

II.

REMARKS ON THE SUPPOSED SITE OF DELGON OR CINDELGEN, THE SEAT OF CONALL, KING OF DALRIADA, A.D. 563. BY JOHN N. M'LEOD OF SADDLELL, F.S.A. SCOT.

The commencement of the sixth century marks an era in the history of Scotland. In the year 501 A.D. the Scots or Dalriads crossed from the north of Ireland, and effected a settlement in Kintyre and Islay. They were Christians. Columba was closely connected through his grandmother with the line of Dalriadic kings; and was deeply interested in the welfare and success of the Scots of Dalriada, who occupied a critical position owing to their proximity to the Pagan Northern Picts, and he no doubt looked forward to obtaining their aid when he and his twelve devoted disciples commenced their great mission for the conversion of the Pagan Picts.

In the year 563, in the forty-second year of his age, Columba arrived from Ireland, and lived with King Conall, son of Comgall, whose chief seat appears to have been at a place which the annalist calls Delgon or "Cindelgund" in Kintyre, and which seems to have been situated on the west coast of Knapdale.¹

The annalist Tighernac records the death of Conall, son of Comgall,

¹ Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 85.

King of Dalriada, in the thirteenth year of his reign, and he adds that in that year a battle was fought in Kintyre, at a place called Delgon, in which his son Duncan and a large number of the tribe of Gabran were slain.

“A.D. 574 Bass Conaill Mac Comgaill Ri Dalraida xvi. anno regni sui, qui obtulit insulam Ja Coluimcille. Cath Delgen in quo Duncadh Mac Conaill Mac Comgaill et alii multi de sociis filiorum Gabrain ceciderunt.”

Skene says, “Delgon seems to be afterwards called Cindelgen,” and adds that it is probably the place from which the Lord of the Isles dates a charter in 1471—Apud Cleandaghallagan, in Knapdale.

Where this Delgon or Cindelgen of the annalist is situated has been a puzzle to historians and antiquaries. When Dr Skene wrote his *History of Celtic Scotland*, a work that must long remain the standard authority on Celtic history, he does not appear to have been at all certain regarding the locality of Delgon; neither is it to be wondered at, that much must be left to conjecture, as, after a lapse of 1300 years, changes, corruption of names and absence of any precise indication of the exact locality by the early annalists, renders it difficult, and requires evidence of unmistakable character, to identify a place.

My object in writing this paper is to call attention to what appears to have been a singular overlook on the part of archæologists in their search for Delgon or Cindelgen; and to endeavour to prove that Delgon was situated on West Loch Tarbert, and not on the west coast of Knapdale, or in any of the places hitherto accepted, or supposed to be the locality.

Colonel White, in his *Archæological Sketches in Scotland*, has given great attention to this question, and in his volume on Knapdale,¹ remarks as follows:—

“In referring to the early history of Kintyre, I alluded to a battle noted by Irish Chroniclers as having been fought in the year 574 at a place called Telocho or Delgon in Cindtire, where Duncan, a relative of King Aidan, was slain, with a large following of Scottish Dalriads.

“Those who have paid any attention to the meagre details of so remote a period of Scottish history may be interested to learn, from one of the highest

¹ *Archæological Sketches in Scotland—Knapdale*, p. 43.

authorities on the subject, that the Delgon of the annalist, a name I was unable to trace in Kintyre, is doubtless no other than Dalchairn in the parish of Kilberry."

Then follows in a note Skene's reply to the inquiry he had made, as follows :—

"My reason for thinking Delgon was in Knapdale is this. The name appears in two forms in the annals, Delgon at 574, Cindelgthen at 621, and from the latter mention appears to have been on the seashore. Now in 1455, John de Yle, Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles, dates a charter to the monks of Paisley at Cleandaghallagan in Knapdale—or rather Ceandaghallagan—and I have no doubt it is the same place as Cindelgthen. The Lord of the Isles possessed at the time the south half of Knapdale, represented by the parishes of Kilberry and Kilcalmonell, for the lordship of Kintyre only extended to the burn of Altasynnoch, which divides Kilcalmonell from Killean, and from thence to the river Add was the lordship of Knapdale. I have no doubt that the Cindtire of the Irish annals was a much larger district and extended over both.

"If Ceandaghallagan was the message of the south half of Knapdale, it is a mere conjecture that Kilberry Castle may be the place meant. And again, Delgon is, I suppose, the same word as Dealgan in Dundevalgan now Dundalk ; Cill Deilge in Ireland has become Cill Dalkay, so that Dalk seems the corruption of it. Cindelgthen, or correctly Ceann Dealgan, seems to imply the head of a loch. Teloch should probably be written Telochō—that is, Telochon—and is merely a corruption of Delgen, which would be pronounced Dolegan. Can it be the old name of Loch Caolisport? The place at the head is called Cinlochcaolisport."

Further on, page 50, Colonel White remarks in a note :—

"Mr Skene, though identifying the Cleandaghallagan of the charter with Tighernac's Cindelgthen or Delgon, seems to have been unaware of the existence of the local name Dalchairn. This name, therefore, serves as an interesting corroboration of his sagacious conjecture that Kilberry Castle was the place whence the charter emanated."

I fail to see how this can be inferred from Mr Skene's remarks. What we gather from them has a most important bearing on the subject. (1) He comes to the conclusion that Cindelgthen was on the seashore. (2) That the name seemed to imply the head of a loch. (3) That the Cindtire of the Irish annalists was more extensive than the boundaries of Kintyre, extending beyond them and including Knap-

dale. (4) That the charter of the Lord of the Isles was dated at Cleandaghallagan, and that it was the same place as Cindelgthen; and that it is a mere conjecture that Kilberry Castle is the place meant.

At West Loch Tarbert there is an island situated near the head of the loch, nearly in mid-channel, where the loch commences to widen. To the north of it is the narrow channel leading towards Tarbert. The island is known as Ealain da Ghallagan, and always was known by that name. This island completely blocks, or rather dominates, the channel or passage by which communication was kept up with Islay, Gigha, Jura and Colonsay, and *vice versa*; and is still the route taken by passengers bound for those islands, and a favourite one from the wonderful beauty of the loch and its picturesque surroundings. The course sailed passes close to the island.

It is well known that Tarbert was the most important position on the Argyllshire coast; and on that narrow isthmus "Savage Clans and roving Barbarians" struggled for its possession as being the key admitting to the peninsula of Kintyre, and a foothold for accomplishing the domination of the surrounding districts.

A glance at the Ordnance map will demonstrate that the island of Da Ghallagan was an important strategic position, a commanding post guarding the entrance from the ocean on the west, also well adapted for a secure stronghold, and being nearly in the centre of the Dalriadic kingdom, would, from its natural position, be more likely to be selected for a residence than Dalchairn or any place on the west coast of Knapdale.

That the island continued for a long period to be a stronghold is certain; and it is more than probable that the Lord of the Isles was here when the charter previously referred to was granted. The charter is given in the Registrum Monasterii de Passelet—"Datum apud Cleandaghallagan in Knapdale xxi. die mensis Maii anno domini Millesimo quadringentesimo, quinquagesimo quarto."

As late as the sixteenth century the island was held by Allan M'Lean of Torlusk, known as Allan na'n Sop; who issued from thence to plunder, and carry on a murderous feud with the M'Neills of Gigha.

In the recollection of some old people still alive, the ruins of a house or fort were to be seen on the island ; but there is not a vestige of any building left, the reason assigned being that fishermen and others from Gigha were in the practice of taking the stones away as ballast for their boats.

Reference has been made to a battle, recorded by the annalist Tighernac, fought in 574 in Kintyre, at a place called Delgon, in which Duncan, son of Conall, and a large number of the tribe Gabran were slain, and also to the facts that the place was afterwards called Cindelgen, and that Mr Skene, when he wrote his history, supposed Cindelgen to be probably the place from whence the charter of the Lord of the Isles was dated.

I beg now to refer to a later opinion by Dr Skene among, if not, the last in connection with *Celtic Scotland*.

In a conversation with Mr Hugh Maclean of Tarbert, an excellent and well-informed local archæologist, he mentioned that he considered it an error on Dr Skene's part, writing the name as *Cean* (*Cean da Ghallagan*) for *clean*, which must be a misprint for *Eilean* or Island. This was brought under Dr Skene's notice ; and with his unflinching courtesy and kindness he at once replied as follows :—

“27 INVERLEITH ROW,
“EDINBURGH, 11th January 1890.

“DEAR SIR,—I have read your letter of the 9th with interest. I have very little doubt that you are right about the identification of the Cleandaghallagan charter ; and if I had been aware of the name of the island when I wrote *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii., which I was not, I should probably have come to the same conclusion. It was evident to me that the first syllable was an impossible form, and I concluded it was a mistake for *Ceann* ; but I think your suggestion that it was a misprint for *Eilean*, coupled with the fact of an island in West Loch Tarbert bearing the name *Ealain da Ghallagan*, is a very happy one, and solves the difficulty.—&c., &c.,

“W. F. S.”

I make no attempt to explain the name *Da Ghallagan*, and leave that to the learned who devote their abilities to the study of place names, but I respectfully submit the evidence adduced to the judgment of antiquaries conversant with early history, as I think it proves or

indicates that the island of Ealain da Ghallagan was the Dolgen or Cindelgthen or Dalegan of the annalists, the seat of King Connall, the patron and friend of St Columba, and who, according to Tighernac, made him the grant of Hy¹ ("qui obtulit insulam Ja Coluim-cille"); that in the immediate vicinity was fought the battle where Duncan fell; and the place from which the charter of the Lord of the Isles was dated.