

## I.

## ON THE KYMRIC ELEMENT IN THE CELTIC TOPOGRAPHY OF SCOTLAND. BY THE REV. THOMAS M'LAUCHLAN, LL.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

The topography of Scotland presents us with features sufficiently various. Not more variegated are the colours of its national tartan than are the names which distinguish its localities. In immediate proximity to each other in many districts may be found townships which have been named by different races speaking different languages, and which furnish us with memorials of those races long after some of them, with their languages, have passed away for ever. The study of those names belongs to three different sciences. First, it belongs to Philology. Some of the most interesting and instructive forms which words assume are to be found in their application to topography; and there is, beyond doubt, a large amount of valuable knowledge lying latent beneath those names which the skill of the philologer has still to bring to light. Then, again, it belongs to Ethnology. Names speak of the races that applied and used them. The nations that people a country live in their designations of places, and other objects, long after they themselves have disappeared from the face of the land. The topography of America will long testify to the existence of the perished Indian; and it is doubtful whether the names of places in Britain do not speak of a race or races who once existed there, but of whom there is now no record, either written or traditional. But the study belongs also to the domain of History, in the stricter sense of the term, and in this connection it is that it assumes a higher dignity and consequence than would otherwise belong to it. True, the testimony of topography has not the certainty of written records, but it is as true that it has not their uncertainty either. Names have been exposed to the influence of no passion, and no prejudice in conferring them. So far as they speak, they speak truth—a statement which cannot always be made respecting written documents, which even after they are deciphered are often the mere monuments of the ignorance, the malice, the prejudice, or the partisanship of their authors, and which, in so far as they are so, serve to lead

us away from, instead of guiding us to, the facts of history. It is true that the range is narrow within which topography can be made to testify at all, but within that range its testimony is valuable, and more deserving of being listened to than has often been allowed. Hence the importance of a careful, accurate, and persistent study of the facts with which it presents us.

In Scotland this study is of interest in connection with the questions so long discussed respecting the ancient inhabitants, and more especially those regarding the long rival, but latterly amalgamated, races of the Picts and Scots. The question has been often raised, and by some parties held to be unsettled still, Who were these severally? Some five or six words of the Pictish language have descended to us. Bede tells us that this people had a language peculiar to themselves. Have we any means of knowing what it was? Does the topography of the country help us in the inquiry; and can we from it gather such a vocabulary of the Pictish tongue as will afford anything like certainty in fixing who these Picts were?

In deciding this question, we are brought to deal with one which appears to be justly preliminary to it,—the question of the form in which we are to take the words whose relations we propose to discuss. Whether we are to take these words as they appear now in common usage, or as they appear in such written documents as have come down to us from the past. It is natural to suppose that the history of a word is to be found most accurately recorded in such documents, because that in them we are able to trace it through its different phases, ascending gradually until we reach its primitive and radical form. This may be true in a few cases, but in a greater number there never was a purer delusion. So far is it from being true that modern modes of pronouncing and spelling topographical terms must be corrected by a reference to ancient documents, that the words as written in these are in a majority of cases utterly indistinguishable, except as read in the light of modern usage. It is necessary, at least, as frequently to read ancient topographical terms in the light of modern usage, as modern terms in the light of ancient orthography. It cannot safely be forgotten that a correct or fixed orthography is itself a modern thing. The spelling in the letters of men and women high in social position not a century ago, is such as

would exclude their authors from the lowest government situations to which there is admission by competitive examination nowadays. In the names of places the variations are extraordinary, and quite absurd. Dr Johnson, in his account of his visit to the Highlands, spells the name of the well-known valley of Glenmorrison with two *l*'s instead of two *r*'s. It is not impossible that some ingenious philologist may, a century after this, find some important theory on this striking fact, and point out how rapidly topographical terms undergo great variations. A safer guide, however, is found in the pronunciation of a modern native than in the mistaken orthography of the travelling philosopher. In like manner, it must be borne in mind, that in our ancient historical documents the names of places were written by men who for the most part knew not one word of the languages to which these terms belonged, and it is no wonder that we should so often find in them those remarkable combinations of letters which defy the ingenuity of even the practised reader, and which show how thoroughly at their wit's end were the scribes in representing upon paper sounds which they had barely caught. Modern Anglo-Saxons are not in many respects different from their fathers, and the statement made may be illustrated by a reference to Gaelic names as now written by English or Lowland Scots writers, when unaided by a knowledge of the true orthography.

It may be of interest, while dealing with this question, to refer to the names of some well-known localities in Scotland, and compare the ancient orthography with the modern pronunciation. The most ancient name of the island of Iona, as found in written documents, is *Hii*. With this the modern name, as pronounced by the native Highlander, is identical. Twelve hundred years have made no change in the spoken word. But the written word has undergone a very different fate. Not more various are the hues of the chameleon than are the forms through which it has passed—*Ea*, *Eo*, *Ieoa*, *Aoi*, *Eyna*, *Yi*, *Hyon*, and various others, of all of which it may be said that they are not of the slightest value, as throwing light on the origin of the term.

In the south of Scotland is the parish of Traquair, a name which finds its representative in the Treguer of Cornwall and the Treguier of Brittany, its English synonym being *The town on the green*. A reference to the charter form of this word is instructive. It appears as *Trequair*, *Tresquere*,

Traverqueir,<sup>1</sup> Trefquer, where the Kymric Tref is unmistakable, and in the year 1150 as Trauequayr, where we reach the pronunciation now in use, and where we learn how steady popular usage in such cases is.

Another name as clearly Kymric as Traquair is that of Tranent. This name appears at an early period in writings as Travernant, a form just such as the Kymric scholar would anticipate. In this latter form the preposition *er* is introduced, making the name "The town on the valley," as in Traverquair; in the former, it is Trentant, as still existing in Wales, "The town of the valley." These are not different names, and there is nothing in the form of the word Tranent to induce the belief that it is more modern than the other.

Among the Western Islands appears one with the English name of Benbecula. The Gaelic name is Beinn nam faodhla, or "The hill of the fords," a name accurately descriptive of the form and position of the island. But how does this name appear in charters? It appears as Beandmoyll, Beanweall, Buchagla, Benvalgha, forms from which it would be well-nigh impossible to extract the real word, and some of which are further removed from it than their modern English representative.

The fair conclusion from these and innumerable similar facts is, that it is upon the whole safer, in our topographical inquiries, to start from modern usage as a basis, while charter forms are to be employed in so far as a rational use of the information they contain may serve to aid in the discovery of the real derivation of names. There is no doubt that in numerous cases such information with respect to earlier forms, and even essential parts of a name, which have in the course of time dropped out of use, is necessary to ensure a historical, and hence an accurate instead of a fanciful, account of our topographical terms. Any one acquainted with Highland etymologies, knows to what an extent our imaginative countrymen have gone in attaching meanings altogether fanciful to such terms; but nothing is more likely to mislead the

<sup>1</sup> Mr Skene, in his paper on the Picts recently published, makes the statement that the form "Traver" does not occur in the topography of Wales. It is equally true that it does not occur in the topography of Scotland, save in some ancient writings. Tranent, Traquair, Troqueer, Traprain, are the Scottish forms. The existence of the "er," however, presents no real difficulty.

inquirer than elevating our ancient and irregular orthography to a position which it is altogether unfit to occupy.<sup>1</sup>

With these preliminary remarks, the question presents itself, whether and to what extent Kymric words occur in the topography of Scotland; and in examining into it for a little, it may be best to confine the inquiry to what was and is supposed to have constituted the ancient territory of the Picts north of the Firth of Forth. Father Innes, in his "Critical Essay," maintains that such words largely exist; he is supported by Chalmers in his "Caledonia," with an amount of labour and erudition which, notwithstanding all that has been said, and often unjustly, to weaken his authority, entitles his opinion to high respect. Mr Taylor, in his work on "Words and Places," maintains the same view, and does so with learning and caution, notwithstanding some mistakes into which he has been led. Nor is it easy to see how the view can be impugned in accordance with the clear and convincing facts of the case.

In the county of Denbigh, in North Wales, lies the vale of Clwyd, intersected by the river of the same name. In the west of Scotland lies another vale of Clyde, with another river of the same name. If we are asked to account for the identity of the names, we are most likely to reply that they were in both instances given by the same people; and in this case history warrants the conclusion, for it informs us beyond a question that both valleys were inhabited by a Kymric population. There is a Clody in Ireland, which Mr Ferguson, in his "River Names," and Mr Taylor both make identical with Clyde; but as there is a village of the name of Clody on the banks, the source of the name is sufficiently obvious. The only name in Ireland apparently the same, is that of the

<sup>1</sup> A case in point may be found in a word referred to by Mr Skene, in his recent paper on the Pictish language, &c. He quotes the opinions of Statistical Account writers on the origin of the word Elie, in Fife, and tells us it was anciently spelled Chellin. This does not aid us in discovering the etymology of the word, however. But we know that in Gaelic topography "An fhaoluinn" means *The sandy beach*. There are several places so called in the West Highlands. This is the real meaning of Elie, as is proved to a demonstration by the fact that the English name retains usually the article, "The Elie." Here the "n" of Chellin is accounted for, but the "ch" is a miswriting or a misreading, either of which is possible. "Fhaoluinn" is pronounced "eulin."

Glyde, in the county of Louth. If this be the same, it is important to observe that it appears in that part of Ireland said to have been occupied by a Pictish population.

To the north-east of the Clwyd, and sweeping the confines of Wales, we find a river bearing the name of Dee. Entering Scotland, a river bearing the same name meets us in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. We find no difficulty in accounting for this, when we note the numerous Kymric names in the surrounding country, from Penpont, Ecclefechan, and Cummertrees on the east, to Ochiltree on the west. But a river of the same name occurs in Aberdeenshire. Are we not justified in concluding that the people who gave the name in the other two cases gave it in this case also? But we cast our eye over the map of Ireland, and the purely Gaelic region of Argyle, and we find a "Dee" only in the county of Louth, and alongside of the Glyde already referred to. Its existence may be attributed to the same cause with the latter, and is, therefore, to be traced to a Pictish source.

In the county of Glamorgan, in Wales, we find the river Nith—a name said by high Kymric authority to be derived from the Kymric word "Nedd," *anything that twists or curves*. Entering Scotland, we find, as in the former case, a "Nith" in Dumfriesshire, and we find a Nethan in the purely Kymric district of Strathclyde; these names are easily accounted for, occurring as they do in what were unquestionably Kymric districts. But then we find a Nethy in Perthshire, and another in the county of Moray; so that from Glamorgan to Dumfries, and thence to the Moray Firth, along the east coast of Scotland, we find this name extending. At the same time, no similar name occurs in the whole river nomenclature of Ireland and Argyle.

There are three Calders in England, one in Strathclyde, and a large number in the Pictish part of Scotland; and this name continues the same, notwithstanding any changes that may have occurred in the spoken language of the several sections of the country where the word occurs.<sup>1</sup> But neither Ireland nor Argyle yields one.

<sup>1</sup> It has been urged that the phonetic mutations which distinguish languages must be sought for in topography. This principle has recently been pressed far beyond its legitimate limits. It is true that it is found to operate within the range of topography, as in the case of the Roman *v* representing the Kymric *gw*, and the

So with mountains. The word "Ochil," applied to the range of hills north of the Forth, is decisive. We have the Gaelic equivalent for the word "Ochil" in "usal;" but Ochil is a distinctly British form, and it is only necessary to look into the oldest MSS. of both Gaelic and Kymric to see that these distinctions have suffered little modification within the historical period. If we give up "Ochil" as applied to the hills referred to, we must give up "Ochil" in the term "Ochiltree," which is as pure Welsh as if the language were spoken in the parish at this day. It has been said that because the geographer of Ravenna mentions "Cindocellum" as a town in Scotland, that therefore "Ochil" must be Gaelic. A single glance at what the geographer says, and a perusal of the names of the accompanying towns, such as Jano, Maulion, Demerosesa, Cermo, will suffice, I presume, to show how very narrow a basis such an inference is made to rest upon; besides that "cwn" is as much British, as "ceann" is Gaelic, for *head*.

The Scottish Lomonds are, beyond a doubt, from the same source with the southern Plinlimmon. It has been said that the Lomond in the case of the Scottish Lomond is merely a hardening of the Leven, applied to the river and lake, which, curiously enough, flow and lie at the base of two of those Lomonds. But there are Levens where there are no Lomonds; and these are in Argyle, showing that in all likelihood the name Leven, in the east, being Gaelic, is of later application than Lomond. A Ben Lomond, near Dumbarton, the capital of British Strathclyde, need create no surprise, as the British tongue must have been spoken around its base; but what is true of that Lomond must be equally true of those in Fife. Lomond, in Welsh, has an intelligible meaning—a *beacon*.

pure *l* of the Saxon representing the aspirated *l* of the Welsh. But there is nothing more likely to lead to error than the application of this principle uniformly in analysing topographical terms, especially in languages where the same organs are similarly used in enunciating words. An illustration of this may be found in the numerous Gaelic names which pervade the Scottish Lowlands, and which, as spoken by the Teuton for three hundred years, are identical with the same words as passing through the throat of the most guttural-speaking Gael. Such a word as Balmaghie, in Kirkcudbright, which, if assuming the Saxon accent, would be Balmaghie, is still even as to accent thoroughly Gaelic.

On the subject of the "Abers," which are said lately to be common to the British and Gaelic dialects, it is remarkable that such a statement could be made in the face of the fact, that while Wales yields so many instances of the use of the word, Gaelic Argyle does not yield one. A few cases in Ireland may be accounted for by the existence of a Pictish people there. Such cases are, however, by no means well authenticated, and, in the meantime, speculations upon the source and relationship of Inver and Aber must yield simply to the logic of fact.<sup>1</sup>

Names of places give the same testimony with names of rivers and mountains. Thus in Brittany, we find Ruan the modern Rennes, and Rohan; a little to the north of these is Rouen, on the Seine. In Wales, we have Ruthin, while in Pictish-Scotland the Ruthvens are numerous, but none occur in Ireland or Argyle. Nor can changes in the spoken language have affected this word. In Wales we have Llanerch; in Strathclyde, Lanark and Drumlanrick; in Pictish-Scotland, Lanrick. No such name occurs in Ireland or Argyle. In Brittany we have Gouerin; in Montgomery, Gower; the Carse of Gowrie, and relative terms, will at once occur to the Scot. The word is a British one, derived from verdure, and retains to this day its British form, although there is a Gaelic form of it—"Feur," *grass*—following, as might be expected, the principles that govern Gaelic enunciation.

Two "Tres" exist on the banks of Lochness. If these be not Kymric, what are they? And there is not one in all Argyle, or in Ireland. But it is needless to dilate. An induction of facts in topography makes it clear that the names in the Pictish portion of Scotland differ from those of Ireland and Argyle, and in the measure in which they do so that they approach the Kymric. Such words as "Pit" or "Pitten," and "For" or "Fother," which appear to be characteristic of Pictish topography alone, do not affect this conclusion in the least, although they serve to prove that the Pictish language had its own distinctive features.

<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of notice, that the generic "Aber" is in Scottish topography found uniformly associated with specific terms purely Kymric; as Aberuchill, Aberchaldar, Aberarder, Aberdour, Aberbrothock, Aberdeen, Aberchirder, Abernethy. That "Inver" should be associated occasionally with Kymric terms is nothing to the purpose; but it is to the purpose that "Aber," the Kymric generic term, should never be associated with a Gaelic word.



A more general reference might have been made in this paper to that read by Mr Skene, last April, before the Royal Society of this city, and since then published in their *Transactions*, in which he takes a somewhat opposite view; but two papers published by him since that time in the "*Archæologia Cambrensis*," as preparatory to that paper, which appears in the same publication, render it almost unnecessary. In the latter of these Mr Skene says, "From these examples, Pictish appears to occupy a place between Kymric and Gaelic, leaning to one in some of its phonetic laws, and to the other in others." Having taken the liberty of propounding this theory some time ago, I feel much fortified in maintaining it by such authority as Mr Skene's, even although he does say that the language inclines more to the Gaelic than to the Kymric. I called it Gallo-cymbric, which did not imply an opposite view. But I find a difficulty here. Mr Skene says, in one of his papers, that "The generic terms (of the Pictish language) do not show the existence of a Kymric language north of the Forth." Now these two statements hardly consist. If the language had a large admixture of Kymric elements, which I do not wonder that Mr Skene, as a scholar, is ready to admit, how is it possible that they do not exist in its generic terms, as exhibited in the topography?

But while referring to the question as one bearing on the races who first peopled Scotland, for it comes finally to resolve itself into this, I cannot but regret the continued mistranslation by recent writers of an important Latin quotation—perhaps the quotation most relied upon by historians in forming their views of the ancient inhabitants of Scotland, into which one of those actually introduces a hyphen of his own devising, in order to make his interpretation sure. The passage is the famous one respecting the "*Scoti vagantes*," from Ammianus Marcellinus. I quote it from the "*Monumenta Historica*," whose editors have used the best edition of their author in furnishing it to their readers. It is as follows:—"Illud tamen sufficiet dici, quod eo tempore Picti in duas gentes divisi, Dicaledonas et Vecturiones, itidemque Attacotti, belliosa hominum natio, et Scotti, per diversa vagantes multa populabantur." The meaning of this passage is illustrated by a previous one from the same author, where he says "*Picti Saxonesque et Scotti, et Attacotti, Brittanos ærumnis vexavere continuis*," the real meaning being

that the Picts, Attacots, and Scots, wandering through the Roman province, committed great depredations. Why the "vagantes" should have hitherto been taken to qualify the Scoti merely, is not easily seen, but the perpetuation of the mistake should surely be avoided. With the fall of this famous passage from its unwarranted position in our national literature, falls many a bulky theory, and many a baseless inference in our early history. If the Scots were wanderers in the Roman province, so were the Picts—a very likely statement. Such, at least, is the real statement of the Roman historian.