

Duw Genes

(Pronounced 'Due Gennes' – 'Goodbye' in Cornish)

Boswednack, Cornwall – March 1891

'Now then, why on God's good earth would anyone be interested in hearing what I've got say? But, as you've trudged your way to my door, open the curtains and let in some light; then pull up a chair. You will have to speak up, mind, as my hearing isn't all that it used to be – and no, I don't mind if you write down what I have to say...but for the life of me, I can't understand why anyone should be listening.

'You say your readers would be interested in my childhood? Well, it was happy. Poor, cold, and wet, but happy. My family, like everyone in Zennor, lived off the land and the sea. Here, in the very room where we are sitting, is where I first saw the light of day. Just there, in front of the fire. It was a fine spring day, and within the hour my father had swaddled me in a blanket, held me in his arms, and shown me the view of the fields, the cliffs, and the glistening sea beyond. '*Dynnargh dhis*, John' he said, 'Welcome. *Da yw gener metya genes* - I'm pleased to meet you.' And so, from the moment I first set eyes on the world, I knew I was a true Cornishman. Can I spell that for you? Show it to me later, but I fear that for your readers it might as well be Double Dutch or Greek.

'Most of the time we learned the old language in rhymes and silly verses – children's games and the like. My mother would sing me a lullaby, especially when the wind threatened to take off the roof, and my father would teach me the names of the birds, animals, and flowers of the field. And the weather of course! *Glaw* for rain – nearly always; *Howl* for sun – hardly ever; and *Gwyns* for wind -all the time. And then there was the Cranken Rhyme – we didn't understand a word of it, but it sounded nice and would always bring a smile to our faces.

'When they died, I took over the farm. Little time for courting, I lived alone – still live alone – and have no sons or daughters to pass things on to. Even if I did, like all the young people around here, especially now the railway has found its way to these parts, they would like as not have gone to seek their fortunes in Bristol or London. No time for the old ways. No time for Cornwall.

'Now, I'm tired, so I'll bid you *Duw Genes*. I look forward to reading the article – *Death of a Language*, you call it?

'A sad title; but true.'

Boswednack Community Centre – March 2022

'Let's start by practising what we learned last week, shall we? So, if I was to meet a stranger and wanted to say hello, my name is Mari, then goodbye, I would say: *Dydh da. Ow hanow yw Mari. Duw Genes*.

'Now, turn to your partner, and introduce yourself.'

497 words