II.

NOTES ON THE WORDS MEN AND MAIDEN IN BRITISH TOPOGRAPHY.

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In writing upon the antiquities of Cornwall, Professor Max Müller observes¹ that "one of the large stones with rock-basins is called the Men-rock, rock being simply the interpretation of the Cornish Mên." And of those special pillar-stones which we in Scotland generally know as "bore-stones," he remarks²:—"They are called Mên-an-tol, hole-stones, in Cornwall; and the name of tol-men, or dot-men, which is somewhat promiscuously used by Celtic antiquarians, should be restricted to monuments of this class, toll being the Cornish word for hole, mên for stone, and an the article." He adds further³:—"Kist-vaen . . . means a stone-chamber, from cist, the Latin cista, a chest, and vaen, the modified form of maen or mên, stone." The same word is again seen in the compound "men-hir"; and, in short, throughout the Cymric districts of Brittany, Cornwall, and Wales, the word man or men, with its labial letters sometimes modified into v or f, signifies stone.⁴

¹ Chips from a German Workshop, 1870, vol. iii. p. 319.
⁴ The Welsh maen (seen in "Pen-maen-mawr") has the compound derivatives hogfaen, a whetstone (hogy=whet), and cistfaen, defined by Spurrell as "a British monument, consisting of four flat stones placed at right angles, with a fifth on top"; cist, as in Cornish, Gaelic, and Lowland-Scotch, signifying a "chest, coffer, or box." The Cornish spelling mean occurs in "Gwreans an Bys" (1611). And in Breton we have "men-hir," "lichavenn" or "lichawen," and "peulven" (Souvestre's
Of special stones denoted by this word, some Cornish examples are the Mên Scrifa, or Inscribed Stone, Mên Perhen and the Mên-Rock, both in Constantine parish, and the circles called the Dawns Mên, some five miles west of Penzance. With regard to this last, Max Müller says\(^1\) that the name, which signifies “the dancing stones,” “was soon corrupted into dance-men, and a legend sprang up at once to account for the name, viz., that these men had danced on a Sunday and been changed into stones. Another corruption of the same name into Danismén led to the tradition that these circles were built by the Danes.” Yet another misconception is indicated by Mr G. F. Tregelles, who states that, about four miles from St Colomb, “is a detached menhir, 7 feet 6 inches high, . . . . called the ‘Old Man,’ . . . . and Mr W. C. Borlase points out that ‘Old Man’ sounds very much like ‘huel maen’ or ‘sün stone.’”\(^2\)

“A still more curious name for these circles,” continues Professor Max Müller,\(^3\) “is that of ‘Nine Maidens,’ which occurs at Boscawen-un, and in several other places in Cornwall. Now the Boscawen-un circle consists of nineteen stones, and there are very few ‘Nine Maidens’ that consist of nine stones only. Yet the name prevails, and is likewise supported by local legends of nine maidens having been changed into stones for dancing on a Sunday, or some other misdeed. One part of the legend may perhaps be explained by the fact that mèn would be a common corruption in modern Cornish for mên, stone, as pen becomes pedn, and gwen gwydn, etc., and that the Saxons mistook Cornish mèn for their own maiden.” An early recorded instance of this misconception is that of Hals, who, writing about the year 1700, describes “nine large moor stones commonly called the Nine Maids, or Virgin Sisters; probably

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\(^2\) Pp. 16-17 of The Stone Circles of Cornwall, by George Fox Tregelles. Reprinted from the Transactions of the Penzance Natural History and Antiquarian Society, 1893-4.

This last example shows us an exceptional case of the number of stones agreeing with the English numeral *nine*; although it is pretty evident that the Cornish word represented by that sound has some other meaning. It is, moreover, interesting to note that in this case of the year 1700 we have the form *maid*, instead of *maiden* or *men*. It may well be questioned whether the *d* in *gwydn, pedn*, and *mēdn* does not represent an obsolete form, instead of being a modern corruption as Max Müller states.

Be this as it may, it is clear that the Cymric word for *rode* or *stone* has gradually become confused with the English words of similar sound but different meaning,—*man, men, maid*, and *maiden*. Without pausing to consider how far other districts of South Britain may furnish parallel evidence, I shall now turn to our own part of the island.

"The Maiden Way" which comes northward through Cumberland has, I think, been pronounced by Dr Macdonald to be a drove road, and not a Roman causeway. It ought, however, to be mentioned in this connection; as also a "Maiden Castle" situated in the same county. Dr Stuart, who cites these two, speaks also of "the Maiden Stone" at Ayton in Berwickshire,—"a striking rock on the coast, isolated at high water"; and there are, further, the "Maiden Bower Craigs" near Dumfries. Going northward along the coast from Ayton, we come to "The Maidens" off North Berwick, and their offshoot, "The Maiden Foot," a dangerous submerged rock near the entrance to the harbour; off the south end of the Isle of May lies the "Maiden Hair" rock; and then at St Andrews, on the sea-shore, there is the natural rock-pillar called "The Maiden Rock." Inland in Fife there is "The Maiden Castle" of Collessie, "where are the vestiges of an ancient fort"; and, in the Falkland district, there is another ancient

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1 Quoted by Mr G. F. Tregelles, *op. cit.*, p. 10. The stones referred to form a circle in the parish of Wendron, between Redruth and Helston.

2 *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 3.

3 Mr F. R. Coles, to whom I am indebted for this last reference, mentions an interesting local custom connected with these rocks.

4 *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 3.
fortification known as "The Maiden Castle."\(^1\) [I have been subsequently informed by Sheriff Mackay that there is another "Maiden Castle" in the neighbouring parish of Kennoway.] Returning across the Forth, we find "The Maiden Castle" of Roslin, on the banks of the Esk, "where parts of the foundations of a fortress are to be seen";\(^2\) and the more notable "Maiden Castle" of Dunedin or Edinburgh. Of this last-named, an anonymous writer of 1718 remarks:—"The Castle was formerly call'd Castrum puellaeum, i.e., the Maiden Castle, because, as some say, the Kings of the Picts kept their Daughters in it while unmarry'd: But those who understand the ancient Scots or Highland Language, say the Words Maeden signify only a Castle built upon a Hill or Rock."\(^3\) Whether this writer has analysed the word accurately may well be questioned. But the point to be noticed is that, about two centuries ago, it was believed that at least this "Maiden Castle" really derived its name from a Celtic term meaning "the castle of the rock."

Proceeding northward across the Firth of Tay, we encounter a name which at once recalls the many stone circles of Cornwall designated "the nine maidens." This is a well beside the old churchyard of Strathmartine, near Dundee, known as "the Nine Maidens' Well," and associated in popular tradition with certain nine maidens, and also with the sculptured stone called "St Martin's Stone." This stone is one of two which, Dr Stuart states, were dug out of the old churchyard about the year 1796.\(^4\)

Some twenty miles farther north is the parish of Menmuir (spelt "Menmoreth" about 1280 A.D.); and Mr Johnston, in his Place-Names of Scotland,\(^5\) suggests that the first syllable of this word may be the Cymric men, "a stone." Certainly, Menmuir possesses one well-known sculptured stone; and a local rhyme, quoted by Mr Jervise in our Pro-

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\(^1\) It is situated on the southern base of Black Hill, S.W. from Falkland House, and about mid-way between Falkland and the station of Gateside.

\(^2\) Sculptured Stones, loc. cit.

\(^3\) Slezer's Theatrum Scotiae, edition of 1718, p. 7.

\(^4\) For references to this place and its tradition, see the Sculptured Stones of Scotland, pp. 20 and 24; the New Statistical Account of Scotland, "Forfarshire," p. 54; and the Dundee Evening Telegraph of 17th July 1895.

\(^5\) 1892, p. 180.
ceedings, speaks of the "Killievair Stanes," as though there had once been several. In Aberdeenshire there is "the Maiden Craig," "a remarkable rock in the gorge of a little valley, about three miles from Aberdeen"; and a little to the north-west of that is the famous "Maiden Stone" of Chapel-of-Garioch. This sculptured stone has two different traditions relating to "maidens"; both of which Dr Stuart rejects. Had the name occurred in Cornwall, Professor Max Müller would undoubtedly have classed maiden-stone with mén-rock, regarding both as mere translations from one language into another. In connection with this particular "Maiden Stone," Dr Stuart further observes that near it is "a paved road . . . called the Maiden Causeway," and that Gordon states that "this stone is contiguous to a small Danish fort called 'the Maiden Castle.'" In this same quarter of Scotland mention may be made of the sculptured stone at Manbean, in the parish of Elgin; where the first syllable of "Manbean" suggests a comparison with "Menmuir," and the possibility that both names are derived from the Cymric man or men, a stone.

As an important contribution to this detail, I may quote from a letter received from my friend the Rev. Dr Stewart ("Nether Lochaber"), to whom I had written on the subject. He observes as follows:—"A few Welsh words do here and there occur in the topographical nomenclature of the Highlands. Examples are Glen Nant, 'twixt Taynult and Loch Awe. At the head of Glencoe we have 'menhir-chlach,'—somewhat tautological, and meaning 'the rocky-stony-place.' In my own parish is 'menhir-a-cheo,'—'the misty-rocky-height,' or 'rocky-place.'" Of these place-names the first is specially interesting, as the addition of the Gaelic clach to the Cymric menhir forms an exact parallel to the "mén-rock" of Cornwall. In the latter case, English has displaced Cymric; in the former case, Cymric has been displaced by Gaelic,—which is rather suggestive.  

1 Vol. ii. (1854-7) p. 462.  
2 Sculptured Stones of Scotland, vol. i. p. 3.  
3 A kindred illustration is furnished by the Rev. J. R. Johnston, in his Place-Names of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1892):—"Carr Rocks (Crail and Berwick-on-Tweed). Tautology: G[aelic] carr . . . . a rock." The first of these is the Carr Rock or Carr Brigs, off Fife Ness, while the other seems to be the "East Carr" and "West Carr," two miles to the south of Eyemouth. (It is interesting to note that
On our western coasts there are sea-rocks distinguished similarly to those already specified between Berwick and St Andrews. Dr Munro, in referring to some Ayrshire antiquities, speaks of "the pretty little bay, known as the 'Maidens,' on account of a few fantastic and weather-beaten rocks that rear their heads above its surgy waves." Then, westward from Stranraer, and close to the Antrim coast, is a group of rocks also called "The Maidens"; while, much farther to the north, off the Isle of Skye, are the rocky islets called "Macleod's Maidens." To the north-west of "Macleod's Maidens" is the sea-loc of Loch Maddy in North Uist, which derives its name from two similar rocks at its entrance, known to English-speaking people as "The Maidies," and in Gaelic as "Maddy-More" and "Maddy-Grisioch." This distinctive "Maddy" occurs again in "Craigmaddie," near Glasgow, where there is a cromlech known as "The Auld Wives' Lift." In both of these cases, I think, "maddy" has been popularly derived from the Gaelic madadh, "a wolf." But in view of the many sea-rocks and other stones distinguished as maids and maidens, it seems as unreasonable to suppose that "The Maidies" of North Uist were so called because they resembled wolves, as that exactly similar rocks elsewhere resembled maidens. In one instance, indeed, that of "The Maids of Bute," two boulders on the hillside opposite Tighnabruaich, a certain resemblance to immediately to the south of these Carr Rocks we have the equally tautological name of "Ross Point.") A little to the east of Tantallon Castle we have also the "Carr Rocks," with one in particular styled "The Great Carr." In all these cases we have parallels to men-rock, maiden-stone, and menhir-chlach; the only difference being that, while carr-rock appears to be a union of Gaelic and English, those names just quoted appear to unite Cymric with English, and Cymric with Gaelic. Possibly the Maiden-Hair rock, off the Isle of May, ought also to be regarded as coming within the last category; assuming hair to represent an aspirated form of carr.

2 It is perhaps right to state that Dr Stewart of Nether Lochaber regards this name as quite unconnected with men and menhir; but I venture to think that a fuller consideration of the subject may modify his opinion.
3 According to the phonetic spelling in F. H. Groome's Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland, s.v. "Lochmaddy."
4 Two miles N.E. of Milngavie.
5 In the Old Statistical Account, vol. xv. p. 279, Craigmaddie is spelt Craigmadden. Here we have a close approach to the English or Cornish form "maiden."
the female figure may be noted; but this resemblance is eked out, if it is
not created, by the use of white paint.

In Shetland we have at least two pillar-rocks, isolated from the
parent cliff, which are known as “The Maiden Stack,” 1 and there is a
third, near Papa Stour, called the “Frau-a-Stack,” which, two centuries
ago, was held to mean “Our Lady’s Rock,” and had a traditionary
story of a maiden who was imprisoned on its summit. “They must
have had some difficulty in getting the young woman up, unless she
could climb like a cat, or they hoisted her up,” observes Mr J. R.
Tudor, who records the tradition. 2 This word fraua is said to be
the Danish frue, “mistress” or “lady”; and such a word may
well exist in Shetland (although I do not find it in Edmondston’s
or Jakobsen’s glossaries). But Mr Tudor points out 3 that “Munch
says Friaarstakkr is the usual name for such steep isolated stacks on the
Scandinavian coast”; and I venture to suggest that the Danish fri,
equivalent to English free, is more likely to be the root of the word. 4
At any rate, we find similar rocks off the north point of Foula styled
the “Friar Stacks” (no doubt once pronounced Freear Stacks). To suit
this form of the word, it is not unlikely that the Foula rocks will
eventually be said to resemble “friars,” if the comparison has not
been already made. But, considering the question as a whole, this
association of frue, a lady, with a rock resembling other so-called
“maidens,” does not appear to me as anything more than a coincidence
—striking, certainly, but not more striking than the fact indicated in the
title of this paper, that the Cymric word for a rock should have branched
off (with apparent consistence) into the English-sounding forms of man
and men, maid and maiden.

One other variant remains to be noticed, that of “old man,” already

1 One at the Mull of Eswick, and another near the Grind of the Navir. (See p.
504 of Tudor’s Orkneys and Shetland, London, 1883.)
2 Op. cit., p. 503. It may be mentioned that Mr H. G. Aldis, F.S.A. Scot.,
informs me that, when he visited Papa Stour in 1897, he only heard the name
“Maiden Stack” applied to the rock in question.
4 See Larsen’s Dansk-norsk-engelsk Ordbog, s.v. fri: at staa fri-t = “to stand
isolated, detached, to be exposed to view.”
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cited in Cornwall; where Mr Borlase has assumed it to signify "sun
stone" ( = huel maen). In Scotland we have the "Old Man" of Hoy
and the "Old Man" of Storr, pillar-rocks situated respectively in
Orkney and Skye. Whatever may be thought of Mr Borlase's trans-
lation of "old" as the Cornish word for "sun," it can hardly be said to
fit in in either of these cases. Yet in view of the many instances here
adduced, it is difficult to see why the word man should not be regarded
as the Cymric "rock" in these two instances as much as in any of the
others. And as for the question of the survival of Cymric words in
Scotland, it is a fact that the Cymric numerals are even yet used by
Ayrshire schoolboys in their counting-out games, and that there are many
Cymric place-names throughout Scotland.

Finally, it must not be too hastily assumed that every place-name of
this kind is traceable to the Cymric word for rock and stone. Maiden-
kirk, for example, seems clearly to owe its name to St Medan. More-
over, the names of places often become greatly abbreviated and corrupted;
and all such names must be judged from their earliest known spelling.
But, discounting all this, when any rock or stone in Scotland is distin-
guished by such forms as man, men, or maiden, the presumption seems
obviously to be that the etymology is identical with that of similar
place-names in the Cymric regions further south.

In his Early Races of Scotland (vol. ii. pp. 356-358), Colonel
Forbes-Leslie discusses the ethnology of "Maiden" as a place-name,
and gives a considerable list of places so distinguished. Of those not
included in the above paper are the "Maiden Castles" of St Vigeans,
Forfarshire; of Dunipace, Markinch, Fife; of Campsie, Stirlingshire;
of Stanemore, Westmoreland; of the neighbourhood of Durham; of the
neighbourhood of Dorchester; and at Llanarth, Cardiganshire ("Castle
Moeddyn"). And, after pointing out that Maidstone, in Kent, was
known as "Maydenstan" in 1303, he goes on to remark:—"The

1 Since this paper was read, it has been pointed out to me that if huel maen
signifies "sun-stone" in the sense of a dial, then it might quite well be applied to
any isolated pillar-rock.

2 The "Old Man" of Storr is rendered in Gaelic at the present day as Am Bodach,
t.e., "The Old Man." But this may be merely a modern translation from English
into Gaelic after the original meaning was forgotten.
primitive monuments in that neighbourhood—viz., at Aylesford and
Addington—suggest an argument in favour of Maidenslane [sic] having
a common origin, whatever that may be, with the Maiden Castles and
Maiden Stones of Wales and Scotland."