

Place-Names of Fife and Kinross.*

This is a most valuable work in many ways, and most suggestive, not only to all students of Scottish history, but especially to those interested in the extension of Scoto-Gaelic. The dwellers by the "Scottis Se," as the Firth of Forth was termed, have been so long of acknowledged Saxon origin, that the fact of Fife being an integral part of the old Pictish Kingdom has been almost forgotten, although Abernethy is within its bounds. While the land "between the two walls," from the Forth and Clyde southward, was Cymric, or Welsh, Fife was Pictish; and, according to Mr. Liddell, of the Gaedolic or Irish race of Celts. So that the Scots, or so-called Dalriads, were of the same branch as the Picts themselves. The "kingdom," therefore, although one of the earliest to come under the influence of the Teutonic invasion from the south and seaward, retains in its place-names the clearest proof of its early inhabitants. This little volume is, therefore, of far wider interest than to the "kingdom" itself, and may be looked upon as a nucleus for a similarly needed work on the place-names of other districts. It is especially valuable, as "there the Celtic dialect ceased to be spoken, and the names in consequence were stereotyped, at a period when the language existed in a much purer form and one less weakened by phonetic decay. . . . The vowel changes, moreover, indicative of Celtic inflexion, are often preserved with remarkable fidelity in the earlier spellings of Fife names." As was to be expected, from a sound scholar and trained advocate like Mr. Liddell, the examination is conducted with a broad grasp, and we could have done with more of his introduction and analyses of the results of the enquiries for the benefit of the general public. Thus—"There existed a great number of peat-bogs, especially in the eastern parts, which agricultural improvement has now removed. The land was generally wet and undrained, and morasses and marshy lochs were so abundant that when a specially dry piece of land existed its exceptional character is found to merit notice in its name (*e. g.* Strathtyrum). Forests and innumerable woods covered the country, as Fothreve, Fothros, and the many 'Kils' attest.

These woods consisted of oak, elm, sloe, yew, ash, birch, alder, and thorn." We have in these and similar studies the basis of ancient history, such as might suitably be followed up for the whole of Scotland. "All the Fife names beginning in Kil, with the exception of Kilwinning, are derived from *Coille*, a wood, and not from the Latin *cella*, a church." This is a reason, amongst others, why such enquiries can only be safely conducted by one with local knowledge, as otherwise the more obvious derivation might have been adopted. Occasionally a step a little aside would have accentuated his derivation. Thus "Dunnitace, Dun + paiste = fort of the charmed serpents," is more exactly reproduced in the neighboring *Dunipace*. We fancy, also, that in the local dialect of the East Coast, as in many of our West Country Gaelic names, *baile* is not necessarily a town or collection of houses, but may be, and often is, a gathering of buildings, seeing they continually speak of a *farm-town*, as the number of western farms called *Baluae* further testify. Yet the explanation of *Balwhidder* may point to ancient manners. "*Baile* × *coteir* = town of the cottars. This is approximately the explanation; the full meaning involves the French word *coterie*, which Littré points out is derived from *cot*, and signified a company formed by a number of peasants to hold lands in servile tenure under a lord. *Balwhidder* (or *Balquhidder*, as it is in Perth) was the town of a *coterie* or such a peasant club. So also *Balquideroch* in Stirling." It is presumably more ancient than the feudal system, to which this refers, and was possibly communistic!

We heartily welcome this work, and call the attention of Celtic scholars to the prominence of Irish Gaelic in the East, as shown in Mr. Liddell's pages. Only by such local enquiries can we build up a proper general history of place-names, as a new basis for prehistoric enquiry into the manners and customs of the early inhabitants, and the original condition in which they found the country. The fact that some of the derivations may be questioned does not lessen the value of a work which is nothing if not suggestive, and stimulative of thoughtful controversy.

* "The Place-Names of Fife and Kinross," By Mr. J. N. Liddell, M. A., advocate. (Edinr. Wm. Green & Sons.)