

## V.

THE DROSTAN STONE (ST VIGEANS). BY REV. DONALD  
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The inscription on this stone<sup>1</sup> consists of four lines of the Celtic type of letters (fig. 1). The characters, twenty-four in all, are evidently clearly cut and well preserved, so that their transliteration presents no difficulty. At the same time, the brevity of the legend and the want of any clear division of the words have been the cause of much confusion in inter-



Fig. 1. Inscription on the St Vigeans Stone.

preting the meaning of the inscription. Two words alone seem to be agreed upon. They are the well-known names Drost or Drosten at the beginning, and Forcus or Fergus at the end. The intervening letters have proved a crux to archaeologists of more experience than I can pretend to, and it is therefore with diffidence that I submit my reading to the consideration of the Fellows of the Society.

For my reading, however, I claim (1) that it is intelligible; (2) that it adheres to Celtic grammar; (3) that it indicates that the writer of the inscription has a consistent preference for the harder tenues *p*, *c*, *t*, where modern Gaelic has the mediæ *b*, *g*, *d*. This one would expect

<sup>1</sup> See p. 237 of *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*.

from the evident antiquity of the stone, and the fact that it is found in the centre of Pictish influence.

Line 1. DROSTEN ··.—This is the genitive of Drostan, the diminutive of Drost or Drust. The fact of its being a diminutive points to the Drostan commemorated on the stone as being one of the early saints, who were often called by the diminutives of their names as a mark of endearment.

The genitive of Drostan would be, in modern Gaelic, Drostain. In Old Gaelic the inflection of *a* is often represented by *e*, hence Drosten = Drostan's. The mark ·· at the end of the name seems to indicate the close of the word, and to have the effect of setting "Drosten" apart as the heading of the inscription.

Line 2. IPEUORET.—In the middle of this line there are three vowels in succession, EUO. Modern Gaelic has at least five such combinations of vowels—triphthongs they are sometimes called—but EUO is not one of them. The *u* must therefore represent an aspirated consonant *mh* or *bh*, both of which are pronounced, sometimes as *v*, sometimes as *u*, according to their position.

Taking *mh* as the aspirated consonant represented by *u*, and letting it begin a word, we can read to the end of the line *mhoret*, which is in modern Gaelic *mhòiread*—pronounced almost exactly *vòret*. This is the nominative feminine of the third comparative of the adjective *mòr*, and would mean *very great* or *noble*. These third comparatives are formed by adding *ad* to the genitive of the positive.

*Mòr*; gen. *moire*; third comparative, *mòiread*, of which the feminine is *mhòiread*.

The word *mòiread* = *meud* may be found in any ordinary Gaelic dictionary as a noun signifying *greatness*, because the third comparatives of adjectives are also used as nouns to express the abstract idea contained in the adjective. Vide *Munro's Grammar*, pp. 62–63.

Before proceeding further it may be noted:

- (1) That the spelling of *voret* in the inscription is phonetic; and
- (2) That the tenuis *t* represents the modern Gaelic media *d*.

Taking the adjective *mhoiread* as nominative, its gender is feminine, and therefore it is natural to suppose it is preceded by a noun or pronoun, which must also be feminine. There are not many words like IPE to choose from. The nearest, and the one that can, I think, be shown to be correct, is the modern Gaelic INBHE = rank, quality, degree.

As the tendency of the Gaelic and the Irish speech is to soften the consonants by aspiration, INBHE points to an older form INBE. There are two possible reasons why INBE should appear on the stone as IPE. (1) Modern Gaelic *b* appears in old Irish sometimes as *p*. For example, the Latin *rumpo* is in Old Irish *rep*, and in Gaelic *reub*. (2) If the Celts of Pictland preferred, as this inscription otherwise seems to indicate, the tenuis to the mediæ in speech—and we have seen that here they apparently wrote phonetically,—they would write IPE for INPE, *n* being to all Celts an ungrateful consonant before *p*.

*Inbhe* is pronounced in two distinct syllables as *in-ve*. The Irish form of the word is *innhe*; but the Gaelic inclines more to the *inbhe*; although the Irish form is not uncommon. This would indicate that the *p* or *b* form of this word prevailed among the Celts of Pictland.

Lines 3 and 4. ETTFOR

CUS

In the photograph p. 237 of *Early Christian Monuments* there seems to be a ∴ after FOR. That mark differs from the one after DROSTEN, and would appear to be a hyphen joining FOR-CUS. If so, this would lead one to understand that the end of the preceding line was also the end of a word. Although the mark seems clear enough to me, I am told there is some doubt of its existence, and I lay no stress upon it. If it exists, it goes a little way towards confirming the division of the words; if it does not exist, its absence does no injury.

FORCUS is an old variety of FERGUS, a name that was common among kings and early saints of Scotland. In passing, the *c* (tenuis) for *g* (media) may be noted.

The only word left to interpret is ETT, which, it is natural to expect, is a word expressing *relationship*.

The modern Gaelic word *oide* (foster-father or instructor) is pronounced as one syllable, *oid'*. Hence in a phonetic inscription the final *e* would be omitted. In *IPE* the final *e* could not be omitted, because it is a distinct syllable. *Oide* was in Old Gaelic *aite*, and *ai* was often written *e* (cf. *Drosten* for *Drostain*).

For the double *r* in *ETT* I quote from the philological notes of the late Rev. Dr Cameron of Renton (in *The Gael*, vol. i. p. 216).

"*Oide* was in Old Gaelic *aite*. The non-aspiration of *aite* points, as observed by Stokes, to an original duplication of *t* in *aite* (= *attia*; cf. *crutire* = *crottaria*), which may therefore be compared to Latin *atta*, Greek *ἄτρα*, Gothic *atta* (father), Sanskrit *atta* (mother). Cf. *Irish Glosses*, p. 124."

Comparing the modern Gaelic with the more ancient form on the stone, the preference of the older language for the *tenues* may be shown thus:—

<i>IPE</i>	for	<i>INBE</i>
<i>UORET</i>	„	<i>MHOIREAD</i>
<i>ETT'</i>	„	<i>OID'</i>
<i>FORCUS</i>	„	<i>FERGUS</i> .

The whole inscription may be compared in the two forms:

DROSTEN :·	DROSTAIN :·
IPEUORET	'INBHE MHOIREAD
ETTFOR	'OID' FER
CUS	GUS

which I translate—

DROSTAN'S :·  
 HIS RANK (WAS) NOBLE :  
 HIS FOSTER-FATHER (WAS)  
 FERGUS.

If my reading be correct, it is plain that the Drostan of St Vigeans was a pupil of a Fergus, who was not likely a king but probably a cleric. He may be the Fergus mentioned in the Aberdeen Breviary as living in

the eighth century, and who was buried at Glamis. Of him we read in *The Church of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 213: "At the Council held at Rome in the year 721 two of the bishops who signed the canons which were then passed were Sedulius who was a bishop . . . of the Britons of Strathelyde, and Fergustus or Fergus, a bishop of Ireland, who was a Pict—that is, a Scottish Pict."

The fame of this St Fergus, who laboured over a large tract of territory in Scotland from Caithness southwards, was such that the writer of the inscription on the Drostan stone might well recall the fact that Fergus was the instructor or foster-father of Drostan.

#### NOTES ON THE CONSTRUCTIONS, ETC., IN THE INSCRIPTION.

- (a) As lines 2 and 3 both begin with vowels, the possessive pronoun *a*=his, would not be written. In modern Gaelic it would be represented by an apostrophe.
- (β) The verb "to be" is often omitted in Gaelic as in Latin.
- (γ) In modern Gaelic the subject does not usually come first, nor does the adjective, when a predicate, agree with its subject; but in older Gaelic (and sometimes in modern poetry) the subject often comes first, and the predicate adjective often agrees with its subject.
- Cf. *A zasga zrin*, his gait was princely (Book of Dean of Lismore, p. 30, *Gaelic*).

*Bi lawe chalma in gonyth*, his hand was always strong. Here Mr M'Lauchlan changes *chalma*, which agrees with its subject, into the modern usage *calm*—*Bha lamh calm an comhnuith* (Book of Dean of Lismore, p. 31).

- (δ) OIDE occurs about a dozen times in the Dean of Lismore's Book. It is the counterpart of *dalta* (foster-son, pupil) of the Legend of Deer. "Columcille acus Drostan mac Cosgreg adalta."

In the Dean's book *Oide* has the meaning of foster-father, patron, tutor. St Patrick is called "foster-father of the clerics," and also "patron of the clerics and of the bells," *oyd ni glar is ni glok* (D. of L., p. 5). Gaul is also called "patron of the schools," *eyddi ni skoll* (D. of L., p. 31).

That the word *Oide* was pronounced as one syllable usually is clear from the forms in the Dean's book, *oyd* (pp. 5, 7, 89, 91), *ayd* (p. 5), *ed* (p. 45); and that the *oi* approximated to *e* in sound is indicated by the forms of the same word, *ed*, *eddyth*, *ydda*, *eddi*.

- (ε) For the construction '*Oide Fergus*'=his foster-father was Fergus, cf. *a throsd cath is buan*=his path was battle and victory (poem by Fergus Filidh in the Dean's book, p. 31).