

V.

ARGYLESHIRE INVADED, BUT NOT SUBDUED, BY UNGUS, KING OF THE PICTS, IN THE YEARS 736 AND 741. BY ARCHIBALD SMITH, M.D.

It is well known that the sons of Eirc, called Lorn, Augus, and Fergus, were the first Irish settlers and founders of the little kingdom of the Scots in Argyleshire. Of these three brothers, the founder of the tribe of Lorn was "Loavin Mor." "Aongus" was the founder of the tribe of Augus, who settled in Islay; and the family of "Fergus Mor," separated in his two grandsons, Congall and Gabhran, into the two houses of the sept of Congall, who gave name to Cowal, and the sept of Gabhran, who retained the original settlement in Kintyre and Knapdale.¹

These original tribes became in course of time divided into two rival

¹ See Note Q, entitled "Origines Dalriadice," in Reeves's *Life of Adomnan*, pp. 433-438.

houses, *i.e.*, that of Lorn and of Fergus; the septs Comgall and Gabhran being both of the Fergusian race, whose united territory embraced the whole of present Argyleshire, to the south of Loch Awe. The portion of present Argyleshire, lying north, north-east, and north-west of Loch Awe, was inhabited by the tribe of Lorn, and on the south-west the territory of this tribe was bounded by the present parishes of Kilmartin and Craignish. But the parish of Kilmichael Glassary did not belong to the rural deanery of the ancient Lordship of Lorn. The river "Att" or Add, which rises in the hill-land of the parish of Glassary, and sweeps on its course through the moss of Crinan to the sea, appears, in the plain at least, to have been the frontier line between the Fergusian race, occupying the lands of "Airgealla," or Argyll proper, and the rival tribe of Lorn. This particular district is still known to natives as Araghael, while the name they give the county, as a whole, is Earra-ghael, or the portion of the Gael. The district name, *viz.*, "Ar-à-ghael," is peculiarly expressive, for it literally means "the battle-field of the Gael." The whole district appears to have been debatable ground between the tribe of Lorn on the one hand, and the united tribes of Comgall and Gabhran (under the common title of the "sept of Argyll") on the other; and all this small central area, only five miles across from Loch Crinan to Lochfine, is strewed over with the monumental cairns and monoliths that record the death struggles, not merely of the Celtic race, but of many rival chiefs, and probably of many nameless invaders from sea-board, through a series of prehistoric ages.

"These are the things which, even nameless now,
Are on earth forgot."

With these preliminary remarks, let us now turn to the Annals of Tighernach, and also of Ulster, under date 719, where we find, on the joint authority of these records, the following entry:—

"Dcc xix. A battle at Eingen between the two sons of Farquhar the Long, in which Anfcellach had his throat cut, on Thursday the ides of September."¹

¹ In reading the Irish Annals of the Scots in British Dalriada, we meet with repeated allusions to Duinatt, Dunut, Dunaidh, and Dunad, all of which appear to be only different forms of orthography, to signify the same name of a place; and so Dr Skene enumerates them all as equivalents for the name of the fort called Dunad, on

And under same date we find it also related by Tighernach that a sea fight took place at Airdeanesbi, between Duncan-beg (king of Kintyre) at the head of the tribe of Gabhran, and Selvach at the head of the tribe of Lorn, in which the action turned against Selvach. From these events we learn that, although Anfcellach had lost his life when contending with his brother Selvach at Fin-glen, the latter was not permitted to reign supreme in Dalriada; for Duncan-beg was powerful enough to have confined Selvach to his own territorial dominion, within the division of Lorn. Under the year 721, Tighernach records the death of Duncan-beg, in these words "Dunchadh Beg rex Cinntyre, moritur." He was the river Add, in the moss of Crinan. In Gaelic this river is named and pronounced At or Att, probably from the verb "at," to swell, as it is known to be particularly liable to inundations on the plain, when it rains on the uplands of the parish of Glassary. But in the present day, when landed property is rapidly changing owners in Argyleshire, and entirely new or corrupted and much modified names are in process of being given to particular places of residence, historically connected with old Highland traditions, I may take this opportunity to observe that the name thus differently written, and applied to the single spot mentioned, is not a name as regards Argyleshire, which has been always confined to the stronghold on the river "Att" alone. I shall also take the liberty of offering a few remarks on the word "creich," as it occurs in the Irish Annals in connection with Dunat or Dunad. When under the year 736 (Ul. An.) we read, "Obtinuit Dunat et combussit creich," Tighernach, in a corresponding entry of same date, writes, "Obtinuit Dunad et compulsit creich." The learned editor of the Irish Annals, C. O'Connor, D.D., gives these words of Tighernach a gloss of his own construction, *i.e.*, "obtinuat munimenta et compulsit praeda." We thus learn that, according to O'Connor's interpretation, the word "creich," as here used, just means the same with the word *creach* in our Scottish Gaelic—that is, spoil or plunder; whereas he assumes that, in the Ulster Annals, the very same vocable means "*regiones*," of which he does not even define the bounds. But I would humbly submit that the word "*creich*," as used in the original, whether in the combination "combussit creich," or of "compulsit creich," equally indicates the application of compulsory force, whether it be by fire or by sword; and these two forms of expression in languages may very well mean but one and the same event in time and place. On this point I believe that the comment of Chalmers ("*Caledonia*," vol. i. p. 293) is quite as consistent with the language and mind of the annalists, as is that of the learned editor O'Connor. Chalmers says, in reference to the invasion of Lorn by Ungus, king of the Picts, in 736, "He seized Duna and burnt Creic, two of the strengths of Loarn;" and subjoins in a note, as follows, "Duna stood in Mid-Loarn, some miles east of Dunolla, which was the chief seat of the Loarn dynasty. See the map of Loarn, in Blaeus Atlas, No. 35." See also vol. x. Old Stat. Report, parish of Campbellton. In

succeeded by Eochy III., the son of Eochy Rineval, who was descended of Fergus, in the line of Gabhran. This Eochy III. appears to have ably maintained the independent authority and dominion of the sept of Argyle and Kintyre, in the same spirit with his predecessor Duncan-beg, who was descended from Fergus in the line of Comgall.

In the year 727 (An. Ul.) we read of a conflict between Selvach and the tribe or family of Eochy, the grandson of Donal.¹

Under the year 730 (An. Ul.) the death of "Selvach M'Fercair," of the regal house of Lorn, is recorded; and, according to Tighernach, "Eoch M'Each," or Eochy, the son of Eochy, whom this annalist styles

accordance with this interpretation, the word "creich" retains the same meaning, in both the Irish authorities of Tighernach and the Ul. Annals, without any discrepancy; and not one word about "praeda," as introduced by the learned O'Connor. In regard to topography also, Chalmers is supported by the fact, that close by Cillemoire or Kilmore, in Mid-Lorn, is Dunath or Dunaidh, about three or four miles south-east of Oban and Dunollaigh. Dunollaigh is phonetically written Dunolla, as Chalmers has it; and, in like manner, Dunath and Dunaidh, in Gaelic orthography, become Duna or Dunha, when phonetically written, the final consonant, "th" and "dh" being quiescent, or only aspirated. This place, under its late proprietors, has had its old name modernised or changed for Dunach; but old Highlanders in the district still call it by its old name. I may here notice, that in attempting to identify Dunmonaidh with Dunad, Dr Skene falls into the mistake of confounding the word "Dunmonaidh," which means a hill-fort, with Dunmoine, which signifies the Dun or fort of the moss. For the words "Monadh" and "Moine," see the Gaelic Dictionary.

¹ Selvach, having burnt Dunolla, it is probable that the residence of the regal family of Lorn would then, for a time at least, be transferred to the stronghold of Dunath, contiguous to Cillemoire, now occupied by the parish church and manse of Kilmore, but which in olden times was dedicated, as its name imports, to the blessed Virgin Mary. Does not the juxtaposition of Dunath and Kilmore suggest the idea that this "Dun," rather than the Chapel of the Virgin, was the place set fire to, under the name of Cillemoire, as the residence of Aedain, the son of Ungus? And, further, does it not appear self-evident that, if in 736, Ungus, king of the Picts, had seized the fort of Dunath, on the frontier of the Argyll dynasty, in the moss of Crinan, that he must have soon had to abandon it? For why else should his son Aedain, in 749, be found in Cillemoire as his head-quarters, thus leaving the whole nethermost regions of the territory of Lorn, from Kilmore to Kilmartin, open to hostile attack from the side of Argyll proper, Knapdale, Cowal, and Kintyre, with its adjacent Isles, which together form the largest portion of Dalriada, and which do not appear to have been at any time broken in upon by the Pictish invader?

“King of Dalriada,” died in 733. By attending chronologically to the entries of the above events, we learn that Eochy III. had only assumed in the early part of his reign, which, according to Tighernach, he commenced in the year 726, the rule over the sept of Argyll and Kintyre; but, on the death of his rival Selvach, who ruled over the tribe of Lorn, this Eochy was so fortunate as to have united in his own person the sovereignty of both these lines of provincial kings; and so he became what Tighernach designates him, the king of Dalriada.

On the death of this prince, in the year 733, both Tighernach and the Ulster Annals agree in stating that “Muredac MacAinfeallach regnum generis Loairn assumit.” In these words “generis” is obviously connected with or governed by “regnum,” and not at all with the man’s name, whose lineage, without the aid of tautology, is sufficiently indicated by the Gaelic word “Mac,” as the son of the unfortunate Ainfeallach, brother to Selvach, who perished in the battle of Fin-glen. I therefore think that the true meaning of this entry of the annalists is, that Muredach assumed the government *not* of the undivided nation or kingdom of Dalriada, but merely of the section of territory which belonged to the family of Lorn, as previously ruled by Selvach. And that this is the right reading of the words quoted, will further appear when I come to show that a prince of Fergusian descent, in the line of Comgall, held contemporary sway over the sept of Argyll and Kintyre. Inattention to this important fact appears to have introduced, as we shall see, very unnecessary confusion into the history of Muredach’s immediate successors.

Under the year 736 (An. Ul.) we read that “Oengus MacFergusu, king of the Picts, wasted the country of Dalriada, and obtained Dunat, and burned Creic, and bound with chains the two sons of Selvach, *i.e.*, Dongal and Feradach.” The places named in this entry appear to be in the territory of the tribe of Lorn. The farm of Dun-ath, or Dun-aidh, which, by dropping the final consonant “h,” becomes Dunat or Dunaid, is situated close to Cillemoire or Kilmore, about three miles south or south-east of the town of Oban; and Creich, which, by dropping the final letter “h,” becomes Creic, as in our text, is the name of a place or farm in the Ross of Mull. (See “New Statistical Report.”)¹

¹ See Chalmers, in his “Caledonia;” and note at p. 86 of the *Annales Ultonienses*,

Under the year 741 (An. Ul.) we have intimation of another hostile raid in these few words, "Percussio Dalriati by Oengus MacFergusa." In the view of Dr Skene, these words mean "The complete conquest and subjection of Dalriada by the king of the Picts." (See preface to the "Chronicles of the Picts and Scots," p. cxxxi.) But with all due respect for the learning and ingenuity of this distinguished archæologist, I must take leave to think, that this is greatly to overrate the real significance of this entry. In much more recent times, and more within reach of circumstantial history, we have had the whole of Scottish Dalriada, including the district of Breadalbane, wasted by fire and sword, but yet not vanquished. In the year 1644, Alexander, son of the renowned Coll Macdonald, familiarly known in Argyleshire by the name of "*Colla Ciotach*," crossed over with a body of Irish followers from Antrim, and, with inexorable ferocity, he devastated the lands of the Campbells, burning and destroying woods, houses, and every kind of property, and sparing no living thing, male or female, young or old, that fell in his way. But what was the ultimate consequence of this savage invasion? After having assisted Montrose at the battle of Inverlochy, in February 1645, and attended this great leader in his previous raid on Inverary, and on many other more warlike exploits, Colla Ciotach's brave son, now styled Sir Alexander Macdonald, again invaded Argyleshire. But the latter having retired to Ireland, left his followers to be slaughtered at Dunaverty, in Kintyre, by the swords of Argyll and Leslie;¹ and the old father, who had been not long before released from confinement by Argyll, left his own adherents to share the same hard fate in the castle of Duntroin (Duntroon) on Loch Crinan, and betook himself to Islay, where, however, he was pursued, taken prisoner, and conducted to Dunstaffnage Castle, where he suffered for his many outrages on the gallows.

And what ground is there to allege that the Picts, under Oengus MacFergusa, who had *struck a heavy blow* (and this I believe to be the full

in Dr O'Connor's "Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores," tom i. p. 307. Both these learned authors agree in repudiating the theory of Pinkerton as gratuitous, dogmatic, and contrary to the facts and events of true history. See also parish of Campbellton in "Old Statistical Report," vol. x. published 1794.

¹ This massacre by Argyll and General Leslie took place early in the spring of 1647. See "Macleod's Gaelic Messenger," vol. ii. p. 92.

import of the vexed expression "*Percussio Dalriati*") at the tribe of Lorn in 741, were after that for a whole century allowed to remain the undisturbed masters of the country? In reply to this question, let us turn to the meagre materials of authentic history on which it is pretended to rest a conclusion so much at variance with the hitherto received opinions of our best historians.

Under the year 749 (An. Ul.) we find this entry, "Combustio Cillcinoire Acdain filii Oengusa." From these words it has been inferred that the Acdain here named must have been the son of Ungus, king of the Picts, and therefore the first of a succession of Pictish princes in Lorn. Now, should it be granted without further evidence that the man here named was the son of Ungus, king of the Picts, and the first prince of the race acting as viceroy in Lorn, upon at least equal evidence we may believe that he was also the *last*, for the entry itself proves that Cillemoire was soon made *too hot* for him. If, indeed, Acdain escaped unscorched on this memorable occasion, his assailant, probably Aodh-fionn, who two years before this date had entered upon his long reign over Dalriada, the most reasonable inference would seem to be, that he found no rest to his feet until, in full chase by the Dalriadic king of Scottish race, he was driven across the heights of Druimnachdrach into his fatherland of Fortren.

Following up the same thread of authentic record, we learn that in the year 747 (An. Ul.), "Dunlaing MacDunchon, king of the sept of Arddgail, died." This significant entry the learned editor of the "Chronicles of the Picts and Scots" (published under the direction of the Lord Clerk-Register of Scotland) leaves out of view, but it is impossible not to see that the fact recorded in this place bears distinct evidence that the sept of Argyll had not been subjugated, but enjoyed an independent government under their sovereign of the line of Congall, at the time of Dunlaing MacDunchon's decease; and further, from the death of this king to the death of Aodh-fionn in 778, there intervenes a period of thirty years, during which the latter is allowed by the best authorities to have reigned over Dalriada. As the length of his reign is admitted, and as the date of his death cannot be disputed, it is clear that he was the immediate successor of Dunlaing to the sceptre of the sept of Argyll, and according to the "*Chronica Regum Scotorum*," there is good reason

to believe that so early as the year 739, on the death of Ewen, the son of Muredach, Aodh-fionn (Hugh the White) assumed the sovereign rights of the sept of Lorn.¹

The Albanic Duan styles this Aodh, "Aodh-na-Aodhflaith," and in the Synchronism of Flann Mainistreach, he is called "Aed-Airlatach," both which appellations imply a noble or lordly character. These two old authorities also agree in placing the same Aodh as the immediate successor, and one Alpin (unknown to Tighernach and the Ulster Annals) as the immediate predecessor of Muredach. In connection with this statement, it may be observed that Dr Skene, in constructing his new theory of Dalriadic history, as we find it detailed in his elaborate preface to the "Chronicles of the Picts and Scots," dislocates and inverts the relative position of his new favourite Alpin, from that which this monarch holds in the lists of Flann Mainistreach and the Duan. And by thus shifting the place of Alpin, the learned editor ingeniously fits this king to his theory, by making him the immediate *successor* of Muredach, and assigns him a reign over Dalriada from 736 to 741. This, however, looks like an arbitrary innovation, or a tampering with old authorities, to which the Irish annalists give no support, for they absolutely ignore this Alpin. But between this monarch and Kenneth MacAlpin, according to Dr Skene, all the intervening kings of Dalriada were of the Pictish race.² It will be remembered that Eochy, the son of Eochy, who died king of all Dalriada in 733, began his reign over the sept of Argyll in the year 726 (according to Tighernach), but did not attain the sceptre of Lorn until after the death of Selvach (730, An. Ul.), when he became king of all Dalriada. Here, then, is a precedent of a divided succession, which Aodh-fionn had directly transmitted to him from his father Eochy III. And what good reason can be given why this prince, on the death of Ewen, the son of Muredach (or, as others would have it, directly on the death of Muredach), should not have taken up the fallen sceptre of the line of Lorn, some years before the decease of Dunlaing MacDunchon, of the sept of Argyll, when, by the union of both tribes under one government, he in 748 became *bona fide* king of Dalriada? This mode of divided succession, countenanced by previous example, implies no

¹ See the question as to Ewan's reign discussed in Chalmers's "Caledonia."

² See Pref. Chron. Picts and Scots, p. cxxxii.

violent measures, and would leave no gap unfilled between the death of Muredach and the accession of Aodh-fionn.

Under the year 800 (An. Ul.) it is recorded that "between the sept of Lorn and the sept of Argyle an action took place, in which Fianghalach MacDunlainge was slain." This entry goes to prove, in as far as these short notices by the annalists are calculated to prove anything, that down to the close of the eighth century, the tribes of Dalriada had not been prostrated by the Picts, but had clearly maintained a vitality of their own. Whatever advantage Ungus, king of the Picts, may have at any one period of his reign acquired in the regions of Dalriada, and particularly in Lorn, it is evident from the preceding extracts that the entire supremacy of their territory could not have been recovered by them later than the year 768. This conclusion is accredited by the fact, that at that date Aodh-fionn was powerful enough to have assumed the offensive and to have penetrated into the Pictish territory (An. Ul.)

After the death of Aodh-fionn, he was succeeded by two other kings, who are styled of Dalriada, *i.e.*, Fergus MacEachach, who died in 781, and Doncorcai, who died in 792,¹ and still posterior to these, mention is made under the year 812 (An. Ul.) of the death of "Angus, son of Dunlaing, king of Kindred Argyll."

Without any attempt at novelty or intricate genealogical inferences, I have, in drawing up the preceding remarks, endeavoured to keep in the plain track of the Irish annalists referred to, who appear to me to give us an intelligible and continuous account of regal succession in Dalriada. But so far as I can see, they afford no countenance whatever to the Pinkertonian theory of the entire conquest of the Scots in Britain, by "Ungust, son of Vergust;" nor to the conclusion that Dr Skene has recently come to, *viz.*, the complete supremacy of the Picts in Scottish Dalriada, and the extinction of Dalriada as a Scottish nation, from the year 741 to the era of a new Scottish kingdom, founded by Kenneth MacAlpin, in the year 843.²

Under the year dccxxx. (An. Ul.) we find this entry, "Bellum ittir (inter) Cruitne et Dalriati in Murbuilgg, ubi Cruitne (Picts) devicti

¹ Ritson remarks that here M'Eochach seems to be an error of the transcriber for MacAodh-fionn.—*Annals of the Scots*, p. 61.

² See Pref. Chron. Picts and Scots, p. clxxiv.

fuerunt;" that is, "war between the Picts and Dalriads at Murbuilgg, where the Picts were vanquished." We thus learn that in the commencement of the reign of Ungus, king of the Picts, the Scots of Dalriada, knew how to keep their own. From the beginning to the close of his reign this potentate appears to have had his hands constantly steeped in blood. Considering the number of his antagonists in his own country of Pictavia, and then again his contests with the Northumbrians, with the Britons of Strathclyde, and the Dalriads, we may feel assured that whatever temporary advantage his invasions of the Lorn district, at different periods may have given him, could not, in the ordinary course of events, be of long duration. It was not in sheep's clothing, but like the ravenous wolves, that Ungus with his armed hordes entered the regions of Dalriada, and it was not by superiority in the arts of civilisation that he was ever likely to win to his side the people whom he had outraged.

On the other hand, Eodh-fionn was no mean rival. He possessed worldly wisdom and superior sagacity, as the laws that he left behind him sufficiently attest. This Scottish monarch, of the line of Gabhran, having once established in Argyll proper a centre of unity, would naturally strive to support and to reanimate the oppressed province of Lorn. With an eye bent on retribution, it would surely be no hard task for him to re-awaken the patriotism and kindle the courage of the veteran conquerors of "Murbuilgg," so as by one united effort of a compact and homogeneous people to clear their own territorial inheritance of all Pictish intruders.

The few known facts of the case support this plain inference. And if, in the view of any unbiassed person, the text, "Percussio Dalriati by Oengus MacFergusa," can be logically construed to mean abject subjection of the Dalriads to the Picts, on at least equally valid authority it must be admitted that this other entry, DCCLXVII (An. Ul.), "Battle of Fortren between Aodh and Kenneth," is sufficient proof (and one that neutralises the previous entry) that he who carried successful war into the oppressor's capital of Pictaria, could not have been a subjugated prince, nor the leader, at the time of his triumph, of a prostrate people, or of crouching slaves under a foreign yoke.

Wherefore I would respectfully conclude this paper, the subject of which may, I hope, be hereafter taken up and treated by more able hands,

by submitting such facts as I have cursorily unfolded to the due consideration and impartial judgment of this learned Society. From all the attention I have been able to devote to the question at issue, it remains my honest conviction that Aodh-fionn was the illustrious restorer of its full liberty to the crushed section of Lorn, and that he was at the close of his career, in 778, the independent ruler of Dalriada as a Scottish nation.
