

The following Communications were read:—

I.

WHO ARE THE CELTS? BY R. ANGUS SMITH, LL.D., F.R.S.,
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In a volume which I lately wrote on Loch Etive and the sons of Uisnach, I had occasion to go over several questions concerning the Celts, and I took a view of them which I think is gaining ground. I was tired of the Celtomania, as many people were, but I had no desire, when discussing the questions relating to the Celts and Saxons of the British islands, to dismiss all the difficulties, and say that the two races were in reality one, as some have done, as if to show how simple the problem was made when they attacked it. This kind of solution is far from the truth, although there is a rough reality in it, as all men are one, and Saxon and Celtic languages are Aryan more or less.

These "authorities," I use the word, because in many things they are so, have desired to get rid of whole generations of previous writers, by throwing all they said aside and so coming to simplicity, an excellent result when true; but to do that they have to throw aside much that history tells us of the numerous names of people in Western Europe and nearly all that fore-history has revealed to us in the documents of the

soil, lessons scarcely hidden under the surface, sermons and stories found literally in stones.

The great discovery of the affinity of languages, and especially of one great wave called the Aryan, has led people to imagine that Western Europe was and is inhabited by an Aryan people, and the scientific class of men who at one time stood up for great diversity of races are succeeded by those who seem practically desirous of reducing mankind, at least in our regions, to unity, because some of the words which they use are the same in different tribes. I have said in *Loch Etive*, &c., chap. xxvi. p. 342, &c. :—

“I am not aware of any proof of a purely Aryan race existing anywhere, neither do I know that any one has shown what an Aryan race really is. There is certainly no proof that such a race ever fully peopled Europe, but there are abundant proofs that it never did so in any known epoch. To have such a result, we must put the darker hill-men of Italy and the plain-dwellers of Holland and Schleswig into the same category, although they are as different to ordinary observation as Negroes and Chinese. We must bring in the Spanish and Portuguese with the Slav and the German. The Welsh and the Norman become one, although so different in type; and the Irish of all kinds, long recognised by themselves as different and as coming from different countries, must be called one. Character goes for nothing in this mode of arguing, as nearly all the characteristics known to us from India to Portugal, with some slight exception, are thrown into one. . . .

“Of course I am willing to say that all men are one; but there are differences, and it is convenient to call these by names, the word ‘race’ being well chosen for the purpose. . . .

“So far as I see, it is proved that an Aryan language has spread from the East, and of the whole theory of the language and its relations it is most interesting to learn the important results obtained. They have been found by men who have devoted their lives to the purpose. It is quite otherwise with the idea of an Aryan race being co-extensive with an Aryan language, and it seems to me that many men do not see the difference. I have seen no proof of the spread of any one race to such an extent as to people the West, and the differences already alluded to when speaking of the Celts constitute of themselves sufficient reasons.

“There remains, then, the old difficulty how to account for the similarity of language or the Aryan relationship of the languages.

“We may suppose a dark-haired race all over Central Europe and Britain,

as well as much of Italy, with a uniform Aryan language; whilst incursions of various tongues to various spots changed it.

“We may imagine a diversity of people over the present Celtic Europe—not forgetting Rome—with a diversity of languages, these being invaded by Celts, who imposed much of their language, and by Germans, who imposed some also.”

It will be seen, then, that I consider those who hold the nations called Celtic and those called Teutonic as one race, to be simply abolishing the knowledge we get from history, and refusing to look at very clear facts. More than this, I look on it as impossible to conceive the great nations of Europe as chiefly Celtic and Teutonic and Slavic, or in any way fully Aryan. We know that in the past the poor races, with their slender power of motion, must have lived in very secluded places and obtained peculiar manners; and even if they retained their manners, those less secluded and those more excluded would be exposed to different external impressions, and the different districts would gradually become dissimilar. It is remarkable what differences a river, for example, will make in people. I have mentioned one limit made by a river or sea-arm over which a man can swim, where Dumbartonshire had one language and Renfrew another, without change, from the entrance of the Saxons till our own day. On the other hand, with rapidity equally astounding languages and races are becoming mixed in a few years before our eyes under the influence of easy travelling.

These two facts, apparently contradictory, must be kept clear. There are many places in Europe where the population has been little moved, and there are others which are highroads of movement. These highroads have received the invaders, and there has been another although a much slower movement into the side ways of conquest, and sometimes the thinner line of conquest has been made uncertain by opening up an avenue for the comparatively endless amount of population of the original stock. Conquerors go where they feed best, they have been stopped by natural difficulties, such as civilisation has now in many cases rendered scarcely visible, and the conquered have been driven into corners where

the stronger have not cared to pursue them. In this way a population, even if exactly the same over all Europe, would in time become diverse by want of communication, although probably in a very slow manner, but by continual pressure of different races on various sides it would of course obtain diversity much more rapidly. Let us suppose that in Auvergne and in Armorica portions of the same race of people lived; let one be invaded by Rome and the other by Cornish or Welsh, the languages would change in a quite different direction, and meantime Welsh itself becomes modified by Irish, by English, by new habits, and by time. Supposing the original Gaels or Celts that brought the Celtic language to Ireland to have come from the East, they would have to meet in Ireland men from all the preceding ages, or at least some of the preceding. How many waves of men have come from the East since the first palaeolithic man wandered over Europe! Let us imagine him coming with his inventions, and actually teaching men to make hammers out of stone, to make instruments for cutting and killing. It was a great invention this chipping of flints. We must think of the men who first learnt this, working hard at their business, and we must imagine another set going about with these old stone rough hatchets on their backs, perhaps carried in baskets; these packmen would sell their flint wares and make money of some kind, returning perhaps from this country to Abbeville or elsewhere to find more. This Abbeville would be very different from the present, and whether this old stone age pedlar walked or paddled across the Straits of Dover, we cannot tell. He would not have come here without knowing that there was a market, and come he probably did. But some one will say that there were no pedlars; the wandering population went south and brought these tools back. Any plan is sufficient for my argument, which is that in those early times men lived here, and these were in times out of all reach of Sanscritism, in Europe in all probability, or any other known civilisation, except that which we have called, by the name of the instrument used, for peaceful or warlike acts.

We must imagine another great innovation when miners came from abroad most likely, for surely this island was not the cradle of humanity,

distant as it is from all the known historical and from all the most active portions of botanical and zoological life ; so we look to the miners coming from abroad and finding quarries of flint in the eastern counties of England. This would be a great discovery and a wonderful advance for England. The former men, the paleolithic, seem to have been over all the world. Is it probable that they covered it rapidly ? Surely we must give them a long period, and even if they required much ground for their uncultivated feeding, there would be great numbers of them, although not concentrated.

When the miners came from abroad, showing the inhabitants here where to dig for flint, they would not come as an army ; they were probably only a few cunning men obtaining a livelihood, and only in a very simple way making a trade for themselves. It is necessary to imagine a long time before these flints became very common here, even when found in British quarries. We learn by the discoveries of these sources that the flints were supplied here, at least after the first period, by native industry. We cannot imagine a host of neolithic men coming to the island and crushing out all the paleolithic. Such a result would be scarcely possible. The population must have been spare ; the want of extensive cultivation, known by the amount of wood, necessitates this. Great numbers of people could not be congregated ; it requires great resources to feed great crowds. Besides, we know that long afterwards the country was not easily passable by great numbers, and unity of people was impossible on a great scale. Even now it is happily not quite possible ; we seek diversity of character and not similarity. We are astounded at the difference of people in villages ten miles apart even in this century. It is quite marvellous how numerous have been, and still are, the styles of speaking and acting in this country, caused by slight barriers and distances. Whenever a man builds, even at a small distance from others, he feels the separation from his neighbours ; he finds it difficult to walk ten miles when he lives in a wild country without roads, and to return the same day. Besides, he has not time ; he must make his living. His journeys are therefore bounded by the amount of

overtime he has after having fed. Generally he has no object in taking such a journey if he has enough to eat.

However, I meant to show that a rapid conquest of the country by paleolithic men would be contrary to all we can imagine of the habits of such uncultivated people, and the conquest would be partly one of industry; those who got the flints or could buy them best were the conquerors. A very slow progress is indicated by this. If this is the way of necessity in very early ages, we need not suppose that the difference was great in the immediate later ones; the change of habits and the conquests seem to have been very gradual. But we certainly need not have gone to early ages to show this. In the very latest periods up to the beginning of this century all conquest was slow, extermination seems in all ages to have been rare; and if this is right, the progress must have been slower in the early times spoken of, when concentration was little known. In the long struggles of races in Ireland it is remarkable how portions of nearly all which have been described seem to have survived, and how even families are preserved in continuity through many centuries, and how different the various inhabitants appear to be to each other even to this day.

It is very important to remark the great diversity of countenance in Ireland, and to know that the language amongst these faces has been long practically the same. Whilst the first is an evidence of the truth of the theory of the great diversity of race, and the absurdity of calling the population either pure Aryan or Celtic, the second shows clearly that languages mix better than people, a fact now recognised. Ireland itself, therefore, is a great example of the separate existence to the present time of various races, and of the diversity of the appearance of races at one part of the Western European limit of migration. It is at the same time a fine example of oneness of language being no proof of oneness of race. I take it to be that there was only one language before English intrusion.

It is not easy to obtain a past from a present, but in this late generation we have a better opportunity of seeing how a country begins to be inhabited than any who have written history before our time. We have

seen great tracts taken possession of before our eyes, we may say ; some of them without inhabitants, or at least nearly so, and many with few. We have seen the struggling races of Australia scarcely occupying the country, and the American natives who could only wander over it, and to whom the enormous wealth of the land was invisible. As dogs taken into the British Museum, seeing nothing to eat or to interest them, so were the Red Indians in their splendid country. We know to some extent what would first happen amongst the early settlers in Ireland ; the island would be inhabited first in creeks and valleys, as most countries are, and the people would meet each other only after long periods had given them time to increase, or new invaders had given them reason to seek more room. Traditions of this early condition are actually found so late in time as even early Irish story, giving a probability of truth which cannot be overlooked. We read of the Firbolgs being in Ireland for thirty-six years before they found that the Tuatha de Danaan were on the island. The Firbolgs themselves were said to have been long out of the country, in Thrace for a time, and had been absent altogether above two hundred years. They are spoken of as coming back with the same tongue. (That may have been, but they were probably not far off and the time much exaggerated ; they only went, perhaps, such a distance as from Dublin to Bantry Bay, if the story is to be taken as having any foundation at all.) Perhaps some people will say that this separation of tribes has made the change which gives the appearance of difference of race, and that inferior food and depressed conditions of every kind have lowered the caste in certain districts, whilst abundance has improved it elsewhere. Irish history forbids us to carry on this manner of reasoning far. We may quote a translation by O'Curry from the "Book of Genealogies of MacFirbis" (*Lectures*, p. 580) :—

" Every blusterer, wrong-doer, distinction clear,
 Every thief, liar, contemptible wretch,
 Are the remnants of the three people hitherto,
 The *Gailleoin*, the *Firbholg*, the *Firdomnann*."

And on page 224—

“Every one who is black-haired, who is a tattler, guileful, tell-taling, noisy, contemptible; every wretched, mean, strolling, unsteady, harsh, and inhospitable person; every slave, every mean thief, every churl, every one who loves not to listen to music and entertainment, the disturbers of every council and every assembly, and the promoters of discord among people, these are the descendants of the *Firbolgs*, the *Gailians* of Liogairne, and of the *Fir-Domhnann* in Erin. But, however, the descendants of the *Firbolgs* are the most numerous of all these.”

From this condition of things I explain the other great fact, that the nations now called Celtic, and those also which were called Celtic, have little similarity, and in some cases are remarkably diverse. They seem in reality to be as unlike each other as any one race is from another; in other words, we could out of them make several, if not many, races; and if several persons were to describe the so-called Celtic races of to-day, they would give us results as contradictory as those given by the various writers of the early centuries. Indeed, we need not speak hypothetically, we require only to read the character of the Celts given by Mr Broca and that by Mr Poesche, both two of the latest writers, and we find one making the original and true Celt small and black, and the other making him large and fair, the old contradictory and unmeaning ways appearing as freshly as ever.

Again, when we now look at the people of the Celtica of the Romans we do find them dark, and the people of Italy, into which Celts are found to a large extent, dark, whilst the Celts coming over the Alps from the eastern side are said to have been light? These things have produced the strange and numerous kinds of Celtomania that have amused and troubled ethnologists before such a word was used for the students of the subject.

I do not know whether my position is quite new. It is not so new as I thought it was. When I first wrote it I had not seen Poesche's book on the Aryans. I take the people of Gaul and of Celtic Britain and Ireland as they are and as they are described; either will do. I find that they do not answer the description of any theory of the Celts whatever. The people of France are dark in the west, as Broca shows, and lighter

in the east, which would exactly suit some descriptions, and indicate the existence of a dark people being invaded from the east by a light. The whole stands so at present, as if this account of the matter were a continuous fact. If we go to the most Celtic-speaking countries of the world, Ireland and Wales, as well as West Scotland, we find people entirely different. The Welsh and Irish are remarkably different in type, in height, in weight, and in expression of countenance as well as character.

Some men have tried to prove the Welsh to be Iberians. I find them neither small nor dark, although not tall. Some men try to make the Irish dark, as if Iberian and coming from Spain, in which case they ought to be like the Welsh of the same reasoners. I have seen no people like Welshmen coming out of Ireland. The Milesians were not dark, and could not be Iberians. The Irish were of different appearances, according to their oldest writers, as already quoted; we have several kinds described, but I think I could pick out more than we see described in their books. As to their dark small men they are not the "noble Iberians," but are said to have been mean and low in character. In any case the diversity in Ireland is remarkable, and seems to be accounted for by its being the last place to which the successive eastern waves reached: a greater variety therefore has been crowded there. I see some people venturing to describe or give names to prehistoric or fabulous old races. The attempt is vain. We have no data worth mentioning, there may be a hundred represented among us; the remains of some types as they wandered over the land, whether from Asia or South Russia. We say nothing definite when we begin with Eskimos, as if we knew them to be the originals of men. We say as little when we talk of cave man and paleolithic and neolithic men; we might as well talk of brick-house men, stone-house men, castle men, and beggar men. Some of these names are useful only as indicating comparative periods. Before the world was covered by men using stone implements, such time must have elapsed as produced many diversities of people and languages. When we think of the changes made in the latter in historic time with literature tending to diminish the change, what must not have taken place when men were

frightfully ignorant, separated by seas and forests rarely passable, or passed only in direst emergencies. We can imagine these races moving sometimes slowly, never rapidly, but driven on by a determined fate, till, when they came west, a congeries would be found huddled perhaps together in the more inhabitable parts or scattered in the wildest manner, like the trees and rocks and portions of houses, that the water escaping from some broken reservoir scatters over the nearest plain or before the first obstruction. Let us imagine a hundred races, not at all presuming that there were not thousands, we can fancy one specimen of the first, two of the second, or so on, or in any proportion. This great deposit I conceive to be in the west of Europe, and notably in Ireland. In Ireland there are many of a most inferior race of men to my mind, but there is no doubt of the fact of a class of most noble workers at a certain period, and in all known times of a number of the most active of minds, quick in imagining, unwilling to reason carefully, quick in moving, unwilling to work patiently; the minds and bodies have been alike restless from early historic times. But we must not go to the neutral regions at present, although I believe that we could pick out the character of thought characterising the people at various times, and find it to be the same as now, more readily than we could recognise the skulls of the various races which have been picked out hitherto, so far as I can find.

And what has been the consequence of this flood of races? Do we conclude that we have the débris of all? By no means; the best may not survive, and the worst may be best able to make a living—the fittest to survive under the circumstances. There is among the people of Ireland a vitality and tenacity of life such as is nowhere seen in the kingdom; but whether it be in the purely Celtic, if there are any such, or in the other races, is not known. I have been in the habit of looking at the deaths at an age over a hundred years in Ireland, and I find the tenacity corroborated in a remarkable manner. I know that the authenticity of these records is not by all persons held to be rigid, and it would be difficult to prove all the cases, and I shall not attempt to prove them, and only record my opinion that the tenacity of life, the youthfulness at

known advanced ages, of persons in Ireland, is such as to render these recorded ages highly probable, although even in Ireland men cannot endure starvation. Independently of this, I came to the conclusion before observing these statements, that there was in Ireland this great capacity of continuation. Who indeed can doubt it when they see the lively airs, and the dance, the spring, the shout, the fun of fighting, and the carelessness of pain? They still retain this difference, distinguishing them from the Germanic races in a notable manner, bodily as well as mentally. I think we may fairly judge that the characteristics mentioned are not caused by the newest, that is, by the Teutonic races, and their existence shows that this later element has been to a large extent overpowered by the previous. So difficult is it to conquer a nation without overwhelming it with numbers.

Finally, if it is necessary further to explain, I look on the races at present called Celtic as more mixed than less western races, and as containing types from the earliest times, and by no means to be called by any one name except from their language or dialects—dialects produced by the mixture of the various conquered peoples with a more or less dominant Celtic language. This shows clearly why the world has been full of contradiction regarding the word Celtic, and it is surprising that it should so long have attempted to unite so many different beings under one name. Instead of simplifying the matter and going back to far ages for the formation of diversities, there has been a desire to simplify by throwing in numerous people as Aryan.

Amongst all this diversity of people covering Celtic lands we hear of the Celtic skull. I consider it a bold thing to speak of. I do not object to looking on the true Celt as a light-haired, large, and fleshy race, but how do we get their skulls? How do we separate these invading Celts from the persons invaded? Shall we take Broca's or Poesche's Celt? After great labour men like to come to a conclusion. I may draw the following:—

I consider the Celtic nations made up of various people, mixtures of men who came to Europe before them as well as after them.

The pure Celts were too little concentrated, perhaps, to form a nation anywhere as great as any of the present so-called Celtic nations, and give it permanence.

They were sufficiently strong-minded to stamp their language and institutions on several nations who were themselves previously mixed.

We find that Celtic nations, as they are called, are unlike each other in appearance, and the title is really misapplied.

The languages, too, are evidently very much modified from the original Celtic, because they are the remnants in part of the various pre-Celtic tongues which were overpowered by the true Celtic.

Types remain long in nations. Let us imagine the high-minded heroes of Erin, whether we take them from the older writings of the natives or when transformed into Christian missionaries, let us imagine them received with joy over all Europe, ruling like kings wherever they came, is it possible for us to imagine that it is the same race that lives in parts of Ireland unable to read or to write, unable to devise an intellectual mode of advancement, idling amid poverty and brutality, and not in the course of many centuries absorbing the intellectual life which is glowing around them? There is only one explanation visible to me. Ireland had a great aspiring dominant race, probably very few comparatively of them. These had many noble qualities not necessarily connected with Christianity; that same race had at a later period men of Christian faith that showed their power in this direction also. When this dominant race had accepted the civilisation of Europe and taken its position there, the older races were left still farther behind, because they had no native sympathetic leaders, and they had no capacity even for wishing to rise. Such, at least, is my explanation of the diversity among people called Celts, and the still greater diversity among men called Ayrans, whilst application is made of the theory to account for the condition of Ireland as in the time of its earlier native writers and its position at the present time. The whole gives us also a remarkable view of the permanency of character in times at least when communication was difficult.

When considering this wonderful permanence of race in so many cases,

the difficulty arises as to the origin of new races. They come out of utter darkness, although we see partly the material out of which they grow, the new spirit which actuates them and makes them take a prominent place in the world, is as much a mystery to us as if the whole race, body as well as spirit, came down from the air. The new race is evolved by laws unknown, but it is evolved; it does not come with its civilisation all ready, it comes only with its capacity to advance, the power was previously prepared, as we see in the rough northern nations coming into Europe, ignorant to the utmost, but with minds ready to learn, whilst many other nations cannot be persuaded to be led even to their benefit.

These simple considerations enable us to free ourselves from a great deal of Celtomania, and also from a Teutomania which is coming in equally rampant. It accounts also for any number of Celtic dialects. Under them must lie the pre-Aryan languages according to this reasoning I shall not go farther on this track, being desirous of keeping the diversity of Celtic nations clearly in view. The word "Celtic" has had no ethnographic meaning for centuries, and has none at all at present. The true ethnic meaning has been lost; at present it is a language characteristic only.

This ought to make us cautious in believing the sweeping assertions of ancient writers as to conquests. Gothic nations, too, are not easily swept away either by force of arms or by intermarriages. We can explain the permanence of the language, especially in the north of England, only by the permanence of the people being greater than we are told. It is still more remarkable in Greece, where the language still remains. In Spain and in Portugal we still find a strongly Latin language. When, however, we come to a country more Celtic, with a position more readily influenced by migration, we see the language broken down in a very peculiar manner. It becomes abraded, softened, cut, and in many curious ways altered, so that the sound is thoroughly changed. In hearing French spoken, no one would think of Latin; but on hearing Italian, an ancient Roman would at once recognise a dialect.

It is a curious thing that in French the consonants have given way most in pronunciation, although appearing in writing. They are thrown away recklessly; and vowels, which one would think least permanent, live longest. This is also observable in the Celtic language of this country.

It will be seen that it is by looking at the present people that I am led to these conclusions, and I may sometime go still further into details. We have been taught that we had in Scotland a great Kymric population, purely Kymric in the south and partly so in the Pictish lands of the north. I see no proof in Dr Beddoe's very valuable work on the stature and bulk of man in the British Islands that any similarity remains, although we are told that in the south-west a Celtic tongue remained till modern times. It can only be by careful examination that definite conclusions can be drawn, but it seems to me that I can tell a Welsh from any other so-called Celtic person, showing, as I think, that the Britons were always different from the others in this island. I imagine that I can tell a person from the west and east of Scotland south, showing, as I think, a more Teutonic population in the east, which would indicate a more Celtic population in the west; and yet I do not find that it approaches to that of Wales, although I think I see the latter population far north into Lancashire, although not in Cumberland. Amongst the many guesses on this subject I may be allowed to give an opinion, half-founded, I may say, because it is not based on exact data taken by me, although I think it is in accordance with Dr Beddoe's most valuable work and some travelling; that is, that the Welsh population did not form the chief part of south Scotland, but was there for a certain time as a dominant power only. As such it is easier to imagine them leaving the place thoroughly.

I see that Mr Rhys, in his small but most valuable work on Celtic Britain, brings in, as I had previously done, prehistoric races, and he goes more into detail of districts. My small collection of photographs shows to me more clearly than I had imagined a remarkably mixed race in north Scotland; but I still look to the east, about Aberdeen and Forfar perhaps,

as having a peculiar race, not very early, but imported after Celtic times, and more uniform in character than what are now called Celts.

In reading again Professor Max Müller's lectures on language, I am inclined to observe that the dialects which he seems not to be able to account for in Aryan tongues may, very readily, have found an entrance by mixture into prehistoric men, and this is another reason for speaking again to the point so long dwelt upon.

In a previous paper I ventured to speak of the sound of the voice, independently of the language, as a subject of study, and I think it will offer much information, but I have been hitherto unable to add anything to the subject.

I have drawn conclusions from the present condition of the nations called Celtic, and in doing so am inclined to observe how long and steadily nations and districts preserve their characteristics. In other words, national characteristics last long; when we find them we must look on them as messages from very distant times. This is the chief point of my present paper. Men have remained little changed in most countries of Europe, and even when apparently destroyed, they have come up again as the grass, although there are districts, and much of England is a fair example of them, where the continuousness and ferocity of the invaders has made it not very easy to perceive the British remnant in the mixture.