II. WELSH STUDIES

LANGUAGE

By T. ARWYN WATKINS, Senior Lecturer in Welsh,
University College of Wales, Aberystwyth

I. General

The chapter on 'Welsh' in W. B. Lockwood, Languages of the British Isles Past and Present, London, Deutsch, pp. 29-52, contains a brief sketch of the phonetics and grammar of the language (useful for students with no previous knowledge of Welsh) and a fair number of 'readings' from texts representing the main historical periods. The texts are accompanied by a form-by-form translation into English. There is also a brief trad. account of the decline of the language, including (somewhat unexpectedly in these 'revivalist' days) the prediction that '... the use of the Welsh language has so far declined that a restoration of its fortunes is scarcely to be hoped for, the courageous exertions of its devotees notwithstanding'.

C. W. Lewis, 'The Welsh language: its origin and later history in the Rhondda', Rhondda Past and Future, ed. K. S. Hopkins, Ferndale, Rhondda Borough Council, 179-234, is a stock potted account of the development of Welsh from its Celtic origins to the present. This is followed by a rather more detailed statistical analysis of its dramatic decline in the Mid-Glamorgan Rhondda valley during the last hundred years. The reasons given for the decline are the traditionally accepted ones, amongst which the influence of English education, to L.'s mind, looms large. He is a little less pessimistic as to the future than Lockwood and reflects the present elitist atmosphere surrounding the revivialist cause in the significant statement that Welsh 'is no longer the language of the poor economically-deprived gwerin but is increasingly becoming the language of the professional classes and of those who belong to the educated cultured strata of native Welsh society'.

The appearance of the Bible in Welsh in the 16th c. (a major factor in the survival of the language) has recently been the subject of important discussions. G. M. Ashton, 'Braslun o
Gefndir Cyhoeddwr Ysgrythurau yn Gymraeg', Diwinyddiaeth, 26:22–33, is concerned with the background to the publishing and printing of both Salesbury’s New Testament (1567) and William Morgan’s complete Bible (1588). J. G. Jones, ‘Richard Parry, Bishop of St Asaph: some aspects of his career’, BPCS, 26, 1974–6:175–90, discusses the background of the man whose name attaches to the revised transl. of 1620, a revision which restored many of the classical forms of the language and contributed in no small measure to the very substantial structural differences between modern lit. and colloquial Welsh. After decades of critical dismissal of Parry’s personal contribution and a general acceptance that the work was really done by the grammarian and lexicographer John Davies, there has recently been a partial ‘rehabilitation’ of Parry. C. H. Thomas, ‘Y Beibl Cymraeg’, Diwinyddiaeth, 26:34–41, is an excellent article on the new transl. of the New Testament (1975). T. is highly critical of the language of the transl., describing it as a mixture of registers extending from the expected formal lit. to a very informal conversational. She quotes some interesting examples and places the responsibility on the shoulders of the literary panel of the translating committee. She strongly suggests that the panel (which is made up of some of the most eminent Welsh scholars and littérateurs) should seriously reconsider its language policy before a new transl. of the complete Bible is published in 1988.

P. Morgan, Iolo Morganwg, Cardiff, Wales U.P., 99 pp., gives an interesting insight into the character of this remarkable 18th-c. scholar and forger. His fantasies resulted among other things in a wide acceptance among Welsh scholars and littérateurs of the genuineness of the so-called bardic alphabet, ‘Coelbren y Beirdd’, in which Welsh was supposed to have been written before the Roman alphabet was adopted. His ideas contributed in some measure to the linguistic theories of W. O. Pughe, the grammarian who, to its detriment, dominated Welsh scholarship during the 19th c.

M. Jones, ‘Literary and colloquial Welsh: some points of divergence’, Studia Celtica Japonica, no. 8:1–14, has the inevitable weaknesses of such a wide-ranging introductory survey. An attempt is made to take in all aspects of linguistic difference with the result that there is always insufficient detail