

IV.

THE NEWTON STONE. A CRITICAL EXAMINATION AND TRANSLATION OF ITS MAIN INSCRIPTION. BY WILLIAM BANNERMAN, M.A., M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

Of the two inscriptions upon this stone, the Ogamic, and the six lines of Alphabetic characters which have been called the main inscription, it is here proposed to deal only with the latter. The opinions expressed in this communication are the outcome of a careful study of the photographic illustrations in *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*. The transcripts from Stuart's *Sculptured Stones in Bishop Graves' communication in P.S.A. 1886*, the illustrations in Lord Southesk's communication of 1882, and in Professor Rhys's of 1892, have also been examined, as well as the figure in Mr Nicholson's *Keltic Researches*.

The conclusions arrived at differ in some important respects from others already brought forward, and it is hoped they may be found not unworthy of consideration and criticism, if not of acceptance.

The first of these is that the letters, debased as they are in form, follow the Celtic rather than the Roman type. The letter T, which occurs twice in the first line, has the Celtic form **Ṭ**. Even more distinctive is the form of the letter R, shaped in the Celtic alphabet like a crook-headed staff **Ṛ**, which appears after the cross in the fourth line and once again in the sixth. They harmonise in form with the corresponding letters on the Drostan Stone, at St Vigeans. The *Book of Deer* is sufficient evidence of the use of this alphabet in the north-eastern parts of Scotland; and its handwriting is a useful standard with which to compare some peculiar features of the Newton inscription.

Line 1. The first line of the inscription (fig. 1) consists of the word Ette. The **Ṭ**'s are of the usual Celtic form; the E's are of a less usual

type. From the left of the base there are oblique descending lines. On comparing the illustrations fig. 215 of *The Early Christian Monuments*, it will be seen that they are much less evident in the larger than in the



Fig. 1. The inscription.

smaller of the two. They are probably mere adventitious embellishments, and do not pertain to the "body" of the letter. In other respects the letters have the appearance of an E lacking the middle

horizontal stroke. In the *Book of Deer* (Spalding Club) E's of a similar form are met with. In Plate VI., for example, the word *bermact* shows an 'e' of this type; except that it is written as a tall letter, like an l, it is of precisely the same form as the c. Such instances might be multiplied.

Line 2. One has therefore no hesitation in reading C as the first letter of the second line. This is followed by U. The third and fifth are of much debased character, but appear to be derived from the capital N by rounding off its acute angles. The sixth is a character clearly shown in fig. 215 of *The Early Christian Monuments* as an , capital Celtic M. The fourth and the seventh places are occupied by a Y-shaped character the identification of which is one of the most debatable points in the inscription. That it must represent a vowel is obvious, however, from its position relatively to the neighbouring consonants. On the assumption that it is intended to represent some Celtic letter, it cannot be a Y, for that letter has no place in any Gaelic alphabet; nor can it be e, i, o, or u; for these are all exhibited otherwise in the body of the inscription. There is but one conclusion; however aberrant its form may be, it stands for the letter A. The succeeding letter is I; and the final letter, which is all but obliterated, may be surmised to represent an N.

Line 3. The first two letters, cut on an unfavourable surface, are best seen in fig. 214. The first is an , somewhat altered in appearance by a flaw in the stone which traverses it from above downwards. The second is the Y-like A, rather faintly marked, and upon a ridge of the stone is O. The rest of the line is best shown in fig. 215. The character shaped like an inverted γ or a Greek λ , cannot be identified from its resemblance to any Celtic letter. There are, however, not many letters left open for choice, and it seems safe to select from among them the one that gives the word an intelligible meaning. That is L. Thereon follow O, U, and E. The final letter as seen in fig. 215 resembles an English G inverted, thus . But there is something more. In the smaller illustration of fig. 215, and in fig. 214, a horizontal

line is shown over this curved portion; and the same thing appears in the illustration from a photograph that is given in Mr Nicholson's work. The letter is **ᚢ**, the Celtic form of G.

Line 4. The fourth line opens (fig. 214) with U and an indifferently formed N. Here the sign of the cross **ᚦ** is introduced. Following it are a very legible R (**ᚱ**) and an F. A strong horizontal line under these two letters is a sign of contraction which there are good grammatical reasons for expanding as the letter O. The line runs on, I, I, and a tall S (**ᚱ**).¹ The final letter is another I, with which is associated a marking that is apt to be overlooked. Opposite the middle of the letter, and interposed between it and the preceding S, is a dot like a full stop; it is quite plainly shown in the smaller illustration of fig. 215. Its import will appear afterwards.

Line 5. The fifth line opens with a strange character like an H, of which the last upright line is abbreviated at the upper end. The interpretation that suggests itself is this. The last upright line is the vowel I. The preceding part of the figure, consisting of the first upright and the transverse line, is identical with the mark of aspiration used in the *Book of Deer*² in place of the customary dot, the "punctum delens" of the Irish scribes. When rendered alphabetically it is represented by the letter h. An I, therefore, to which it is prefixed should in all probability be transliterated as h-i.

The rest of the line is made up of N, two Celtic capital SS, and I.

Line 6. One cannot get rid of an impression that the latter part of this line has been "gone over" by some too zealous restorer. The finishing of the letters with ceriphs, and a certain sharpness and decision in the cutting, indicate an acquaintance with modern alphabets and the use of better tools than were probably in the hands of the original craftsman.

¹ It is possible that the second i represents the lower part of a partially obliterated **ᚱ**, but the point is immaterial.

² The *Book of Deer*, pl. iii., line 13, 14, 16, shows examples of its use in connection with the words *Buchan*, *gathraig*, and *rath*.

The reading of the line presents no new letter, nor any special difficulty in its rendering. It is LOA O A R U I N.

The whole inscription therefore reads thus:—

eττε	ETTE
CUNUNMUN	CUNANMAIN
ΜΛΟΛΟΥΟΕΣ	MAOLOUOEG
UN † ROFIIR·I	UN ROFIIS·I
h-INSSI	H-INSSI
ΛΟΛΟΥΡUIN	LOAOARUIN.

Here is no unknown tongue. It is the Old Gaelic, the language of the *Book of Deer* and of the Celtic manuscripts on which Zeuss based his analysis in the *Grammatica Celtica*; and it will bear critical examination according to its own grammatical rules, as will be shown. [The references are to Zeuss' *Grammatica Celtica*, ed. 1853.]

"Ette" is a second person singular imperative, formed, like "dene," *fac*, and "dece," *ecce*, by suffixing "e" to the root of the verb [Z., p. 457]. The root in this case is "ét," "ét," *ire* [Z., p. 492].

"Cunanmain" consists of a preposition and its noun written as one word in the usual manner of Old Gaelic. "Cun" is a variant spelling of "Con," "co," or "cu," a preposition which in the sense of *ad, usque ad*, governs the accusative [Z., p. 585]. "Anmain," accusative singular "of anim," *anima* [Z., p. 269].

"Maolouog," genitive of the name of a person "Maolouog," now commonly called St Moluag. The writer of the inscription shows a curious tendency to spell his long vowels as diphthongs; but this practice, if clumsy, has abundant precedent. Thus "gó," "góo," "gáo," and "gáu" are various ways of spelling the same word [Z., p. 39].

"Un." As "cun" is written for "con" in the second line, so here "un" is written for the more usual "on" *a quo*. It is a word formed

by the combination of the preposition "o" or "ua," and "n" representing the relative pronoun.

"Rofiis." The third person singular of the past tense of a passive verb. It is made up of the verbal particle "ro," the invariable mark of the præterite in the old Gaelic, and of the root "fes," "fis," "fias," in modern Gaelic "fios," *scientia*. "Rofess" is glossed *notum fuit* [Z., p. 49].

"·I." The letter i, separated from the context by means of dots, is a contraction of very common use in old Celtic writings. It stands for "iodhon," and when rendered in Latin usually takes the form of *id est*; but its range is very wide, and it is used to introduce any sort of amplifying or explanatory clause.

"H-inssi," the genitive of the feminine noun "inis," *insula*. The Annals of Tighernac (*Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, p. 78) spell this word "indsi"; and "inssi" would accord best with modern custom.

The letter "h" prefixed to the word is a mere aspirate; coming as it does before the genitive case of a feminine noun which begins with an open vowel, it occupies a place which is perfectly appropriate to it.

"Loaoaruin." The genitive of a noun whose nominative is in "-an," formed in the same way as "cuirn" from "carn," or "Domnuill" from "Domnall."

Here the inscription writer exhibits the same predilection for diphthongs which has already been seen in his rendering of the name Maolouog. It is nevertheless a little startling to find that the extraordinary concatenation of letters presented to us in Loaoaruin is now familiarly known as a monosyllable, Lorn. The condensation is severe, but the steps of its progress can be traced.

In the various tracts brought together by Dr Skene in the *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* the name Lorn occurs over a dozen times. The general type of the nominative case is Loarn, Loorn, Loern. That the writers regard this as a word of two syllables appears by the way in which they form the genitive case. This is "Loairn," not "Loirn," as it would be if the nominative were monosyllabic. Farther, there is

evidence that even this form is abbreviated by the elision of a vowel between the "r" and the final "n"; for we have on pp. 151, 301, a nominative "Loaran" and on p. 288 "Lorin." The Latin writer of the *Metrical Chronicle* has even a more extended form, "Lorimonie"; which if it have any etymological value must be taken as a poetical inversion of "Lomironie," and an indication of a vocalised labial, a lost digamma, between the first two syllables. This restores the original form of the word, the form in which its meaning must be sought, as "Loforan." In view of these facts it would be rash to lay a charge of ignorant misspelling against the inscriber of the Newton Stone.

The translation thus presents no difficulty; but the syntax and the vocabulary are allied so closely to the Latin tongue that it is interesting to compare the original with its literal rendering into that language as well as into English.

Ette
cun-anmain
Maolouog
un + rofiis : lodhon
h-inssi
Looaruin.

Ito
ad animam
Moloci
a quo (Fidei) erat professio : Etiam
[incola fuit] Insulæ
Lornæ.

In English :—

Draw near
to the soul
of Moluag
from whom came knowledge (of the faith). He was
of the Island
of Lorn.

The history of Saint Moluag and his connection with Lorn and with the mountainous parts of the shires of Aberdeen and Banff are too well known to call for more than the briefest notice. He built his head church, as our inscription recalls, on an island in the Firth of Lorn, which from that circumstance acquired the name of Lismore. He also founded Rosmarkie; and in the north-eastern district his name is associated with Mortlach, with Glass, with places in the lordship of Strathbogie, with Logie-Mar, with Clatt and others. The Collect for

his day in the Breviary of Aberdeen sounds like an echo from the Newton Stone: "Deus, qui per predicationem beati Voloci confessoris tui atque pontificis populum in tenebris ambulantem a cultu ydolorum convertisti: presta ut pia ejus intercessione omnium nostrorum corda ad cultum vere religionis convertantur. Per Dominum."

The *Annals of Tighernac* thus record his death:—A.D. 592. Obitus Lugdach Lissmoir 'i' Moluoc.

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