail	„ Badenoch.
pronnstail	„ Strathspey.
prunnastal	in Skye, Edinbane.
prunaistean	„ „ Glendale.
pronastan	„ „ Sleat, and in Lewis.
grumastal	„ Torridon.
grunnastal	„ Gairloch and Lochbroom.
grunastal	„ Sutherland, Helmsdale.
grunnastan	„ „ Reay Country.
grunnasdan	„ MacLeod and Dewar's Dictionary.
gronnustal	„ vocabulary in Gaelic Bible, 1st edit.

In the one group of forms there is the ordinary change of *b* to *p*. In the other group the substitution of *g* for the original *b* is analogous to the long-standing substitution of *c* for *p*.

In early loans from Latin *p* was often replaced in Gaelic by *c*. *Cailleach*, an old wife, a nun, comes from the Latin *pallium*; *Càisg*, the Passover, Easter, from *pascha*; *clòimh*, wool, down, from *pluma*, and *cuith*, a pit, a snow-wreath, etc., from *puteus*. The Latin *presbyter* appears in Old Irish both as *prebiter* and as *crubthir*. *Patricius* gave our *Pàruig* and *Pàdrui*, Old Irish *Patricc*, but it also gave *Cothraige*, one of the names by which St. Patrick was known, and which was neither more nor less than a Gaelicised form of *Pathruig*. In modern Gaelic there are a few instances of the correspondence of *c* to *p*. *Padhal*, a ewer, invites comparison with the obsolete *cadhal*, a basin, and *clod*, from English *clod*, with *plod*, from Scottish *plod*, *ploud*, a green sod; while *cartan*, which means a crab in Irish, is explained as a Gaelicised form of Gaelic and Scottish *partan*. *Pràmh*, a word of obscure

derivation, is rendered a slumber, a doze, but requires the word for sleep expressed or understood, as *pràmh-chadail*. It is also rendered grief, dejection, gloom, when the phrase is *fo phràmh*, under a cloud, under heaviness of mind. The meaning would seem to be something like darkening, obscuration, cf. the use of *teimheal*, darkness, to mean a swoon. The different forms in which the word appears, *prèamh* or *preumh* (like *freumh*) in *Atholl*, and *cnàmh* and *cnàimh*—*cnàmh-chadail*—in *West Ross* suggest borrowing. *Cape Wrath*, which derives its name from the Norse *hvarf*, a turning, a shelter, appearing in English as *wharf*, is found in Gaelic in two forms. Generally it is *Am Parbh*, the turning or angle, but in *Lewis Gaelic* it is called *An Carbh*. Here the Norse *hv*, which in other place-names is met with as *ch* and as *f*, has become *c* in *Lewis* and *p* in the rest of *Gael-dom*, just as Indo-European *qu* became *c* in Gaelic and *p* in Welsh.

Two Latin loans show the change of *p* to *c*, and also appear in a variety of forms in modern Gaelic.¹

Purpura, purple, appears in four guises.

Corcur, Old Irish *corcur*; here *p* has in both cases been changed into *c*.

Curpur, a form used in *Lewis*; here only initial *p* has been changed to *c*.

Purpur, Middle Irish *purpuir*; *p* has been kept in both positions.

Purpaidh, used in *Lewis*, *Sutherland*, etc., an adjective, influenced by the Gaelic adjectival suffix *idh*, as in *diadhaidh*.

Pulpitum, a pulpit, appears in six or seven forms.

Cùbaid; *p* has become *c* initially and *b* medially; *t*, though standing alone between vowels, has not been aspirated, but has sunk to *d*; the vowel *u* has become long, filling the blank left by the disappearance of *l*.

Cùbaidh, the form used in *East Ross-shire* and in *Sutherlandshire*; *d* or *t*—*cùbaith*?—has been aspirated.

¹ Latin *plecto* has given not only *pleachd* and *fleachdail*, as noticed above, but also *cleachd*, a ringlet, fillet of wool; Early Irish *clechtain*, I plait.

Cùbainn, the form found in Lewis; final slender *d* is changed into *nn*. So *Sàbaid*, Sabbath, in Lewis is *Sàboinn* and *Sàboinnnd*.

Pulpaid, used in Tiree, and found in Shaw's Dictionary; *p* remains in both positions, *l* is retained, and consequently *u* is not lengthened.

Pùbaid, found in Kintyre and in Strathspey: *p* medially is *b*, *l* is gone, and *u* lengthened. A similar loss of *l*, but without a lengthening of the preceding vowel, is found in the Lowland Scottish form *poopit*.

Bùbaid, a dialectic form given by Dr. MacBain under *cùbaid*; *p* in both positions has become *b*.

Pumpaid, a form heard in Arran; it has come from *pulpaid*, which was doubtless Shaw's native Arran pronunciation at the time he wrote, not by change of *l* to *m*, but by loss of *l* through the form *pùbaid*, with intrusive *m* as in *tombaca*, from *tobacco*. This same intrusion of a liquid is seen in *buntàta*, from *potato*, and in *plang*, from *plack*.

In the case of both those words it is clear that there has been reborrowing. *Purpura* was first borrowed as *corcur* in early times, and then borrowed again as *purpur* at some later period. *Purpaidh* is based of course on *purpur*. What the relation of *curpur* is to *corcur* and to *purpur* it is hard to say; it may be based on neither, and may have been taken independently from *purpura*. Its agreement in form with *cùbaid* in having initial *p* changed into *c*, but not medial *p*, is in any case noteworthy. *Cùbaidh* and *cùbainn* go with *cùbaid*. *Pulpaid* and the remaining forms have been borrowed independently and quite possibly not from Latin *pulpitum*, but from English *pulpit*.

The change of *p* to *c* in loans from Latin is as old as the age of St. Patrick, and is attributed to British, that is, Welsh influence. The first missionaries to Ireland, it is maintained, went from Wales, and spoke the old Welsh or British language. In that language *p* often corresponds to *c* in Irish, as in Welsh *penn*, Gaelic *ceann*, head; W. *plant*, Gael. *clann*, Old Irish *cland*, children; Old W. *map*, Gael. *mac*,

son. When Welsh met Irish this correspondence of Irish *c* to Welsh *p* was noticed; and as Latin, according to the theory, was first introduced to Irish speakers by Welshmen, it was supposed that the proper way to adapt Latin words to Irish use when they contained the letter *p* was to change that consonant into *c*. Examples like *curpur* and *cùbaid*, in which the change is only partly carried out, and others, like *Parbh* and *Carbh*, together with the analogous *pronnastail* and *grunnastal*, would, however, suggest rather that the change was not made deliberately, but took place naturally, and that it was the result of a native tendency of the language and not of extraneous influence or analogy. The theory of Welsh influence claims support from certain other peculiarities. One is the substitution of a Gaelic *s* for a Latin *f*, as in Gaelic *srian*, from Latin *frēnum*. Here again Gaelic has *s* in certain cases, where Welsh has *f*; and on the theory in question it was supposed that it ought to have *s* also where Latin had *f*. One of the instances may be noticed. The Latin *furnus*, an oven, has given Gaelic *sorn*, a flue, vent; Early Irish *sornn*; Welsh *ffwrn*; Cornish *for*n. By a roundabout way through French *fournaise*, and English *furnace*, this same Latin word has reached Gaelic as *fùirneis*, *foirneis*, and *ùirneis*, a furnace; Irish *uirnéis*, *fúirnéis*; Middle Irish *forneis*. The principal difference of form in this case is analogous to that found in the cases of *capella* and *cathedra*, which have come into Gaelic direct from Latin respectively as *caibeal* and *cathair*, and roundabout through French and English as *seipeal* and *seidhir*, or *seithir*. The same word, that is to say, has been borrowed twice, first, straight from the original Latin, and then, after transmission through two intervening languages.