

ON THE AGE OF OGHAM WRITING.

No. III.

BY THE REV. CHARLES GRAVES, D.D.

[*Read at the Meeting of September 3rd.*]

A difference of opinion between me and Mr. Windele, respecting the correctness of the late Mr. Horgan's reading of an Ogham inscription, has involved us in a controversy about the orthography, etymology, and signification, of Irish words. If Ireland had a Philological Society, our papers upon this subject ought, doubtless, to have been addressed to it. But as no such body exists in this country, and as there is an intimate connexion between antiquarian and philological studies, I trust that the Archæological Society of Kilkenny will not refuse its attention to the present paper. In it I have endeavoured to narrow the question in dispute to a single point; so that, on my part, nothing further may remain to be said.

Mr. Horgan, regarding the *tt* in the *Sagittari* inscription as equivalent to a *d*, proposed to read it as *Sagi Dari*; and took these two words to mean *The Priest Darius*, or *The Sage Darius*. I objected to this reading and interpretation, not because Mr. Horgan chose to regard the double *t* as equivalent to a *d*, but simply because I was persuaded that this substitution converted into bad Irish what is good Latin, if taken as it stands. I was quite aware that in Irish MSS., especially the more modern ones, *tt* is frequently put for *d*: sometimes according to rule, and sometimes in violation of it. And I would have readily admitted that it was done in the case before us, if the result thereby attained had been satisfactory. It happened, however, to be quite the reverse. *Sagi Dari* is not good Irish for *the priest Daire*, for the two reasons which I alleged in my former communication to the Society; and which, in spite of Mr. Windele's attempts to invalidate them, will be found substantial and conclusive.

I stated that there is no such Celtic root as *Sagi*, meaning sage or sacred; and I warned Mr. Windele against identifying it with *Sai*, *Sui*, or *Saoi*; a word suitable, indeed, to his purpose so far as its signification is concerned, but failing him in its orthography, inasmuch as it never contained a *g*. To this Mr. Windele replies, first, by adducing the word *Sacc* (sacred, holy) from the Supplement to *O'Reilly's Dictionary*; and next, by asserting that *Sagi* really was an ancient form of the word *Sai*. I shall deal with these words separately.

The word *Sacc* (sacred, holy) may certainly be found in the Dictionary to which Mr. Windele refers; and I knew that it was there before I made my first communication on this subject to the Society. Yet I am so bold as to say that no such word exists in the Irish language. To disbelieve what is in print appears to some an unwarrant-

able piece of scepticism. Many more will wonder at the audacity of the man who ventures to dispute the authority of a lexicographer; yet I venture to do all this—not rashly, I hope, or presumptuously, but after patient endeavours to ascertain the truth. I have taken the pains to search for the word *Sacc*, or *Sag*, holy, in all the glossaries within my reach. It is not to be found in them. The best informed Irish scholars with whom I am acquainted profess never to have met with such a word. It is a figment, a forgery, contrived by modern dabblers in etymology; and for its appearance in O'Reilly's Dictionary we can account in a very natural way. If we turn to Vallancey's Collectanea we shall find a passage which has a marvellously close connexion with the present inquiry:—

“I am of opinion that the *aire deasa* was the chief of the *dos* or *das*, and that they were both sacrificers and augurs; though here ranked with the *file*: every order of the *file* bore the same name in the order of the Druids; they were distinguished by the prefix *sagah* in the clerical order, and in the laity, by the simple word, or by the prefix *an*; hence, *sag-airt*, Irish, a priest, and *sacerdos*, Lat.”—*Collectanea*, vol. iii. p. 533, note.

From this passage it is likely that O'Reilly promoted *Sag*, or *Sacc* to the honor of appearing in a dictionary. If I am mistaken in my conjecture, let Mr. Windele produce old and unquestionable instances to prove the genuineness of the word; until he does so my denial of its existence must be allowed to stand good.

I have nearly the same thing to say respecting *Sagi*. I deny that the word *Sai* ever assumed this form, or ever received a *g* into it. The word was not one of uncommon occurrence; we meet it in ancient writings of all kinds; but always spelt in them as *Sai* or *Sui*. When inflected it appears to admit a *t* or *d*; but this does not help Mr. Windele. It is only in the way of cacography that *d* or *t* in Irish words is interchanged with *g*. For instance, O'Reilly's Dictionary gives both *Suidhim* and *Suighim*—I sit. But only the former is correct, as appears from a comparison with its cognates in other languages.

There is probably a misprint in that part of Mr. Windele's paper in which we are told that “the word *Sadi*—sacred, holy, wise, learned—may be readily found in O'Reilly's Dictionary.” The word is not contained in my copy, which, it is to be supposed, is perfectly like his.

“A first rate proficient in Irish scholarship” comes to Mr. Windele's aid, assuring him that *Sacair*, a priest, and *Sacar buig*, sacrifice, are both derived from the root *Saige*, holy. I venture to hope that really first rate Irish scholars, who also know something of Latin and of general philology, will agree with me in holding that both these words are derived *immediately* from the Latin. The former (if indeed there be such a word) from *Sacerdos* or *Sacer*; the latter from *Sacrificium*. The passage quoted by O'Reilly to exemplify the use of *Sacarbhuig* was well calculated to suggest this conclusion. *Cen comand, cen coibhsen, cen sacarbhaic*, is to be translated *sine communione, sine confes-*

sione, sine sacrificio; and more than that, I would say that it is waste of time to argue with any man who doubts the *direct* derivation of the three Irish substantives from the three Latin ones. Scholars of the same class refuse to admit that the Irish words *ceall, eaglais, teampull, baisleac, eusbog, sagart, deochain, aistreoir* are derived *directly* from the Latin *cella, ecclesia, templum, basilica, episcopus, sacerdos, diaconus, ostiarius*.

I used a second argument to show that *Sagi Dari*, is not good Irish for *The Priest Daire*. I stated that "even if there had existed such a word as *Sagi*, with the supposed meaning, it would have been written after, and not before, the proper name, when employed as a title. We always find *Flann file, Cormacan eigeas, Goban saer, &c. &c.*, not *File Flann*, and so on." To this enunciation of the rule I would only add that it is limited to the case where the word signifying the title is unaccompanied by the article *an*. Mr. Windele replies that the instances quoted by me are "exceptional cases." I deny the truth of this, and I am fortunately able to refer to authority amply sufficient to sustain my denial. The *Annals of the Four Masters* are full of lists of the names of persons *followed* by their titles. I select the following instances as peculiarly apposite—

A.D. 750.—*Conghus scribhmidh.*

755.—*Adharcu eagnaide.*

1077.—*Ferdachrioch Ua Coibhdenuigh Saoi & Saccart.*

1088.—*Maoilisa Ua Maoilgiricc, airdfile & ardollamh.*

Or, if we turn to the *Annals of the year 951*, we shall find, in the compass of a few lines, three instances of the very title in question, *Saoi*, coming after the name of the person to whom it belongs; a similar instance in the case of *Sagart*; and more cases than I care to count in which other titles are subjoined to proper names.

When a rule of this kind is said to hold good, it is meant that the number of exceptions to it is very small as compared with the number of instances in which the rule is observed. Along with many hundreds of passages illustrating the general rule which has been stated above, I could furnish two or three cases of exception: their extreme paucity just "proving the rule." I must add, however, that those to which I allude do not occur in inscriptions—there, from the nature of things, the name seems imperatively to claim precedence of the titles.

Mr. Windele's inability to combat the rule which I have laid down is most signally manifested in his unfortunate attempt to produce an example of its violation. "Cuan O'Lochain," he says, "as quoted in Petrie's 'Tara,' furnishes a ready instance in support of Mr. Horgan's reading, in the line:—

"*Sai Bruccaid beirdis dlliciud.*

The Sage Brugaid who distributed law."

Now it must be remembered that, to make this quotation applicable, two things are necessary. *Bruccaid* must be the proper name of a

person; and *Sai* must be a title of that person. Neither of these conditions is complied with. *Brugaidh* means a public victualler, or farmer; and the word *Sai* is not in apposition with it, but refers to an individual of a different class. This will be only too evident when we quote the passage fairly and at length:—

*Ri ocus ollamh filiud,
Sai, bruccaidh, beirdis dlíccíudh
Lepaidh na loiscíthí loichet,
Laarc ocus loncroicheatt.*

King and Ollave poet,
Sage, Brooce, who distributed law,
[Had] beds which lightning did not burn,
[And] the laarc and lonchroicheat.

Petrie's Essay on Tara, Trans. R.I.A., Vol. xviii., part 2, p. 148.

Let this be compared with the parallel passage in the poem on the same subject, given at page 200, and it will be sufficiently plain that the *Sai* and the *Brugaidh* were different persons.

*Ollam britheman, co m-buaidh,
Aire foirgill, fir,
Do berar lonchrochait doib,
Dunachis tic snim.
Sui littri, is ri ruirech,
Irreim cosmail choir,
Dlegait athbach, maethglan min,
Is prim-chrochait doib.
[Do ber] da ollamain filedh,
Is do aire aird,
Larac maith min, miad nad borb,
Noco labra laidc.
Briugu ocus aire tuissi,
Con hilur a fasach,
Do berar doib, ní radh n-issel,
Larac dia sasadh.*

The ollave-brehon, with power,
The aire forgaill 'tis true,
To them a lonchrochait is given,
From which no sadness proceeds.
A Saoi of literature, and a royal chief,
In a just similar rank,
Are entitled to the soft, clean, smooth, entrails,
And to a prim-chrochait.
[Is given] to the ollave-poet,
And to the aire ard,
A good smooth larac, honor not rude,
It is no false saying.
The briugu and aire tuissi,
With extensive pastures,
To them is given, no low saying,
A larac to satisfy them.

Assurance will be made doubly sure by reference to the ground plans illustrative of the poem, and given at pp. 205 and 206. They show at a glance that the *Suid Littri*, Professors of Letters, sat in one place, and the *Brugaidh*, or public victualler, in another.

I have already intimated that the passages quoted by Mr. Windele to prove the propriety of writing *tt* for *d* were superfluous, seeing that I neither denied nor forgot the existence of such a practice. What relates to this matter is therefore beside the main question. I may, however, be permitted, very briefly, to notice one or two points relating to it.

Mr. Windele tells us that the celebrated Patrick Lindon, of the Fews of Armagh, writes *O'TTongaile* for *O'Donnaigale* in an address to the Castle of Glasdromin. I happen to have before me a copy of Lindon's poem, in which the name is spelt O'Donnaigale. But perhaps Mr. Windele is so fortunate as to possess an autograph. Be that as it may, Mr. Windele ought to have older and better authority than that of either "the celebrated Patrick Lindon" or "the accurate Patrick O'Pronty" to justify the use of *tt* for *d* in the beginning of a word unaffected by eclipsis. More celebrated and more accurate scholars, if I am not mistaken, abstained from such a mode of spelling.

To his quotations from books Mr. Windele adds a reference to an inscription on a stone at Kilnasagart, near Jonesborough, County Armagh, which he says "contains these double letters in *TTan* and *TTer*, and are evidently *T* doubled for *D* though initials." This would, indeed, be a most ancient and decisive example of the practice in question, if Mr. Windele reads the inscription right. I can only say that I visited the monument myself about three years ago, examined it minutely, and brought back a rubbing of it. I am also in possession of an excellent sketch of it made by Mr. George Du Noyer, a gentleman combining the qualifications of an artist and an antiquary. I have, moreover, been permitted to examine a drawing of it, made with the greatest care by Dr. Petrie no less than thirty-five years ago. With this knowledge of the inscription, I venture to assert that there is no *TT* for *D* to be found in it. An indubitable instance of this mode of spelling, taken from an ancient monument, would be a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Irish palæography.

The question in dispute between me and Mr. Windele, is now reduced to a very simple issue. I deny the existence of such a Celtic root as *Sag*, holy, or wise. I assert that *Sai* never assumed the form *Sagi*. I also assert that the notion of holiness never entered into the signification of the word *Sai*. If these positions of mine be untenable, let Mr. Windele refute me by alleging satisfactory examples, and I will at once admit that my main objection to Mr. Horgan's reading is groundless. But when I ask for *satisfactory* examples, I mean such as may be gathered from the writings of scholars whose authority commands respect in the settlement of a question concerning the use and spelling of an ancient Irish word—men like the M'Egans, the M'Firbises, the O'Clerys, Peter O'Connell, or the O'Mulconrys. I appeal to the authority of the great mass of ancient MSS. which are preserved to us—to such books as the Liber Hymnorum, the Books of Armagh, Lecan, Ballymote, Leinster and Lismore, the Leabhar na h-Uidhre,

or the Wars of Turlogh. By the decision of modern word-forgers I do not offer to abide. In the mis-spelling of recent and obscure scribes, falling into error through their ignorance or their pedantry, I do not recognise materials available for the construction of a standard of orthography, or the establishment of principles of criticism.

ON THE AGE OF OGHAM WRITING.

No. IV.

BY JOHN WINDELE, ESQ.

[*Read at the Meeting of November 5th.*]

At the hazard of wearying the endurance of the Society by thus prolonging the discussion of what, I fear, many will regard as an opiate subject, I am compelled to offer a few more "last words" in reference to this question, and Dr. Graves' rejoinder read at your late meeting.

In doing so, I may as well observe, parenthetically, that the engraving of the Burnfort and Gleann-na-g-cloch inscriptions given in the *Transactions* for 1850, page 142, and stated to have been supplied by the Royal Irish Academy, is very far from being accurate, is calculated to mislead, and does not correspond with the drawing furnished by me when forwarding my original communication on the subject.

And now as to Dr. Graves' paper; in this he claims the merit of having narrowed the question in dispute to a single point, and I am free to admit that he has to some extent done so; but it is by omitting the part of Hamlet, and avoiding all reference to his notable "Sagittar," whom he would willingly leave to an undisturbed sleep, in the consecrated crypt at Burnfort. By this manœuvre he changes his position, turns away the tide of warfare from himself, and adroitly places me on the defensive—a feat very dexterous indeed, and displaying his "cunning of fence" to some purpose. And yet I hardly regret the ruse; for although I have really no more concern with Mr. Horgan's translation than with any of the several others heretofore mentioned by me, yet I by no means object to stand up in vindication of the scholarship of my deceased friend, or to show that he was not without *some* show of reason for the translation he had given; that it was consonant with the language and perfectly natural and unforced, whilst no sufficient reasons had been offered to invalidate it.

The controversy regarding the antagonist translation, that of "Sagittar," being virtually at an end by its being quietly withdrawn from the field, this in reference to "*Sagi Dar*" may now be reduced within less extensive limits, in as much as Dr. Graves has abandoned his objections to the convertibility of the double *t* to *d*—reluctantly to be sure, as was natural, for he says in so doing, "I was quite aware