

THE
GAELIC TOPOGRAPHY OF DAMNONIA.

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I propose in this paper to examine the Topography of that portion of England which was at one time known as Dumnonia or Damnonia. For the sake of convenience it may be maintained that Damnonia embraced Devonshire, Cornwall, and the Scilly Isles. A writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* remarks that "Dumnonia or Damnonia, the Latinized name of a kingdom which long remained independent after the arrival and early conquests of the West Saxons, seems to be identical with the Cymric Dyfnaint, which survives in the present Devon. The Saxon settlers, as they advanced into the country, called themselves *Defenas*, i. e., men of Devon or *Dyfnaint*, thus adopting the British name." Into *Dyfnaint*, *Devon*, the Welsh word *dwfn*, Gaelic *domhain*, seems to enter as a component part. Professor Rhys states, that the remains of the language of the Dumnonii in Devon and Cornwall leave no kind of doubt that they were of the earlier Celts or Goidels, and not Brythons. I am of opinion that satisfactory evidence can still be extracted from the names of rivers and bays and headlands in the ancient kingdom of Damnonia, to show that Celts, whose language was Gaelic, gave in the distant past many of those topographical appellations which, with various degrees of correctness, have come down to our own time. It may be safely affirmed that the names which were given in an early age to the streams and lochs and hills and headlands of a country were intended to express some physical peculiarity. In his introduction to the "Vindication of Irish History" (p. 6), Vallancey thus writes: "It is unreasonable to suppose that the proper names of men, places, rivers, &c., were originally imposed in an arbitrary manner, without regard to properties, circumstances, or particular occurrences. We should rather think that in the earliest period, and especially when the use of letters was unknown, a name usually conveyed a brief history of the thing