

ON THE AGE OF OGHAM WRITING.

No. I.

BY THE REV. CHARLES GRAVES, D.D.

[*Read at the Meeting of May 7th.*]

ABOUT a year ago, Mr. Windele presented to the Archæological Society of Kilkenny rubbings of three of the Ogham inscriptions deposited in the Cork Institution; and in a paper accompanying the donation he has given an account of these monuments, and stated his views respecting the characters which appear on them (See p. 142 *ante*). As he has not only declared his dissent from the general views which I have put forward on this subject, but also called in question the correctness of my reading of one of these inscriptions, and suggested a different mode of deciphering it, I feel that I am called upon to discuss this question briefly before the Society, in whose ranks I have now the honour to be enrolled as a member.

Mr. Windele, as I understand him, is of opinion that the *Ogham Chraobh* character, in which these inscriptions are written, was in use among the Irish Druids—long previous to the Christian era; and was related to the cuneiform characters of the East. I have on the contrary shown grounds for believing that it was constructed, in comparatively recent times, by persons acquainted with the Roman and Runic alphabets. The internal evidence of this, founded on an analysis of the *Ogham Chraobh* alphabet, appears to me as convincing as evidence of the kind can be. But I am not without external testimony to the same effect. One of my witnesses is the stone found at Burnfort, near Mallow, of which a rubbing was presented to the Archæological Society of Kilkenny by Mr. Windele.

On this monument, as an examination of the rubbing will satisfy any of our members, is inscribed in Ogham letters

SAGITTARI.

To read this in a straightforward way, taking the letters as we find them, would be embarrassing to those who hold Mr. Windele's theory. The monument has all the characteristics supposed to indicate paganism and extreme antiquity. It is found in the cave of a *rath*. It bears no cross. To admit then that it exhibited a *Latin* word or name would greatly diminish the strength of Mr. Windele's case.

Accordingly we find him and the Rev. Mr. Horgan combining the two *t*'s into a *d*, and then trying to make Irish of the letters so reduced in number.

Now I take the letters as they present themselves, and therefore, it is hardly fair to say, as Mr. Windele does, that "*I would fain find them to indicate the name Sagittari.*" I do actually find that word; and I prove it to be a *proper name* by showing that a French Bishop of

the same name lived in the sixth century. I did not intend to have it inferred, as Mr. Windele concludes, that "this foreign ecclesiastical dignitary has been buried in the rath at Burnfort;" for I happened to be aware of the circumstances and place of his death, as related by Gregory of Tours. It was enough for me to show that Sagittarius was the name of a Christian living within the period during which I suppose the *Ogham Chraobh* character to have been in use. Having said so much for my own reading, I may now proceed to criticise that of Mr. Horgan, which, according to Mr. Windele, has been received with favour by the Cork antiquaries.

Mr. Horgan, substituting a *d* for the two *t*'s, forms the word *Sagi Dari*, which he translates as *The Priest Darius*. Mr. Windele says "the word *Sagi* is the root of *Sagart*, a priest, and perhaps also of the Latin *Sagax*, and cognate with the Hebrew word *Sagad*, to adore, and the Scandinavian *Saga*."

From these philological statements I altogether dissent. First, I venture to assert that there is no appearance of there having been any Celtic root *Sagi*, cognate with *Sage*, and meaning wise, wizard, priest, or any thing of the kind. This is not said hastily, but after a careful review of the Scotch, Welsh, and Breton languages, as well as of the Irish. We have indeed in Irish the word *Sai*, of which *Saoi* is the more modern spelling; but this, though its meaning would serve Mr. Windele's purpose exactly, could have had no *g* in it.

But next, 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. This objection has the more weight, because a title is less likely to be misplaced than another word, and least of all in an inscription.

Again, *Sagi* is not the root of the Irish word *Sagart*, a priest. *Sagart*, like the Anglo-Saxon *sacerd*, is derived from the Latin *sacerdos*, which was employed to denote the Christian priest; like the Italian and Spanish *Sacerdote* to this day. In ancient Irish MSS. wherever I have noticed the word, it is spelt with a *c*; thus, *Sacart*. The following instances will serve *instar plurium*. *Leabhar Breac*, fol. 43, a, 1, in the Litany of Ængus the Culdee; fol. 126, a, 1, in an ecclesiastical tract; fol. 130, a, 2, in the story relating to *Cairpre Crom*, Bishop of Clonmacnoise.

So also, in the *Book of Ballymote*, we meet at fol. 182, a, 2, a passage relating to the Seven Clerical Orders. In this *Sacart* is spelt with a *c*, and its connection with *Sacer* is recognised.

Cormac Mac Culleannain likewise, in his *Glossary*, gives the derivation of *Sagart* from the Latin as follows:—*Sacart*, *i.e.* Sacerd, ab eo quod est *sacerdos*. He adds, indeed, one of the fantastic etymologies, of which we find so many in his work; but we may presume that he preferred the one which he has placed first.

In the *Liber Hymnorum*, a MS. probably a thousand years old, I

have found numerous examples of this spelling with a *c*, and not a single instance to the contrary.

Sagart, then, we may be assured, comes from *sacerdos*; and that from *Sacer*, which is perhaps cognate with the Greek *hagios*, and the Sanskrit *Sac venerari*.

As for the Latin *Sagax*, I think there is good reason to suspect that this, as well as the Scandinavian *Saga* is connected with the Gothic *Sagan*; German, *Sagen*; English, *Say*; for as the Latin *presagio* means to foretell, we may presume that the real meaning of *Sagio* was to tell. So, in the old German, *forasako* meant foretelling or prophecy. Between the Latin *Sagax* and *Sacer* it is not likely that any relationship existed. The Hebrew *Sagad*, to which Mr. Windele refers, following the misleading guidance of Vallancey (*Collectanea* Vol. iv., p. 449), has nothing to say to any of these words. It does not mean to adore, but to fall down; and it is only when constructed with the preposition *le*, unto, that it admits of being so translated. To fall down unto idols is equivalent to adoring idols; though falling down is not identical with adoration.

The length to which these criticisms have extended may appear disproportioned to that of the sentence upon which they form a commentary. It must be remembered, however, that a short objection often demands a lengthened reply; and that the clearing away of difficulties or errors is generally more laborious than the statement of them.

I have little doubt but that Mr. Windele's candour will oblige him to abandon Mr. Horgan's reading and interpretation of the Burnfort inscription. Whether he will acquiesce in mine is another question. I fear his attachment to his theory will still lead him to adopt any conclusion rather than the natural one, viz., that the nine letters, S A G I T T A R I, constitute the Latin name *Sagittari*.

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No. II.

BY JOHN WINDELE, ESQ.

[*Read at the Meeting of July 9th.*]

It is with much reluctance that I find myself compelled to offer a few observations on a paper from the Rev. Dr. Graves, relative to the Burnfort inscription, read at the last meeting of your Society. But were I to permit it to pass without notice, my silence might, doubtless, be construed into an admission of error which I am, in this case, but little disposed to make.

Premising that I do not feel myself in any way answerable for the