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Present Limits of the Celtic Language in Scotland

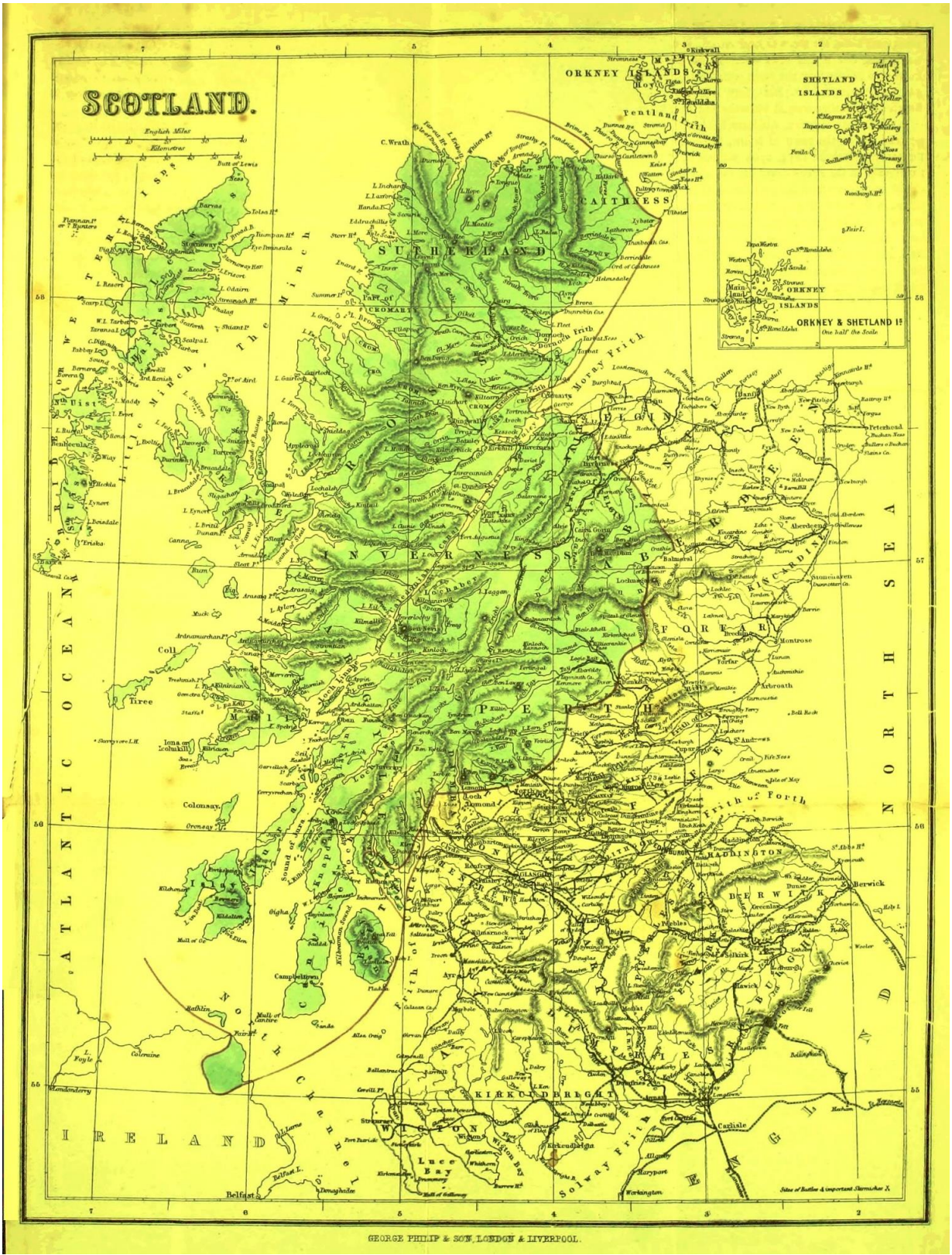
James A. H. Murray (James Augustus Henry Murray)

(7 Chwefror 1837, Denholm, Yr Alban – 26 Gorffennaf 1915, Rhydychen, Lloegr) (78 oed)

Revue Celtique, Cyfrol 2 (1873-1875), tudalennau 178-187

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PRESENT LIMITS
OF THE CELTIC LANGUAGE
IN SCOTLAND.

Nous devons à l'obligeance de M. James A. H. Murray, membre de la Société philologique de Londres, la permission de reproduire ici ce qu'il a écrit sur la délimitation des langues celtique et anglaise en Ecosse, dans son érudite monographie des dialectes anglo-écossais : *The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland; its pronunciation, grammar and historical relations*, vij-251 p. in-8, Londres, Asher, 1873.

Bien que ces pages ne soient pas inconnues à plusieurs de nos lecteurs, et notamment à nos lecteurs écossais, il nous a semblé utile de les mettre à portée du public celtique tout entier, et nous désirons que le travail de M. Murray sur l'Ecosse suscite des travaux analogues dans les autres pays celtiques. Aujourd'hui en effet que les langues celtiques reculent si promptement devant les progrès grandissants de l'Anglais dans les Iles Britanniques, du Français sur le continent, il importe de marquer l'étendue précise de leur domaine. Nous serions heureux de publier dans cette revue des recherches analogues sur la géographie des langues irlandaise, galloise et bretonne, et nous attirons sur ce point l'attention de nos lecteurs que leurs voyages ou leurs relations mettent en état d'observer l'état linguistique des pays-frontière, ne fût-ce que pour quelques villages. Ces notes, auxquelles nous offrons volontiers l'hospitalité de la Revue, se compléteraient l'une et l'autre et permettraient de faire pour les autres pays celtiques ce que M. Murray a fait avec tant de zèle et de succès pour l'Ecosse.

Nous n'ignorons pas que ces recherches sont délicates et qu'elles demandent souvent une sorte d'enquête. Là où l'usage de deux langues se rencontre et se confond, il faut observer ou savoir de personnes dignes de foi :

- 1° De quelle langue les habitants se servent le plus volontiers entre eux, en l'absence d'étrangers ;
- 2° Quelle langue on parle de préférence aux enfants ;
- 3° Par l'intermédiaire de quelle langue on enseigne la langue de l'État dans les écoles ;
- 4° Dans quelle langue on prêche à l'église ;
Et, si les deux langues sont employées à des offices différents ;
- 5° A quelles heures se célèbrent les divers offices, par quelles classes de la société ils sont principalement suivis, et dans quelle proportion ;
Enfin si la langue de l'État (anglais ou français, suivant le pays) a remplacé la langue celtique, il faut s'informer, et autant que possible auprès des ecclésiastiques eux-mêmes ;
- 6° Depuis quelle époque la langue celtique a disparu du service religieux.

Tels sont les principaux points qui doivent attirer l'attention dans une enquête de ce genre et d'après lesquels on peut établir avec quelque certitude une frontière linguistique.

M. Murray s'était entouré de ces précautions et de beaucoup d'autres encore, et les noms de ses correspondants sont une garantie que l'enquête a été menée avec toute la rigueur possible. Aussi n'est-ce pas pour diminuer le mérite de son travail, mais pour rendre hommage à un savant modeste (dont l'œuvre est restée inconnue à M. Murray et au public britannique), que nous mentionnerons un travail antérieur sur le même sujet. Il y a plus de vingt ans, un savant allemand qui s'est occupé avec beaucoup de zèle de géographie linguistique, M. Nabert, avait parcouru la plus grande partie de l'Écosse pour dresser cette délimitation des langues que M. Murray nous donne à son tour. M. Nabert n'a pas, à notre connaissance, publié le résultat des observations qu'il a faites allant de village en village, mais c'est sur ses indications qu'a été dressée la ligne de partage entre les langues anglaise et scoto-gaelique dans la carte linguistique des Iles Britanniques du grand atlas de M. Berghaus¹, et il faut dire à l'honneur de M. Nabert que la ligne de démarcation qu'il donnait coïncide dans son ensemble (et sauf quelques points) avec celle de M. Murray.

La partie principale de l'ouvrage de M. Murray est formée par une grammaire comparative des dialectes anglo-écossais de l'Écosse du Sud et de l'Est, sujet étranger à nos études ; mais cette grammaire est pré-

1. H. Berghaus : *Physicalischer Atlas, VIII Abth. : Ethnographie*, carte n° 12, cf. texte p. 17, col. 1. — Nous citons d'après la deuxième édition, Gotha, 1852.

cédée d'une longue introduction historique d'un intérêt beaucoup plus général. Nous devons y signaler notamment les pages consacrées à l'établissement des Anglais dans le Nord de la Grande-Bretagne, au progrès fait par leur langue aux dépens du celtique, aux vicissitudes par lesquelles le nom de Scot et d'Écossais, originellement réservé aux Gaels des Hautes-Terres, est arrivé à désigner le peuple et la langue d'origine germanique du Nord de la Tweed, et enfin celles où M. Murray montre avec une grande vraisemblance une influence phonétique et psychologique exercée par le celtique sur les dialectes anglais parlés en Écosse. Cet essai intéresse au même titre le philologue que l'historien et nous y renvoyons le lecteur qui s'intéresse de plus près à l'histoire et à la langue de l'Écosse celtique.

Les personnes qui possèdent le volume de M. Murray trouveront des modifications et des additions dans le texte que nous reproduisons : nous les devons à l'auteur lui-même, qui a bien voulu corriger les épreuves de cet extrait. C'est également sous ses yeux et par ses soins qu'a été dressée la carte linguistique de l'Écosse celtique qui accompagne le numéro de la Revue.

H. G.

The extent to which the Gaelic is still spoken in Scotland has been already referred to. Having found, while engaged in the preparation of this work, that there exists no accurate account of the limits within which the old tongue is now confined, at the suggestion of some of the members of the Philological Society, I issued in 1869-1870, a series of inquiries to clergymen and others residing along what, from personal examination, I knew to be the linguistic frontier, accompanied by sketch maps of their respective districts, upon which I asked them to lay down the approximate limits of the Gaelic. These inquiries were in every instance most courteously and fully answered, and I have here to acknowledge the great obligations under which I lie to the various gentlemen who so warmly responded to my requests¹. When arrange-

1. These are the Rev. Wm. Ross, of Chapelhill Manse, Rothesay, a native of Caithness, to whom I am mainly indebted for notes upon Caithness and the other counties N. of the Murray Firth, and also on the islands and coasts of the Clyde; the Rev. Colin Mackenzie, of Ardclach, and Rev. John White, Moyness, for the counties of Nairn and Elgin; the Rev. Walter Gregor, of Pittsligo (Editor of the « Banffshire Dialect »), and James Skinner, Esq., Factor to the Duke of Richmond for Elgin and Banff; the Rev. Robt. Neil, of Glengairn (through Rev. Dr. Taylor, of Crathie), for Aberdeenshire; the Rev. Neil Mc Bride, of Glenisla, for N. W. of Forfar, and adjacent parts of Aberdeen and Perthshires; the Rev. Samuel Cameron, of Logierait, Rev. Dr Mc Donald, of Comrie, Rev. Hugh Mc Diarmid, of Callander, for the adjoining parts of Perthshire; the Rev.

ments were being made for the census of 1871, the Philological Society memorialized the Home Office with a view to have the linguistic statistics of Great Britain collected in the returns, as is so admirably done in Russia, Austria, and other Continental countries. Had this been acceded to, very much more minute information than is here communicated would have been within our reach. But as no attention was paid to the suggestion, these notes will in some measure do for the Gaelic what would have been possible also for Irish, Welsh, and the Norman French of the Channel Isles. The general result is seen in the Map, where, however, it is to be observed that the *outside limits* of the Gaelic are shown, that is, every district is included in which Gaelic is still *spoken by any natives*, regardless of the fact, that English may there be spoken by the majority of the people. To a distance of ten miles probably, all round the frontier, Gaelic may be considered to be the language of a decreasing minority, especially in the towns; in almost every part of the Highlands, English is now more or less understood and spoken, though in the extreme west, and especially in the Islands, many persons may be found who know nothing but the native tongue. « From Barra Head to the Butt of Lewis, there is very little English; individuals may be found who speak it, but not a community. » These facts, which could not easily be shown on the map, are detailed in the following notes, whence also it can be seen how steadily the Celtic has been retreating backwards step by step within living memory. The traditional Highland boundary line, as it existed to 1745, is also known to us, and affords the same evidence as to the retreat of the Gaelic frontier.

The linguistic boundary is formed by a wide curve, extending from the head of the Murray Firth by the N.E. corner of Perthshire to the Firth of Clyde; of the three natural divisions of Scotland, the Gaelic area does not now touch the Southern, cuts off the larger part of the Central, and the whole of the Northern, with exception of the N.E. point of Caithness, and the Orkney and Shetland Isles, which have long been Teutonic¹. On the other hand it includes a portion of the N.E. of Ire-

W. Mackintosh, of Buchanan, for the W. part of Stirlingshire; the Rev. Duncan Campbell, of Luss, for the district between Loch Lomond and Loch Long; and the Rev. Neil Mackenzie, of Kilchrenan, formerly missionary in St. Kilda, for that island, and other western parts. To the Revs. W. Ross, Neil Mc Bride, and Walter Gregor (Member of the Philological Society), I am specially indebted for much general assistance in addition to the information as to their own districts.

1. The Orkneys were certainly occupied by Celts at the date of their conquest by the Scandinavians in the 9th century; as to the Shetlands, more remote from the Scottish mainland, the question is doubtful. At least the Celtic language utterly disappeared from the isles, in which dialects of the Norse lingered till within the memory of very old peo-

land, the dialect of which is identical with that of the opposite coast of Kintyre (or Cantire). More particularly, the line may be drawn from a point on the Murray Firth, about three miles W. of the town of Nairn, southwards towards Loch Clans, and S.E. to Geddes, thence S. and E. by the S.W. boundary of the parish of Auldearn, and so on to Coulmony on the Findhorn, whence S.E. to the Knock of Murray. Thence across the Spey, midway between Cromdale and Ballindulloch, to Lyne on the Avon, and along the southern watershed of Glen Livet to Aberdeenshire; across Strath Don, nearly in the line of the road from Inverness to Balmoral, to a point on the Dee, about four miles above Ballater. South of the Dee, the Gaelic has retreated about seven miles farther west, so that the line leaves that river about four miles above Balmoral, and runs south over the Grampians, to the boundary between Perth and Forfar (no part of the latter county being Gaelic), which it follows as far as Mount Blair, thence across Glen Shee and Strath Airdle, the lower part of which is now English, and S.W. across the moors to the Tay between Dunkeld and Dowally. From Dunkeld by Birnam Hill, and the southern watershed of Strath Bran to Glen Almond, thence south by the head of Glen Turritt to Comrie. From Comrie, along the braes of Doune to the Teith, three or four miles below Callander, and so on by the north side of Lake of Monteith to Gartmore, where the boundary leaves Perthshire. In Stirlingshire, from Gartmore to Rowardennan on Loch Lomond, and across that lake by Glen Douglas to Loch Long. In the Clyde, the line may be carried directly down by the east of Bute, Arran, and Cantire. But this includes extensive districts in which it is hard to say how far the Gaelic is to be considered native, inasmuch as it would certainly have been already extinct there but for fresh accessions of Celts from more inland districts. One correspondent, a native of Arran, says the line should proceed « from Arroquhar to Dunoon, and from Dunoon to Kames Castle (leaving out the Toward district as no longer Gaelic); from Kames, across the narrow part of Bute (Gaelic being no longer native in the south half of Bute) to Arran, so as to include that island,

ple lately alive, though for several centuries this *Norns* had been waning before the English introduced by fishermen and other settlers from the Scottish mainland. The present dialect of these islands is not really descended from the *Norns*; it is merely an English dialect which has displaced the other, adopting (in Shetland especially) a few of its words and forms. In Caithness, it is now certain that the Norse was completely driven out by the Celtic, as it was in Sutherland. in Lewis and other of the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man. The present Teutonic dialect of Caithness is not descended from the Scandinavian or connected with it; it is the Scotch of Banff and Aberdeen on the opposite side of the Murray Firth, which has been introduced by fishermen who have settled on the coast of Caithness during the last three centuries; before this language, the Gaelic, after having conquered the Scandinavian, and recovered the whole of Caithness, is now again retreating.

and thence to the Mull of Kintyre;... even in some districts within the line, such as Dunoon and south end of Kintyre, Gaelic is almost extinct. » Another, who is minister of the Free Gaelic Church in Rothesay, says, « In Bute, and the district on the shores of Cowall, from Inverchaolin, by Toward, Dunoon, Sandbank, Kilmuu, and Strone, English prevails, but a few natives and a considerable immigrant population still speak Gaelic. Of the native farmers in the Isle of Bute, probably *ten* can speak Gaelic. A small portion of the Gaelic-speaking people in the town of Rothesay are also natives, but the large body consists of immigrants. Gaelic is still preached in the Established Church at North Bute, also occasionally at Port Bannatyne, while there is regular Gaelic service in the Established and Free Gaelic churches in Rothesay. The Gaelic population in North Bute is almost entirely immigrant. About 1843-5, the estate of Skipness was sold, and the new proprietor cleared away a large part of the inhabitants, who came over and settled in Bute. In the district from Inverchaolin to Strone, along the shore, a few natives still speak the language; there is a considerable Gaelic population in Kilmun, and a few in Sandbank; in Dunoon there are said to be upwards of 200 Gaelic-speakers, but chiefly immigrant. It is curious to observe the nature of the change going on along the border line: the Gaelic people are gradually going to the principal towns in their neighbourhood, while Lowlanders who have been successful in business in the towns, or farmers from the south, go to occupy farms or residences within the Gaelic area. This change has taken place extensively in the district from Otter Ferry on Loch Fyne round to Loch Long... I do not think Gaelic is extinct anywhere in Kintyre. Even in the farming district of Southend, a few natives still speak it; and in Campbellton, I think a majority of the people use the ancient tongue, so that the line may safely pass south of the peninsula. »

In Caithness, at the other extremity of the line, the boundary is drawn « from the mouth of the water of Forss, west of Thurso, by the village of Hallkirk, and to the N.E. of Harpsdale, along the road to Achkeepster, and thence by a gentle curve to Bruan Head. » The majority of the people in the village of Lybster, and in Mid Clyth and East Clyth, speak English. In Caithness, Gaelic is regularly preached in Dunbeath, Latheron, Lybster, Halsary, Westerdale, Hallkirk, Reay, and occasionally in Bruan. In Ross-shire the district from Tain to Tarbat Ness, and along the coast to Invergordon, is chiefly Gaelic. The Gaelic School Society occupies two stations in this peninsula, one at Hilton and Balintore, and another at Inver. The district from Cromarty

southward along the shore to near Avoch, is chiefly English, local tradition stating that it has been so since the time of James VI, when a number of people from the south settled here (see Hugh Miller's « Schools and Schoolmasters »)¹. But there is a large Gaelic congregation at Resolis, and smaller ones at Fortrose and Avoch.

In the County of Nairn, Auldearn has been an English parish for many generations. In the town of Nairn, Gaelic preaching was given up in the parish church in 1854, upon petition of the parishioners; it is still partly used in the Free Church for the sake of old people, but these are chiefly immigrants from the parishes of Ardersier, Petty, etc., who have settled in the town. In the parish of Ardclach, a few natives speak Gaelic, and for the sake of old people it is preached in the Free Church, but has been discontinued for ten or twelve years in the parish church². In the other parishes of this county, Gaelic is still preached for the sake of the old people, but the Celtic is « gradually disappearing, most of the young people being quite ignorant of it. » The traditional Highland boundary passes through the town of Nairn, and its mixed population was already a matter of note in the reign of James VI, if we may credit a story told of that monarch after his accession to the English throne. His courtiers are said to have boasted in his presence of the size of London in comparison with any town in Scotland, but the King declared that there was in the North of Scotland a town so large, that the people at one extremity of it spoke a different language from those at the other!

In the lower division of Elginshire, Gaelic is extinct, but is still preached in the parishes of Cromdale, Abernethy, and Duthil, in the upper part of the county; in Banffshire it is used in divine service only at Kirkmichael and Tomantoul. « No Gaelic has been spoken in any part of Inveravon for very many years, nor in Glen Livet for upwards of forty years at least; even in Tomantoul, I am told by natives that the children now cannot speak one word of it, and that in thirty years or less it will be quite lost. »

1. Inverness has also a large English population, which local tradition attributes to a garrison left by Cromwell. Extraordinary ideas are current as to the purity of the Inverness English, the most that can be said for which is, that it is Book-English and not Lowland Scotch. But « it is not correct to consider Inverness as an English town, isolated and surrounded by the Gaelic; the latter has still a firm hold of a large part of the town; in at least four churches Gaelic is the language used, and that for people born and brought up in the town. »

2. Over all the Highlands nearly, it will be found that the Gaelic lingers in the Free Churches, long after it disappears from the Established Churches. The Celtic population took an intense interest in the Non-intrusion struggle and when that culminated in the disruption of the national Church in 1843, the Highlanders almost to a man joined the Free Church. There was consequently no longer any need for Gaelic to be preached in the Established Churches.

In Aberdeenshire, Gaelic is not now used in the public worship of any church. Down to the Disruption in 1843, it was partly used in the parish churches of Braemar, Crathie, and Glengairn, and in the parish church at Ballater at the Communion only; but in all these it has been disused since 1845, and in the Free Churches since 1850. In the Roman Catholic Chapels it has been obsolete for a much longer period. It is still used in ordinary conversation by a considerable proportion of the population of Glengairn, Crathie, and Braemar; it is the first language learnt in a very few families, but every child above ten years of age may be said to understand English. It is nearly, but not altogether extinct in Strathdon; but has not been used in Glenbucket for a long time past. Towie and Glentanner, although their topical names are all Gaelic, have been considered as below the Highland line for several centuries. None of the natives there know anything of Gaelic, which is fast disappearing even in Braemar.

Although a portion of Forfarshire was included within the Highland boundary, and the local names are Celtic, Gaelic is not spoken in any part of the county; nor has it been used in public worship in any parish since the Reformation at least (except in Dundee, where there is a Gaelic church for immigrants, as in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and London).

In Perthshire, Gaelic is commonly spoken in the upper part of Glen Shee and Strath Arde; but « in the Free Church of Kirkmichael, Strath Arde, there has been no Gaelic preached for several years, and it is going and almost gone in the Established Church¹. » It has for some time been used in divine service, in summer only, in the parish of Logierait, and « is or ought to be used in whole or part in every parish in the Presbytery of Weem. » It has been quite disused at Dowally, but is partly used at Little Dunkeld. « In the parishes of Comrie and Cullinstown, Gaelic is much spoken, and frequently preached in; Aberfoyle has a Gaelic-speaking minister, and he till recently officiated half the Sabbath in Gaelic; but now only occasionally. These parishes lie along the frontier line; inward, and completely or nearly quite Celtic are Balquhidder, Killin, Kenmore, Weem, etc. »

In Stirlingshire, Buchanan parish, which extends along the whole east

¹ *An Address to Highlanders respecting their native Gaelic, showing its superiority over the artificial English, etc.*, by Archibald Farquharson. Edinburgh, Maclachlan and Stewart, 1868. Referring to Strath Arde, the writer says, « Although my native country, I am quite ashamed of them. » Who wrote the inscription « Mile failte » (a thousand welcomes) on the top of the arch at Kirkmichael, on the occasion of a certain gentleman up the country taking home his English bride? I passed under it, and expressed my astonishment to see it, as the children spoke nothing but English in the street.

side of Loch Lomond, and across to Loch Katrine, is the only part in which Gaelic is spoken, though there is now « probably not a person in the parish who cannot understand and speak English. No Gaelic is spoken below the pass of Balmaquha. Between that and Rowardennan, Gaelic is used in some families, and is in pretty common use above Rowardennan. But it has long ceased to be taught in school, and has not been used in church for half a century, with the exception of an annual sermon at Inversnaid, discontinued in 1868. » West of Loch Lomond, Gaelic is extinct among the natives of Luss, but there is a constant influx of slate quarriers, servants, etc., who speak Gaelic, from Argyllshire. English alone has been used in church for fifty years, the last Gaelic minister having been Dr. Stewart, one of the translators of the Gaelic Bible. Even he, in the latter part of his ministry, had a Gaelic service only once a month. In Arroquhar, Gaelic is still in general use, but receding. Divine service is regularly in Gaelic and English.

With regard to the identity of dialect between the Scottish Highlands and a part of Ulster (a point to which my attention was first called by H.I.H. Prince Lucien Bonaparte), I have been favoured with information from the Rev. Classon Porter, of Larne, and Robt. Mac Adam, Esq., of Belfast, an eminent Celtic scholar, and well acquainted with the dialectical divisions of the Irish. The district in question is « the Glens of Antrim, » opposite to Kintyre, with the adjacent Isle of Rathlin (anglicized *Rathlin*); the area has been much circumscribed within living memory, but still extends from Cushendall on Red Bay, northward to near Fair Head, and inland over the mountainous district, to a breadth of 8 or 10 miles. « The people are evidently the same as those of Argyll, as indicated by their names, and for centuries a constant intercourse has been kept up between them. Even yet the Glensmen of Antrim go regularly to the Highland fairs, and communicate without the slightest difficulty with the Highlanders. Having myself conversed with both Glensmen and Arranmen, I can testify to the absolute identity of their speech. » — *R. Mac Adam, Esq.* The Celtic of all the rest of Ulster, viz., in Donegal, and isolated patches in Derry, Tyrone, and south of Armagh, differs considerably from the Scottish Gaelic, and is truly an Irish dialect. But there is not the slightest reason to deduce the Glensmen from Scotland; they are a relic of the ancient continuity of the population of Ulster and Western Scotland.

The most advanced outpost of the Celtic in the Old World is the Isle of St. Kilda, lying far out in the Atlantic, to the west of the Hebrides. The language is entirely Gaelic, none of the natives knowing any English

but the little that they may be taught by their minister or missionary. All the topical names are Celtic, and the Northmen seem never to have reached the island. The Gaelic has the dialectic peculiarity, that *l* is pronounced instead of *r*, as in Harris, which strikes the hearer very strangely at first.

Such are the limits within which the Scottish Gaelic is now spoken; its recession within living memory aids us at least in depicting the successive steps by which it has receded during the six or eight centuries since it occupied all the territory north of Forth. At the War of Independence, I think it probable that it extended to Stirling, Perth, and the Ochil and Sidlaw Hills, and that north of the Tay the « Inglis » was limited to a very narrow strip along the coast. Galloway and Carrick in the S.W. were also Gaelic till the 16th century; and it is probable that we are to look to the Reformation, and to the use of the Lowland Scotch in public worship and the parish schools, for its disappearance there. The origin of this division of the Erse stock is involved in obscurity, but according to Mr. Skene (*The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, vol. I, p. 42) they were a residuum of the Irish Scots, who devastated Britannia in the closing years of the Roman rule, A. D. 360 *et seq.*, and succeeded in effecting settlements among the Britons, not only in this S.W. corner of Scotland, but also on the west coast of Wales, whence they were at length expelled by « Cunedda and his sons » 450-500. Their occupation of this part of Scotland has left abundant traces; in the west part of Dumfriesshire, in Kirkcudbright, Wigton, and South of Ayrshire, not only the names of places, but the native personal names are of Scoto-Irish origin, contrasting strongly with the Teutonic nomenclature of Eastern Dumfries and Roxburghshire.

Celtic scholars distinguish three dialects in the Scottish Gaelic, a Northern, a Central, and a South-western. The Northern division, comprising Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, and North Hebrides, is distinguished by its « narrow, sharp, and arid » pronunciation, its consonantal character, and tendency to suppress guttural sounds, as in *mac*, *pasgadh*, *deagh*, which are pronounced (*mak*, *paskgəv*, *tjee.əv*) for (*makhk*, *paskgegh*, *tjee'egh*). « The pronunciation gives reason to think that the inhabitants spoke some Northern language at one time. » Probably this is due to the great influence of the Norse in these parts. In the South-western division, comprising Argyle, Perth, and the Southern Isles, long *é* (*ee*) is used for long *i* (*ii*) of the central division; the language is most vocal, « the swelling sound of the terminations *adh* and *agh* are scarcely audible after a broad vowel; the words are generally pronounced with amazing rapidity, falling from the mouth with a kind of jerk, and such heedlessness that it is not easy sometimes for a stranger to catch the nature of the sound¹. » The northern variety is that which is easiest for a Sasunnach to acquire and understand, the South-western comes nearest to the Irish and the language of the old Celtic literature.

James A. H. MURRAY.

1. *Principles of Gaelic Grammar*, by John Forbes, F.E.I.S. Edinburgh, 1848. The introduction contains a short sketch of the characteristics of the three dialects.