

# Treatise On The Soul of Kernow

## I.

The times are a changin', and with it, the people and the world change too. Retelling the story of these changes is often called a history. Trying to predict the future of these changes is nowadays called economics. I am neither historian nor economist, in so far as anyone would like to bestow those titles upon me. Nor could I really be called a journalist, since nothing I say here hasn't been said before, or can be relied on to be true. Now clear that these are anything other than the unreliable yarns of a knave, I will begin. Herein lies a tale about the ever-changing soul of the land of **Kernow**.

Cornwall is many things. It is a region in the southwest of Great Britain. It is a political entity, as well as a geographical one. How to distinguish one from the other is a problem of little consequence, since this region has such distinctive geography, I hardly doubt many feel troubled at conflating the two<sup>1</sup>. It is the southernmost, and westernmost extent of Great Britain, having one of the mildest, and stormiest climates on the island. It is home to the Cornish people, some of whom are Cornish nationalists, some of whom also identify as ethnically Cornish, as distinct from white-British, or any other ethnicity in the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cornwall is surrounded by the sea on three sides, and by the Tamar river and Dartmoor on the fourth.

It is famous for sandy coves, granite cliffs, evocative seaside cottages, pasties, ice cream, surf, sunsets, and emerald ocean views from its dramatic coast.

This well renowned landscape is also the stage upon which a significant change takes place as we speak. This change is political, economic, cultural, social, and who knows what else. As with all change, it is just as important to preserve certain things from being lost, as it is to improve upon them. **Progress and conservation are paradoxical bed-fellows**, something the process of writing this treatise has shown to me to be true.

Though these disciplines - those of politics, economics, the humanities and social sciences - are interesting in their own right, to exclusively view the world through their lens requires that we create an abstraction. In order to create any sort of rational, objective abstraction, it is required to climb to a great altitude and look down on the world and its phenomena, as though it were a map. **Maps are the tools of power**, and though enabling and informative, sometimes even beautiful, people desire an intimacy which is lacking in the distance of a birds-eye view. If this was not true, a tourist would never need to set foot on foreign soil, as he could claim to have seen the world from his aeroplane or television.

I do not wish to make an abstraction of a land where, when I am there, I feel as though I am a **part of the soil**. To view the world as an abstraction, at least in our day and age, is also to be entirely materialistic, since these disciplines are largely averse to trendy ontologies. This too does not suit, since to feel part of the soil, to encounter a region, for me is not compatible with a

materialist ontology. It is also true that, to view the world through the lens of a discipline requires having been given the authority to do so, and lacking the prerequisite qualifications, I shall not claim such an entitlement.

Yet I am entitled to lay claim to being a Cornishman, and so rather than reflect on an abstraction, fit in with materialism, or lay false claim to authority, I wish to speak openly, honestly, and with sincerity, about a land in which I see change. However, to speak openly as a Cornishman, also means to speak knavishly, scornfully, licentiously, lest it be someone else's tale to tell.

What's more, to do the place and the people justice requires more than encyclopaedic facts. Rather than rely on descriptions of the changing face of the land, something which I believe amounts to very little on its own, I want to describe the changing **soul** of the land - a task which requires historical context as well as a certain spiritual inclination.

I once met a stranger in a bar in London, a Canadian man, and listened to him passionately describing his visit to Cornwall. Something invisible had incensed him with the feeling that the place had its own character. I remember him saying that something beyond just the landscape and the town had evoked an emotion in him which was completely unique. In fact, a truer representation of what he said, was that **Cornwall had its own emotion**, and he happened to be sensitive to it. He also spoke as though I would know exactly what he was talking about, and I did. This is by no means a unique experience, and confirms my own feelings about many places.

It may be why so many people are so passionate about the area, why so many people feel drawn to it, and I hope even those

who have not visited the region might be sympathetic. I hope many people agree that it is not *that* difficult to 'speak to the land'. It may be very difficult to command it to tell its secrets, but to catch a glimpse, to eavesdrop, is most definitely not out of the question.

With that in mind let us return to the Cornish peninsula. We must first take a look at something plainly visible to us all - that Cornwall looks very different to how we remember it, and certainly how our ancestors remember it. Within just the modern era there have been some big moves. The language, the industry, the culture, the infrastructure, the towns, the relationship between the land and people; all have not just slowly and subtly changed, but have undergone complete revolutions. Even people's attitudes to the region in the media, or the way people pay attention to it as inhabitants and visitors seems to be unrecognisable, just by the simple fact that people appreciate it. It has become a nationwide icon of natural beauty, and an international heritage site, meaning people probably would like to preserve that beauty.

In contrast, for a long time at least a few could not have cared less about the beauty of it, and hence it was heavily exploited. Mining, military bases, farming, pollution, terrible town planning, using ancient forts as quarries, the list goes on. If you will allow me to anthropomorphise, as I have said I would, the land is at least partly responsible for that, the same way we are partly responsible for the misfortunes which befall us. After all, should that not be implied by the notion of soul, that it has a teleology and character - sometimes unable to act

in its best interest, being rebellious, and eventually trying to change its ways?<sup>2</sup>

How would it make a difference to know if your beloved homeland was mingling in a new crowd? Cornwall is doing just that. It does now attract *lots* of completely different people - not without consequences for its more regular inhabitants, what we might call the ethnically Cornish.

On this note, I myself do not live there any more, nor do many of my family, and so am not Cornish by residence, but Cornish by **blood**. Branches of my family tree show we have been there since records began. It is not outrageous to assume they have dealings in the area across an unimaginable span of time before that. Though I do not believe anyone should need permission to talk about anything, I feel entitled to talk about being Cornish.

That said, I am not planning on sermonising, lecturing - this is hopefully going to be fun, an escape - nor do I want to talk down to anyone else from a position of superiority. It is simply worth pointing out on a contextual note, that I am closely connected to the area, and that I, in typically Cornish fashion, have left.

Since I am not a resident there and have not been for some time, I tend not to be patriotic or sentimental, nor am I an outsider trying to fit in or maintain a livelihood. I am a piece of Cornwall which, like a spore, has floated away and taken up root elsewhere, to start something new. It may be a

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<sup>2</sup> Plotinians may take issue with this, I am well aware, but with two thousand years of history on my side, I feel less optimistic about the perfection of the intellect.

disappointment to learn that the 'something new' which it engendered is only a libellous retelling of its history, but I know it well enough to be sure that is not true, and in any case, much worse has gone before.

I may flaunt my time on the land and family ties among the people, but it means nothing more than having a certain fluency with the matter at hand, as a lifelong swimmer tends to have more of an affinity with water. This fluency, and this ancestry, is a badge of pride, but not a badge of authority, and I leave it down to you to decide whether to receive any claims and opinions in seriousness or jest.