

## VIII.

ARCHÆOLOGY OF THE VOICE: LOWLAND SCOTTISH. BY R. ANGUS SMITH, LL.D., PH.D., F.R.S.

In our desire to know the past of our country in this Society, we have searched the history of Scotland for political transactions and for accounts of social progress; we have sought to know the way of life of our forefathers, and tried, but not very successfully, to obtain some idea of their appearance. We have succeeded better in knowing something of the language, and I now wish to enter on what I suppose to be a new point—namely, the tones of their voice. Is it possible to show that a tone can be reproduced after centuries; that any phonograph can have preserved it? We know that words can clearly be. I have stood in the garden of Sallust, and asked a man what he was sowing, when he answered "*Lattuca*." Sallust himself must have pronounced it almost exactly so; every vowel was most exactly preserved, and, so far as I could observe, every consonant. But the same must be said of the greater part of the Italian language, so far as the words are concerned. It is marvelous, too, how the names of places are preserved in the East, even from early scriptural times, and how amongst ourselves in the Celtic districts the very vowels remain.

If we pass from a consonant to a vowel, we may next pass to a tone, and it is to this I am calling attention specially. I remember an old friend, German-born, saying, "How peculiar is a Scotsman's voice? it is like that of no other nation." And that voice remains with the Scot; and even when he has forgotten his mother dialect, or can with difficulty understand the common phrases of his childhood, the old notes will appear in his voice. His throat is the throat of his fathers, and unless it be made to use other modulations in childhood, he speaks with the tone of his fathers more or less to the end. I do not say that it is otherwise with other men, but I deal now with the peculiar note of the Scot. I have had some curiosity in hunting that note. I have not heard it

among French or Germans, although I have been a good deal in their countries, and I have been for a week in Copenhagen and around without observing it, also in Norway and Sweden and Iceland. I have sometimes thought that I found it among Norwegians, but I was not sure. I found it as far north as Shetland, and that, of course, led me to think that it must come from Norway. Still the fact remains that I had not found it clearly out of Scotland until last October in the voice of any man unconnected with Scotland.

In October I was in Germany, not far from Bremen, in the town of Oldenburg, in the company of a gentleman learned in the history and use of peat; and whilst listening to his observations, which interested me much, I was struck with a peculiar note, or tone rather,—I will not pretend to describe it,—and I forgot the peats thinking of that tone. I ought to know that voice, I thought, but I never heard it from a German before, although I have known Germany well for more than forty years. I interrupted the remark that the gentleman was making, and told him my surprise at hearing such a note from a German; upon which he said that he was not German, but that he came from the west of Holstein. Here, then, I thought, must be the tone of the Angles or Saxons,—I am not careful here to distinguish,—and this would explain why a part of the south of Scotland was sometimes called Saxonia, so much peopled by the original invaders. It was as if I had gone back for a thousand years, and heard our ancestors speaking: the voice was there that had echoed through thirty generations and kept the same tone; it was as if an instrument perfectly tuned had been kept to give forth its own note. It was not a fact that could be disputed, it was not a fact that could be distorted; it was a spiritual link, a tone that was the consequence of a movement in an instrument constructed as the former instruments were, and set to the same tune. It was to me a proof that the people from that district had communication with us,—a proof that history could not confirm or weaken; I doubt if there is anything so peculiar to individuals and nations as tone. This is not the first time that tones of voice of nations have been considered, but I am aware of nothing so definite from

the depths of antiquity in this direction ; and in any case it gives us a new mode of inquiry, a mode of seeking what are the places in which the true Teutonic or Norse race abounds most in Scotland.

Of course I do not run away with the idea wildly. I know that a people can learn the notes of another as they learn the language, but neither can be done without contact or mixture.

But I must tell more exactly the spot from which the echo of past Scottish ages came. It was from Wilster-Marsch, and near the village of Beiden-Fleth, not far from the point where the river Stör falls into the Elbe, about twenty miles below Hamburg. This river Stör reminds us of the Stours in England, and notably in Kent. I am not aware of any river of the name in Scotland, however, even in districts where the tone alluded to is strongest.

Perhaps some people will laugh at this. What is a tone that it can last for a thousand years? A vibrating wire has power to cause another to vibrate with the same note ; we can give it a name, we can reproduce it by an instrument made by well-known rules, but these wonderful tones of the voice as yet have escaped scientific investigation, made by an apparatus which seems as well suited to make thousands of notes differing from that which inevitably appears in individuals. Every one knows how remarkable is the voice. I met a peculiar instance of this, and also in Germany. I went into the laboratory of the late Professor Redtenbacher of the University in Vienna. I had not seen him for somewhat above fourteen years ; he was standing with his back to me, busy with an organic analysis. I spoke, and he answered instantly, mentioning my name, and apologising for not turning round at once, as the experiment demanded attention. The air had conveyed a sound to him exactly the same as it had done fourteen years before, and no sound like it had been heard from any of the people with whom he had spoken.

This note, or tone, or intonation, which I cannot describe, is quite independent of dialect ; indeed, it is itself capable of being much modified. I went lately to a village in Clydesdale, Strathaven, where I used to spend some of my holidays as a boy, where traditions of Covenanters

were abundant, and where Claverhouse was a name in those days more familiar than any living politician's; I went to spots where changes I thought would least occur, but the people did not speak with the old tongue. It was actually gone, even from people not very old. A railway had come and made a change which centuries before had not changed, I dare say. I do not mean that the Scottish tone was gone, but a change had taken place, and all may go some day. I asked myself if the change was in me; others who knew it in my early time agreed that it was not in me; and I soon had perfect proof, because I met a lady from the district, but located in Dumbartonshire, who spoke the dialect, if we may so call it, to perfection, exactly as I remembered it; showing that I had noted the peculiarity and kept it well during my lifetime. I knew it at once.

I mention this circumstance of change in opposition to the circumstance of no-change, for the same reason that I mentioned in another publication the fact of the boundaries of the Gaelic and "Sassenach" languages remaining quite the same in Scotland for centuries, until the railway and steamboats began the change. Ten years had done in Nairn what three hundred, probably six or eight before, had not effected.

When a community has little intercourse with outsiders, the language may remain the same for centuries, and even for thousands of years; but when motion is rapid a change may take place rapidly. This argument may be used to illustrate other events.

I may turn to this again, but I send these remarks that if I do not return to the subject others may. I hope to go to Holstein soon. I spoke at one time of collecting faces, so to speak, so that the typical countenances might be got, and from these I expected to find out the true facial expression of the Pict, the Scot, and the Saxon. I did not think so early of hearing the voice, but I now look upon it as a something so permanent that no pyramid lasts better, and no buildings of Saxon, Norman, or Roman can stand with so little alteration, if no intruder interferes.

Of course we cannot see the end of a subject like this. I already am

led to fancy much, and to invent many inquiries which I know I shall never make ; but one thing strikes one as clear, that the prevailing tone of voice in Scotland connects itself with a prevailing race—a very simple conclusion ; but even if it is a truism, it is better to begin with it. The next point is the prevalence at the points which all the constituents are supposed to have been most intimately connected with—the great Teutonic immigration. I think that in such regions of inquiry much is to be learned.

This inquiry may be made by those who find it impossible to collect skulls, or to draw satisfactory conclusions from them when collected. The quality of the evidence is different from that which depends on measurement, and it is not easy to communicate to others its force, but it will most certainly be a guide. When we hear the voice, we can stand and look till the more solid evidence appears ; and when we see the expression of countenance, we can do the same ; expressions are even less explainable than sounds. It is more by expression of face that I know when I pass from the Celtic to the Teutonic regions on the Continent, and I have met faces in an isolated region of France—Sologne—which were so unlike either that I can imagine them to have come down unmixed from Cæsar's time. This subject leads to the remark that our country contains within itself the forms, voices, and looks of the past, and we have only to separate them, and we shall learn the type of all the races which make it up ; it is analogous to the result drawn by Dr. Arthur Mitchell, in his beautifully written and beautifully reasoned volume, in which he shows that prehistoric acts and habits are often found in the very midst of civilisation.

The work in this direction must be done soon, for that detestable mode of endeavouring to imitate the Southern English voice is prevailing in Scotland, and produces a tone most offensive to the ears of one who knows the true tones of both the English and Scottish well. The English roll of voice, which has its own delicacy and beauty, although often productive of indistinctness, as foreigners strongly feel, cannot be obtained without spending early life amongst the people ; and that tone

which is manufactured at a distance is, when not offensive, often ridiculous. Besides this, the roll is not the same in all parts, and it does not even exist in all England; and in the individuals in which it is very strong is evidently connected with some imperfection of enunciation by no means found in the best speaker or healthiest bodies and minds. The clearest, strongest speakers and best intellects get over the excessive roll, but retain the softness and music.

I ought, however, to add that I am not a musician, and cannot describe sounds, although having a keen appreciation of poetic measures.

Dr. J. A. Smith stated that the subject of the intonation of the voice was one upon which he had some conversation years ago with the Rev. Thomas Maclauchlan, LL.D., our well-known Gaelic authority, and learned that he had paid some attention to this matter. He showed him Dr. Angus Smith's paper; and as Dr. Maclauchlan was unfortunately, from the delicate state of his health, not able to attend the meeting, he had received from him the following letter, which, as it refers to the *Celtic or Gaelic accent or tone of the voice*, may be quoted here:—

“ EDINBURGH FREE ST. COLUMBA'S MANSE,  
“ May 15, 1882.

“ MY DEAR DR. SMITH,—I have read Dr. Angus Smith's paper with great interest. His idea is very nearly one that, as you know, occurred to me many years ago. I was travelling in Brittany, and was struck with the peculiar accent or intonation of the Bretons. After considerable observation, I came to the conclusion that the intonation of Breton and French was the same. Listening to a Frenchman and a Breton speaking, without hearing the words, I could observe no difference in tone, or accent, as it is called. I am satisfied that the Breton has retired from a large part of France, as topography teaches, and left his intonation behind.

“ Coming home I extended my observation, and found that the peculiar intonation of Glasgow and the district all round is the Gaelic intonation of Argyllshire, slightly modified. The same is true of Ayrshire, where there is a marked Gaelic accent, easily discernible by one who is familiar

with the sound. It is equally true of Perthshire; and it is manifest in the North Highlands, where Gaelic and English are spoken with the same intonation, even in districts where the Gaelic has retired. I think this is a subject deserving of consideration. I had a good many notes on the subject, and would fain write a paper such as you desiderate, but the state of my health is so broken that I cannot do so."