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### Guid Scots – gutes Deutsch by W.R.W. Gardner

[Ae year syne, Dr Gardner gied a talk til the Scottish German Centre. We speired gif we wad write it up for the Magazine, and here it is. We jalouse it is o sic import that we brek our rule o prentin articles in Scots alane. In our neist number we`ll hae a speil by Dr David Murison on Scots and Norse. For the pleasure o prentin the translation by Sir Alexander Gray we are behauden til his son and literary executor, Maister John Gray.]

Every speaker of English who attempts to learn German becomes quickly aware of the striking resemblance in vocabulary between the two languages. Everyday German words like *Vater, Bruder, Mutter, Mann, Weib, Haus, Ring, Gold, Silber, machen, brechen* and countless others have a familiar ring to the English ear. The reason is, we know, that English and German are sister tongues, having sprung from a common West Germanic parent, or at least from a group of closely related West Germanic dialects once spoken in a wide area of what now is North West Germany. The Angles and Saxons who invaded and conquered Britain between 450 and 550 A.D. were kinsmen of other West Germanic tribes such as the Franks, Alemans, Suebi (Swabians), and Marcomanni (Bavarians) who, at about the same time, migrated southward and conquered a vast territory as far as the Danube and the Alps, thereby laying the foundations of the later German Reich.

We should not therefore be too surprised at the close coincidence in basic vocabulary between Modern English and German. The marvel is that they have succeeded in retaining such marked similarities in spite of 1500 years of divergent development. Of the two languages English has moved much further away from its Teutonic parent than German. The reason for this is that English has in the course of its development been subjected to massive infusion of new blood from other languages, notably Scandinavian, French and Latin. The Vikings belonged to the North Germanic branch of the Germanic stock and could therefore be said to be first cousins of the Angles and Saxons, speaking a tongue which was not all that far removed from theirs. For this reason many Norse words were readily assimilated into English in the period of Viking domination in Britain. On the heels of the Vikings came the Norman French. In the centuries following the Norman Conquest English underwent a much more profound transformation still as numerous words from French were adopted, displacing and replacing native Anglo-Saxon forms. The effect of these cataclysmic events in

British history was not confined to the vocabulary of English but extended also to the structure of the language. Virtually the whole inflectional system of Old English was wiped away as a combined result of the Scandinavian and Norman French intrusion.

No such violence was done to the German language in the course of its historical development. Germany was never subjugated and dominated by alien races, as were the British, with the result that German has remained a relatively homogeneous language, preserving in both vocabulary and syntax many features of its native Germanic heritage. In order to appreciate fully the historical links between English and German we really require to go far back in time, at least to the age of Chaucer. In Chaucer's works we encounter not only many original Anglo-Saxon words which have long since been lost from the language but also a considerable number of characteristic Germanic inflections which had not by then been levelled out, e.g. *eyen* (eyes), *been* (bees), but such forms did not survive long after his time.

However we do not need to turn back the pages of history to the 14<sup>th</sup> century to find evidence of the close links between English and German. Quite remarkably, we find a vast number of old Anglo-Saxon words and syntactical features surviving in our present-day Scots dialects, all well documented in Scots literature of the past two hundred years. In fact it can be quite safely claimed that, of all areas of Britain, Scotland has remained most loyal to its native Anglo-Saxon linguistic heritage. Why this should be so is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail, but clearly Scotland's political separation from England from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and its greater geographical remoteness have been major factors.

As well as developing its own literary language, constantly drawing fresh blood from its regional dialects and reaching its flowering in the poetry of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas, Scotland also developed a fierce pride in its national identity which manifested itself, as often is the case with smaller nations, in determined will to cling to its own customs, traditions, institutions and, not least, its own language.

A further factor could well be the conservative character with which the Scots are accredited. After all, it is not just coincidence that Scots preserve a considerable number of Scandinavian and French words which have long been lost to English. The popular, romantic notion that the large body of words of French derivation

peculiar to Scots are all attributable to the Auld Alliance is scarcely tenable. Many of them date back to the early period of Norman French influence.

Let us now take a look at some of the closer points of resemblance between Scots and German of our time. Scots preserves a large body of Old English words which are remarkably similar to their German equivalents, sometimes with identical, sometimes with slightly shifted meaning. These have disappeared from Standard English, although some are still encountered in Northern English dialects. A representative selection is as follows (Scots forms are quoted first, German second):

*clash/Klatsch; carl/Kerl; coft/kaufte; crummie/krumm; fecht/Gefecht, fechten; forfochen/verfochten; fell/viel; fleech/flehen; fremit/fremd (cf. Sc. to gae to the fremit/G. in die Fremde gehen); gowk/Geck; hain/Hain, hägen; hairst/Herbst; hals(haws)/Hals; hamesucken (old Scots legal term)/heimsuchen; harns/Hirn; hoast/husten; howff/hof (as in Gasthof); jucky/juchzen; kail/Kohl; keek/gucken (low German: kiken); ken/kennen; kist/ Kiste; lear/Lehre; lift/Luft; loup/laufen; mengyie/Menge; muckel/Old German: michel; mutch/Mütze; minnie/Minne; rede/Rat; reek/rauchen; sair/sehr; schene/schön; scribe/schreiben; shoogly/schaukeln; sicker/sicher; skaith/Schaden; skellum/Schelm; snell/schnell; sned/schneiden; spael/spähen; spier/spüren; stark/stark; steggin/steigen; steer/stören; sweer/schwer; tawpie/Tölpel; thrums/Trümmer; wale/wählen; won/wohnen; wud/Wut; yon/jen(-er).*

This list of examples could be greatly extended, but enough evidence is contained within it if the remarkable correspondences between the two languages. This is one of the main reasons why Scots ballads and folksongs translate so easily and so well into German. Verses such as:

'In behint yon auld fail dyke,  
I wot there lies a new slain knight;  
And naebody kens that he lies there;  
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.'

('The Twa Corbies')

'Up and spak an elder knicht,  
Sat at the kings richt kne:

"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor

That sails upon the se"

('Sir Patrick Spens')

'It is the moon, I ken her horn,

That's blinkin in the lift sae hie ....'

(R. Burns)

would not require very much elucidation to be comprehensible to a German.

Phonological similarities between Scots and German are often striking. A few selected examples will be sufficient to demonstrate this. Scots retains the velar *k* when it is palatalized to *ch* in English, as in *kirk, birk*/G. *Kirche, Birke*/E. *church, birch*. In English this *ch* sound is often silent before another consonant, as in *thought, light*. But in Scots, as in German, *ch* is pronounced, e.g. *thocht, licht*/G. *dachte, Licht*. In vowels too we find a more marked resemblance between Scots and German:

English Scots German

*toe tae Zehe*

*cow coo Kuh*

*Heart hert Herz*

*song sang Sang*

*more mair mehr*

Correspondences between Scots and German are as evident in accident and syntax as they are in pronunciation and vocabulary. Old English plural forms of nouns survive in Scots, e.g. *-er*, as in *childer*/G. *Kinder*, and *-en*, as in *e'en* (G. *Augen*), *schoon*. Diminutives are rare in English, but abound in Scots as they do in German, particularly in its regional dialects. German has the suffixes *-chen*, and *-lein* (with numerous dialectal variants) as in *Häuschen, Kästchen, Hündlein* etc. Scots makes wide use of the suffix *-ie*, as in *laddie, lassie, dearie, feartie, coordie*

etc., and in northern dialects, *-ock*, as in *lassock*, *winnock*, *bannock* etc. These two suffixes can combine, as in *lassockie*, *wifockie*, giving a double degree of diminution. The process often goes further still in forms like *a wee bit lassockie*.

In German all adjectives with suitable meaning are used as adverbs without the need of a suffix, e.g. *er is freundlich* (*he is friendly*), and *er lächelt freundlich* (*he smiles in a friendly way*). This usage survives in Scots, e.g. *I'm awfy thrang* (cf. E. *I am awfully busy*); *I'm terrible obleeg'd tae ye*; *he was fair dumfoonert*; *she was greetin sair*; *her tongue gauns constant*. The adjectival suffix *-like* (G. *-lich*) is rare in English, cf. *lifelike*, *childlike*, having been mainly replaced by *-ish*, as in *blackish*. It is common in German, e.g. *wunderlich*, *ärgerlich*, *kleinlich*, *rötlich* etc., and is in wide use in Scots, e.g. *blacklike*, *doucelike*, *younglike*, *oddlike*, *strangelike* etc. Similarly the suffix *-some* (G. *-sam*), though not infrequent in English, e.g. *fearsome*, *gruesome*, is much more prevalent in Scots, e.g. *vexsome*, *scunnersome*, *frichtsome*, *teddisome*, *lightsome* etc.

In the case of numerals, the unit is often placed after the tens in Scots, e.g. *twa an' twinty*, as in German, e.g. *zweiundzwanzig*. The ordinals are formed by adding *-t*, as in German, not *-th* as in English, e.g. *foart*, *fift*, *saxt*, *seevent*/G. *viert*, *fünfft*, *sechst*, *siebert*.

Weak verbs in Scots often retain the Old English full ending *-it* in the past tense and past participle, e.g. *grippit*, *happit*, *theekit*, *bedeckit*, *yarkit*. Many strong verbs in Scots preserve old historical forms of the past tense and past participle, long since levelled out in Standard English. These often bear a striking resemblance to German strong verbs, e.g.

#### English Scots German

*find, found, found, find, fand, fund, finden, fand, gefunden*

*fight, fought, fought fecht, focht, fochten fechten, focht, gefochten*

*hold, held, held haud, held, hauden halten, hielten, gehalten*

*let, let, let lat, luit, latten lassen, liess, gelassen*

*leap, leapt, leapt lowp, lap, luppen laufen, lief, gelaufen*

*work, worked, worked work, wrocht, wrocht würken, worhte, geworht (Old German)*

In some forms of the past tense Scots and German approach each other closely, e.g. *brak, cam, beuk*/G. *brach, kam, buk* (*backte* in Modern German). Scots often preserves the old *-en* suffix in the past participle of strong verbs as in German, although the *ge-* prefix has been lost (as in Low German), e.g. *gotten, hauden, proven, putten, quitten, strucken, stoo den*.

The affinity between Scots and German is not confined to declensions and conjugations, but also extends to syntax. We find that as in German, nouns denoting weight, measure or value are generally used in the singular, whereas English demands a plural, e.g. *twa stane o' tatties; six fit lang; three gless o' whisky; twa unce o' salts; it'll be seevin mile frae here; she's aicht year auld*/G. *zwei Pfund Tomaten; zwei Sack Kartoffeln; zwei Glas Whisky; zwei Paar Schuhe; zwei Mark*.

The use of the definite article in Scots is often identical with German usage in situations where it is dropped in English, e.g. before names of seasons, as *in the winter*/G. *im Winter; the summer is over*/G. *der Sommer ist zu Ende*; with names of meals, as *what's for the supper?; it's fish for the tea*, cf. G. *zum Abendessen; das Frühstück war reichlich*; with the names of certain institutions, as *at the school; he's awa tae the kirk; he's been sent tae the jile*, cf. G. *in der Schule, im Gefängnis, zum Markt*; with nouns denoting arts, sciences or sports, as *he's guid at the German; he's awa at the fitba'; she's takin' lessons at the singing'*, cf. G. *die Physik wird immer schwerer; er hat sich beim Fußball verletzt*; and in other miscellaneous situations, as *he has the most money*/G. *er hat das meiste Geld; up the stair*/G. *die Treppe hinauf; he cam wi' (by) the train*/G. *er fuhr mit dem Zug*.

There are parallel usages in Scots and German in the case of

a) certain expressions of time, e.g. *hauf fower*/G. *halb vier* (i.e.3.30); *fower oors*/G. *vier Uhr*;

b) the use of prepositions with certain verbs and adjectives, e.g. *wait on*/G. *warten auf* (cf. E. *wait for*); *speak wi' (I didna speak wi' him)*/G. *sprechen mit; feart for (I'm no feart for him)*/G. *sich fürchten vor; angry at (I was angry at him)*/G. *böse auf* (cf. E. *angry with*);

c) the use of *for to (fur tae)*, equivalent to German *um zu*, to express purpose before an infinitive, e.g. *he gaed fur tae get it*/G. *er ist gekommen, um es zu holen*;

d) the use of the double negative (a marked feature of old German and old English, still common in German dialects, and used to give great emphasis to the negative), e.g. *he's no nae waur; he disna tak nae mair than ane gless.*

Scots has preserved some interesting features of verbal usage which correspond closely with constructions in German. In interrogative sentences the verb sometimes comes at the beginning or, with an interrogative adverb, in second place, e.g. *Think ye sae?; whaur git ye that?* The auxiliary verb *can* is often used as an infinitive, e.g. *I'll no can gaun the morn; I'll no can dae it/G. Ich werde es nicht tun können. Sud* (i.e. *should*) can be used to express a reported fact as *soll*, or *sollte* in German, e.g. *'Mrs. Birse mintet to me as muckle's that they sud be thinkin'* (i.e. *are said to be thinking*) *o' gien oure the place to the aullest sin Peter.'* (W. Alexander: 'Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk'). The verb *to go* is omitted in some constructions with *want* (G. *wollen*), e.g. *he wants in, oot, awa/ G. er will hinein, hinaus, weg.*

Sufficient evidence has been presented in the course of this short treatment to demonstrate that Scots has preserved many ancient features of the once common West Germanic forbear of German and English. German and Scots translators alike have discovered for themselves how readily the folk poetry of one language is transposed into the other. In addition to their common stock of vocabulary, both languages have a great wealth of rhyming words, similar rhythmic patterns and the same potential for alliterative and onomatopoeic effects. Few languages lend themselves as well as German to translations from Scots. No doubt this is one important reason among others why Burns has been done into German so successfully by so many hands.