

CHAPTER I.

Of the Name, CULDEES.—Conjectures as to its Origin.—Of the first preaching of the Gospel in North Britain.—Of the Mission of Palladius.—Jona the principal Seat of the Culdees.—Said to have been the immediate Successors of the Druids.

THE name of CULDEES, or KELDEES, was given to a body of religious, who chiefly resided in Scotland, Ireland, and some of the adjacent isles. The etymon of the name has exercised the ingenuity of the learned.

According to Boece and Buchanan, they were called *Culdei*, q. *Cultores Dei*, or worshippers of God, from Lat. *colo* and *Deus*.¹ Spotswood thinks that they were named from the *cells* in which they lived.²

Lloyd, bishop of St Asaph, after saying, that he had not met with the word, in this form, “in any author before the time of Giraldus Cambrensis,” justly observes; “Then it was a very usual thing to find out Latin derivations for those

¹ Boeth. Hist. lib. vi. c. 5. Buchanan. Hist. lib. iv. c. 46. Hoc est, *Dei cultores*. Lib. vi. 17.

² History, p. 4.

words of which men did not know the original. And thus the *Kyldees*, or *Kylledei*, came to be called *Culdei*, or *Colidei*; that is, the worshippers of God; being such as spent their whole time, or a great part of it, in devotion.”

Others have embraced still more far-fetched etymons. Bishop Nicolson says, that *Culdee* signifies “a black monk,” as being meant to denote the colour of the *cowl*, in the Irish language, *culla*.² Some have supposed that the word has been borrowed from the Greeks; in the same way as the names *bishop*, *presbyter*, *deacon*, and *monk*, have come to us from them: for their monks, confined to cells, were called *Κελλωται*.³

The origin assigned by O'Brien is certainly very plausible. In Irish, he says, it is *Ceile De*, from *ceile*, a servant, and *De*, God.⁴ Goodall adopts this etymon, observing that, “in more ancient MSS. the word is not written *Culdei*, but *Keledei*; and that the more learned in our old language affirm, that it is compounded of *keile*, a servant, and *Dia*, God.”⁵

Dr Smith gives the same etymon.⁶ For he views the word *Keledei* as merely the Latinized Gaelic phrase *Gille De*, which signifies *Famuli Dei*, or, servants of God. This derivation has also the sanction of Dr Shaw, in his History of Moray.⁷

Toland, however, contends that *Keledei* “is from the ori-

¹ V. Historical Account, p. 139.

² V. Pref. to Irish Historical Library.

³ Goodall. Introd. ad Scotchchron. p. 68.

⁴ Irish Dictionary.

⁵ Introd. ad Scotchchron. ubi. sup.

⁶ Life of St Columba, p. 162.

⁷ P. 251, 252.

ginal Irish, or Scottish, word *Ceile-de*, signifying, *separated* or *espoused to God*.”¹

It has also been said, that “Gaelic *cuil*, and *ceal*, signifying a sequestered corner, cave, &c. those who retired to such a place were called *Cuildeach*, in plural, *Cuildich*; which they who spoke or wrote Latin, turned into *Culdeus* and *Culdei*, altering only the termination.”² Nearly the same account is given by another writer. “*Culdee*,” he says, “is a Gaelic word, signifying a monk, or hermit, or any sequestered person. *Cuildeach* is common to this day, and given to persons not fond of society. The word is derived from *Cuil*, a retired corner.”³

“Their name,” according to another learned writer, “was probably derived from the notion of their retreat, and seclusion. In the Welsh, *Cél*, which means shelter, a hiding, would form the name in the plural thus: *Celydi*, *Celydiaud*, *Celydion*, *Celydwys*.”⁴

Although both the etymons last mentioned have peculiar claims to attention, yet I am disposed to prefer the latter, from *cuil*, *ceal*, or *cél*, a retreat; not merely because it requires no change of the initial consonant, but because it is most consonant to the established sense of *Kil*, retained in the names of so many places, which, in an early age, have been consecrated to religion. But of this more fully afterwards.

¹ Nazarenus, Account of an Irish MS. p. 51.

² Statist. Acc. Scot. ii. 461, 462. Par. of Blair-Atholl.

³ Ibid. xiv. 200. Note. Par. of Kilfinichen, Argylls.

⁴ Caledonia, i. 434. Note.

When this name was first imposed, it is impossible to ascertain. Without paying any regard to what our historians have said of the establishment of Christianity, by a prince designed Donald I., we may safely assume, that there must have been a considerable number of Christians in the northern part of our island about the time assigned to his reign, that is, towards the close of the second century. For Tertullian, who flourished in this age, asserts, that the gospel had not only been propagated in Britain, but had reached those parts of the island into which the Roman arms had never penetrated.¹ This perfectly agrees with the defence, made by the Culdees, of their peculiar modes of worship. For they still affirmed, that they had received these from the disciples of John the Apostle.²

Scotland and Ireland have contended for the honour of the origin of the Culdees. Some of our writers pretend to trace them to the beginning of the fourth century. The Irish say, that this order of monks was first instituted in their island, by Columba, A. 546; and afterwards, by the same apostolic presbyter, in Scotland. Till his time, indeed, we have no evidence of the existence of any societies observing a particular institute; though there seems to be no good reason to doubt that the doctrines, by which the religious of the Columban

¹ Hispaniarum omnes termini, et Galliarum diversae nationes, et Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita. Lib. advers. Judaeos, p. 159.

² Ledwich's Antiq. p. 55, 56.

order were distinguished, were held in North Britain long before.

It is said by Prosper of Aquitaine, that “Palladius, being ordained by Pope Celestine, was sent to the Scots believing in Christ, as their first bishop.” The same thing is asserted by Bede, in the very language of Prosper.¹ This testimony has occasioned a great deal of controversy. The generality of our Scottish writers have contended, that his mission was to the country now denominated Scotland: and many things plausible have been advanced on this side of the question, especially by Goodall.² It has, particularly, been urged, that ancient writers were so little acquainted with the northern part of our country, or that lying beyond the Forth, that they viewed it as an island distinct from Britain; that they sometimes called it *Hibernia*, and its inhabitants *Hiberni*; and that the position given to the country is applicable to Scotland only. But there can be no doubt that Bede was well acquainted with both countries; and, though he sometimes calls the inhabitants of Ireland, and at other times those of North Britain, *Scots*, yet, when he gives an account of the mission of Palladius, as he immediately proceeds to speak of the *Scots* and Picts, who took possession of Britain all the way to the wall, it appears that he here uses the term as denominating those who had come from Ireland, as allies of the Picts, and soon after returned to their own country.

¹ Chron. Temp. p. 26. Hist. lib. 1. c. 13.

² Introd. ad Fordun. Scotchron. c. 2—6. Catalogue of Bishops, Pref. iv. v.

For the very same people, whom in his Chronicle he calls *Scotti*, he in his History designs *Hiberni*.¹ Now, it cannot be conceived, that Bede would call those *Hiberni*, whom he knew to be inhabitants of Britain.

It must be admitted, however, that it forms a considerable difficulty, that Marianus Scotus, who wrote about the year 1060, and who was himself an Irishman, should use such language as seems necessarily to imply, that he considered the mission of Palladius as meant for the benefit of the inhabitants of North Britain. For, having expressed himself in the very terms used by Prosper, he adds: "After him was St Patrick, by birth a Briton, consecrated by St Celestine the Pope, and sent to be archbishop of *Ireland*. There, preaching for forty years, with signs and miracles, he converted the whole island of *Ireland* to the faith."²

But while it may be supposed, that Palladius went first to Ireland, there is reason to believe, that he thought himself bound to visit those Christians also who resided in the country, now called Scotland: for it has been asserted, that he died in the northern part of this island.

¹ Bed. Hist. lib. i. c. 14.

² Ad *Scotos* in Christum credentes ordinatus a papa Cœlestino Palladius, primus episcopus missus est. Post ipsum sanctus Patricius fuit, genere Brito, a sancto Cœlestino papa consecratus, et ad archiepiscopatum *Hibernensem* mittitur: ibi per annos quadraginta signis atque mirabilibus prædicans, totam insulam *Hiberniam* convertit ad fidem. Ap. Pistor. Rer. Germanic. Script. Tom. i. p. 606.

A learned writer considers it as "likely that he passed over to Britain, from the north of Ireland, and died in Galloway, held by the Píks after 427."¹ But he seems to go too far, when he says; "Not a church was ever dedicated to Palladius in Scotland, nor is there a trace of him in our history or tradition."

Fordun, confining the mission of Palladius to the Scots of Britain, says, that King Eugenius gave him and his companions a place of residence where he asked it.² In the MS. of Coupar, there is this addition; Apud Fordun, in *lie Mearns*; i. e. "at Fordun, in the Mearns." This perfectly coincides with the modern account. "This parish [Fordun] is remarkable for having been for some time the residence, and probably the burial-place, of St Palladius, who was sent by Pope Celestine into Scotland, some time in the fifth century, to oppose the Pelagian heresy. That Palladius resided, and was probably buried here, appears from several circumstances. There is a house which still remains in the churchyard, called *St Palladius's chapel*, where, it is said, the image of the saint was kept, and to which pilgrimages were performed from the most distant parts of Scotland. There is a well at the corner of the minister's garden, which goes by the name of *Paldy's well*."³

¹ Pinkerton's Enquiry, ii. 262.

² Advenit verò Scotiam magna cleri comitiva regis Eugenii regnationis anno undecimo; cui rex mansionis locum ubi petierat, gratis dedit. Scotichron. lib. iii. c. 8.

³ Statist. Acc. iv. 499.

To this it may be added, that the annual market, held at Fordun, is still universally, in that part of the country, called *Paldy*, or, as vulgarly pronounced, *Paddy Fair*.¹ This is a strong presumption, that a church had been dedicated to him there; as it is a well-known fact, that at the Reformation, when the saints' days were abolished, the fairs, which used to succeed the festivals, and were denominated from them, were retained. Hence their very name, from Lat. *Feriae*, holidays. Camerarius asserts, on the authority of Polydore Vergil, that "the precious reliques of this saint were formerly worshipped at Fordoun; and that the shrines, containing these, adorned with silver, gold, and jewels, had been repaired by William Scheves, archbishop of St Andrews."²

It is said in the Breviary of Aberdeen, that Palladius died

¹This designation is incidentally mentioned in another part of the same account: "Somewhat more than a year ago, a remarkable whirlwind happened at one of the great fairs in this country, called *Paldy fair*, and which stands in this parish, by which some of the tents in the market were unroofed." *Ibid.* p. 500.

²Imo ante 150 annos capsae ipsius auro argentoque et gemmis ditissimae sunt reparatae a Guillelmo Scheues sancti Andreae Archiepiscopo. De Scotorum Pietate, p. 163. Boece also says, that he died "at Fordun, which is the name of a village in the Mearns;" giving the same account of the respect paid to his reliques there. Post multos tandem pios sudores, ac religiosa opera, Christi dogma propalando pro mortalium salute impensa: Forduni (vico in Mernia nomen est) beatissimum huius vite exitum sortitus, fati concessit. Vbi sacre eius reliquie in multo habitae honore a multis illuc religionis causa confluentibus, vel hac nostra aetate venerande ostenduntur. Has Willielmus Schevves sancti Andree olim archiepiscopus, vir undiquaque eruditus, effossas humo, multis piis precationibus, solennique apparatu, in capsulam argenteam honorifice locavit, &c. *Hist. Fol.* 133, a.

at Longforgund in Mernis.¹ Although Longforgan, formerly written *Forgund*, seems to be a place of very considerable antiquity, the description here given cannot apply to it, as it is situated in the extremity of Perthshire, on the borders of Angus. This place may have been substituted, by mistake, for "Fordun in Mernis." According to Sigebert, Palladius was sent to the Scots, A. 432.² It would appear, that, finding his labours unsuccessful in Ireland, he had attempted the conversion of the Picts: for Fordun was in their territory. Bede informs us, that Ninian converted the Southern Picts. These, it has been generally supposed, were in Galloway; as Ninian is said to have been bishop of *Candida Casa*. But, if Mr Pinkerton be right in asserting that, A. 412, the date of the conversion referred to, there were no Picts in Galloway, and that those meant must be such as dwelt to the south of the Grampian mountains;³ Palladius most probably went thither for the purpose of reclaiming them from any errors into which they might have fallen, and especially with the view of bringing them into subjection to the authority of the bishop of Rome.

¹ Annorum plenus apud Longforgund in Mernis in pace requiescit beata. Brev. (Julius) Fol. xxv. b.

² Chronic. Fol. 10.

³ "That Whithern was the see erected by Ninian over the Piks he converted, is a childish and ridiculous error. Ailred tells that it was his proper British see, long before he went to convert the South Piks, who lived, as Bede shews, south of the Grampian hills, or in Fifeshire," &c. Enquiry, i. 74. V. also ii. 265, 266.

It may easily be accounted for, that there should be fewer traces of Palladius in our history, or local memorials of him, than of almost any other *saint* who resided in this country. To a people of so independent a spirit as that which characterized our forefathers, the ministry of any one must have been extremely unacceptable, whose chief object was to subject them to a foreign yoke.