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John Arnott MacCulloch [1868-1950], "The Picts of History and Tradition," The Evangelical Quarterly 7.1 (Jan. 1935): 3-16.

THE PICTS OF HISTORY AND TRADITION

JOHN HILL BURTON said that the Pictish problem was one of those topics which the temper and reason of man seem not to have been made strong enough to encounter, so invariably did both break down when it was discussed. In Scott's *Antiquary* the debate between Oldbuck and Sir Arthur Wardour illustrates this. Happily, we do not now take the matter so seriously as to quarrel about it, and indeed the whole problem may now be considered solved or nearly so.

I

As is well known, Celtic speech is divided into two groups—Goidelic, that of the Gaels (Goidels) of Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man ; and Brythonic, that of the Celts of Gaul, the Bretons, Welsh, and Cornish. These are respectively grouped as Q Celts and P Celts, because the labialized guttural *qu*, later modified to *q* or *c* or *ch* in Goidelic speech, became *p* in Brythonic. Thus Old Irish *ech*, a horse, was *epos* in the speech of Gaul. Our familiar Gaelic *mac* is in Welsh *map*, now *mab*. This linguistic division has a bearing on the Pictish problem.

Here it may be said in passing that the Goidels early broke away from the continental Celts. They reached Ireland: whether they partly populated Britain is a moot point. If they did they may have been the " Beaker folk " of archaeologists, who appeared about the beginning of the Bronze Age. The Brythonic groups arrived in Britain later, and probably in successive stages. But earlier than Goidel or Brython were the race or races who dwelt there, and who were certainly not annihilated by the Celtic incomers.

An early classical name of Britain and Ireland was " the Prettanic Isles " (πρεττανικαὶ νῆσοι), a name learned by Greek travellers either from inhabitants of Britain, or, less likely, from the Gauls. The Latinized form of this might be rendered " Bretannic Isles ". Corresponding to this is the medieval Welsh Ynys Prydein, Britain, from an earlier Priten. The word Prydyn, singular Pryden, occurs also with the meaning of " Britons ", or, as usually rendered, " Picts ".

These Welsh words are etymologically connected with Old Irish Cruithen, plural Cruithnigh, which originally meant

" Britons ", and was used at a later time as the Irish name of the Picts, north of the Forth and Clyde. The two names Prydyn and Cruithnigh show the change of *c* into *p*. Both words represent an earlier Qretanis. Hence the formula Pretani = Prydyn = Cruithnigh, though it must be remembered that the Welsh and Irish forms are of late occurrence compared with Pretani. Now Prydyn and Cruithnigh are held to be connected respectively with Welsh *pryd*, Irish *cruth*, meaning " form " or " figure ", from a root *qrt*, " to cut ", and hence Prydyn and Cruithnigh are thought to be derived from words signifying the " forms " or " figures " painted or tattooed on the bodies of early Britons. The Pretani were " the figured " or " painted folk ", if we assume that this derivation is correct.

Hence, too, on the assumption that Latin Picti, the name given to Picts by the Romans in the late third century, A.D., is really derived from *pingo*, and means " the painted folk ", the Picts are regarded as the same as the Pretani, Prydyn, or Cruithnigh. Hence it has been asserted that the Picts once inhabited all Britain, and, as Pretani, gave their name to it. There were also Cruithnigh in Ireland, probably invaders from Britain : these are assumed to be Picts. We are safer in regarding them simply as British tribes.

Taking the theory that the Pretani are equivalent to Picts, we find that opinions here diverge.

Sir John Rhys and Heinrich Zimmer assert that the Pretani or Picts were pre-Celtic, Neolithic inhabitants of Britain. The Goidelic invaders then conquered and called the island by some such name as Inis Cruithne, " Island of the figured folk ". When the Brythons arrived later, this, with change of *c* into *p*, became Ynys Prydain.[1]

On the other hand, Dr. MacBain[2] held that Pretani or Picts were the earliest Celtic people of Britain, using Celtic speech of the *p* type. They had arrived *c.* 300 B.C., prior to the coming of the Belgic tribes from Gaul. This assumes that they called themselves Pretani, " figured folk ", which is unlikely, if Pretani has that meaning.

Not unlike this is the theory of Henri Hubert that the Picts, Qretini, or Pretini, were early Celtic invaders of our islands,

[1] Rhys, *Celtic Britain*, fourth edition, pp. 206f., 268f.

[2] Dr. MacBain, in Skene's *The Highlanders of Scotland*, second edition, 1902, p. 389f., and *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xi, 267f.

giving their name to these, and speaking a Brythonic dialect. They were followed by various Brythonic groups, and finally by the Belgic tribes.[1]

The connection of Pretani, Prydyn, and Cruthin with *pryd* and *cruth* in the sense of "form" or "figure", seems to be a large assumption, first stated by an early medieval Irishman, Duald MacFirbis, and approved by eminent philologists. The supposed connection with cutting or painting figures on the body is, perhaps, a philological delusion. If the connection is right, however, the knowledge of it did not continue, for the names Prydyn and Cruithnigh were used of Britons or of Picts long after tattooing or painting ceased.

It is also a large assumption to insist that all inhabitants of Britain, *c.* 300 B.C., were Picts, because the word "Picti" of the third century A.D. may mean "the painted folk", and be equivalent to Pretani of the fourth century B.C. Indeed, only at a later time were the words Cruithnigh and Prydyn applied exclusively to tribes north of the Wall of Antoninus, the Picts.

II

We know that these tribes first appear by the name Picts in 297 A.D. But, though it is commonly asserted—another philological delusion, shall we say—we do *not* know that Latin Picti had any connection with *pingo* and meant "the painted folk".

It is thus safer to assume that the early names Prydyn and Cruithnigh were not originally or for many centuries the equivalents of Picti, but merely meant "Britons" in a wider sense. Prydyn only seldom means "Picts" in Old Welsh writings. The Irish Cruithnigh usually taken to refer to Picts in Ireland or Scotland, much more likely meant at first Britons, again in a wide sense. As Prof. Watson puts it: "All Picts were Cruithnigh (Britons), but all Cruthnigh were not Picts." The word was later applied to the tribes north of the Forth and Clyde, and that region was called "Cruthentuath", "land of the Cruithnigh". After the Picts became the dominant people there, the terms "Cruithnigh" and "Picts" naturally became equivalent. Cruthentuath or "Pictland" was Latinized as Pictavia. Formerly it had been Caledonia.[2]

[1] *Les Celtes*, pp. 248, 258.

[2] See Prof. W. J. Watson, *Celtic Place Names*, p. 67, and *passim*.

To return to the Latin name Picti. All our Scottish histories have made popular the meaning "painted folk", as Scottish histories have popularized many other errors, and this is, perhaps, another example of the philological delusion. This meaning is probably due to the encyclopædist, Isidore of Seville, in the seventh century. Besides explaining the name of the Scots (Scotti) from their habit of painting their bodies or tattooing them by means of iron points and ink, he says that the Picts are so called because of their habit of making minute punctures in the body, a pigment made from some native herb being used, and a pattern formed. This is followed by the *Pictish Chronicle*. But if Isidore is recording a current belief it is not unlikely that it was derived from a popular etymology of Picti. Or he may be paraphrasing what Herodian (third century) says of the painting or tattooing of the northern Britons, and assuming that Picti means "the painted folk". It is, in fact, a folk etymology, such as medieval writers loved. Actually we may see in Picti or Pecti (the latter apparently the correct form) merely the Roman rendering of a native name. Some, however, still haunted by painting and tattooing, try to connect this supposed native name with the medieval Irish *cicht*, carver or engraver. The stem of the native name, *pict-* or *pect-*, resembles the Norse Pettr, O.E. Peohta, Scots Pecht—all names for the Picts. It occurs also in the Gaulish names Pictones, or Pectones, the name of whose town was Pictavi, and survives in Poictiers; and the name Pictones is sometimes applied to the Picts of Scotland in the Irish and Scottish Chronicles.

It is worth noting here that King Alfred in his translation of Bede does not render "Picti" by any Saxon word meaning "painted", but by the Saxon name of this people, Peahtas. Other Saxon forms were Peohtas, Pihtas.

III

When Caesar invaded Britain its people must have been of mingled stocks, pre-Celtic and Celtic, with Celts as the dominant people, whether they were Goidels or Brythons, or perhaps both. It is now agreed, however, that they were mainly of the *p* group, therefore Brythonic. This was true of the tribes in what is now Scotland.

Tacitus calls the northern tribes Britanni, their land Caledonia. In his opinion their large limbs, blue eyes, and fair

or rufous hair, pointed to a Germanic origin. Germans and Celts, according to classical observers, were outwardly alike. The people of Caledonia did not differ from southern Britons and Gauls. Tacitus gives no hint that their language was not alike, and he was interested in such matters. Among the northern tribes enumerated by Ptolemy, the Caledonii are outstanding. In 208 A.D., Dio Cassius groups all the northern tribes as Caledonii and Mæatæ. In 297 A.D. the Picts are first mentioned by name. Eumenius speaks of the Romanized Britons as being accustomed to such enemies as the Picts and the Irish (Hiberni). In 310 A.D. Eumenius speaks further of "the forests of the Caledonians, and other Picts", pointing to the identity or relationship of Picts and Caledonians, though the passage may be read, "Caledonians, Picts, and others". In 360 A.D. and later years the tribes north of the wall of Antoninus are summed up as Picts. These Picts, with Saxons, and roving bands of Scots from Ireland ("Irish assassins", Gildas calls them), troubled Roman Britain. In 368 A.D. Ammianus says that the Picts consist of two groups—"Dicalydones et Verturiones". "Dicalydones" perhaps means the men of the two Caledonias, Caledonia divided in two by the Grampians. "Verturiones" is the Latin form of a Celtic word which appears later as "the men of Fortrenn"—the Pictish district of Strathearn and Menteith.

The Picts have thus appeared on the historic scene. Had they arrived in Scotland shortly before Eumenius spoke of them? Or were they a tribe or group of tribes already there, possessing a name which was rendered Pecti or Picti in Latin? This is more likely, and is supported by the fact that the Mæatæ, not named by Ptolemy, appear as such first in 208 A.D. as a distinct Celtic group. Of course it is possible, as Prof. Watson argues, that the Picts had settled first in the Orkneys and Shetlands, thence penetrating the mainland, and ultimately taking the place of the Caledonians and assuming the leading place among the tribes north of the wall. But as the name "Picts" appears soon after the time when the Caledonii were powerful, and as there is no evidence of a Pictish conquest of Caledonians, we assume that Caledonians and Picts were the same or closely related. As in 208 A.D. there were two large groups of northern tribes—Caledonii and Mæatæ—so in 365 A.D. there were two groups of Picts—Verturiones and Dicalydones. Caledonia was now known as Pictland, Pictavia. The Celtic names, Welsh Prydein, Irish

Cruithnigh, hitherto belonging to all British tribes, were now used exclusively for these peoples north of the wall. So *now* Cruithnigh, Prydein, and Picti did become synonymous. North of the wall of Antoninus the Pictish territory extended to the Orkneys, as the Norse name "Pettalandfjordr" shows. It included the Western Isles, at least partially. Thus the Picts had become the dominant people north of the wall, and dominant they remained for many centuries.

In early medieval tradition "a long pedigree" was sought for most peoples. Welsh writers and the Pictish Chronicle traced the Picts to Scythia. Irish writers made them descendants of Hercules or brought them from Thrace. Bede, following perhaps some traditional account, says that they came from Scythia, "as is reported". Gildas, *c.* 570 A.D., who loathed them, says they were a "transmarine people" from the north-north-east, and gives no flattering picture of them. Nennius, *c.* 800, brings them from some unnamed place to the Orcades, thence they occupied the north of Britain. While the statements of Gildas and Nennius are less extravagant than others, it is doubtful whether they are to be taken as seriously as some students are inclined to do. However, from other sources it can be shown that the island Picts in the Orkneys were for long years piratical and savage. In St. Columba's time, Brude, King of the Picts, whose seat was at Inverness, was supreme over the Picts in the Orkneys, as well as those on the mainland.

IV

Theories regarding the racial affinities of the Picts are four in number:

1. They were Teutons or Goths—the theory of Stillingfleet and Ussher in the seventeenth century, of Pinkerton in the eighteenth century, vociferously upheld by Jonathan Oldbuck, and revived recently by W. C. Mackenzie, who claims that the Picts were invaders from Scandinavia.

2. The theory of Rhys and Zimmer that the Picts were the pre-Celtic, Neolithic inhabitants of Britain, whom it is strange to find coming into power in the third century A.D.!

3. The theory of Dr. Skene that the Picts were Goidels, Gaelic-speaking Celts, their representatives the modern Highlanders.

4. Most Celtic scholars nowadays—Loth, Meyer, D'Arbois, Stokes, Windisch, Hubert, MacBain, Watson—favour the view that the Picts were representative of the *p* group of Celts, more or less akin to the Brythons and Gauls in speech, yet with dialectic differences.

This fourth theory answers most fully to all the facts, to the deductions which may fairly be drawn from the classical notices just cited and to the evidence of philology and the topography of Pictland, no less than of archaeology.

Now we come to the Pictish customs which have been alleged by upholders of the theory that the Picts were non-Celtic.

1. The Pictish rule of the royal succession was through the female line. Bede[1] gives a legendary origin for this custom. The Picts had sought a settlement in Ireland, but the Scots there advised them to go to Britain, and, following this advice, they went and dwelt in the north of Britain. But they had no wives and asked them of the Scots, who agreed to supply them provided that when any difficulty should arise, they should choose a king from the female royal race rather than from the male, " which custom, as is well known, has been observed among the Picts to this day ". Apart from the legend the practice of counting from the female line in the royal house did exist among the Picts. One of their kings in the seventh century was son of a Saxon refugee, Eanfred, and a Pictish princess.

This custom has been supposed to be bound up with the matriarchate and is linked to the vague statements made by classical writers about community of women in Britain. Caesar refers thus to the " Interior tribes " : "The women are common wives of groups of ten or twelve men, formed generally of brothers, fathers and sons." Dio Cassius says that community of women prevailed among the Caledonii and Mæatæ. Tacitus, who probably knew better than Caesar and Dio, does not mention this, and does speak of the wives and children of individuals.[2] Caesar and Dio are probably talking vaguely or giving a mistaken interpretation of facts, e.g. of exogamy, where all the females of one clan are *theoretically* wives of all the males of another clan. Be that as it may, the Pictish succession, of a king's brother, of his sister's son, or even his elder daughter's son, may or may not

[1] *Hist. eccl.*, i, 1, 7.

[2] Caesar, *de Bello Gall.*, v, 12, 14; Dio Cassius, lxxv, 5, lxxvi, 12; Tacitus, *Agricola*, 11f., 27, 31.

have been based on the matriarchate, but it does not prove that the Picts were non-Celtic. Traces of the custom are found among Aryans elsewhere. The Celts themselves may have passed through a matriarchal stage. The Irish Goidels had the custom of reckoning descent through the mother, for traces of this are found in the texts : gods and heroes are called sons of their mother, rather than of their fathers—Cuchulainn, son of Dechtere, Lug, son of Ethne. We may also compare the Welsh *Mabinogion*, in which we find the same, as with Gwydion, son of Don. Not improbably, the early British tribes had the same custom, for the queen had with them great influence, if Boadicea may be taken as an example. Succession through the female line may have been once general, then confined to the royal house, or surviving in myths of deities and heroes.[1]

The usual explanation of the Pictish custom, however, is that it was adopted from the vanquished people with whom they had intermingled. Whether that be so or not, it had practical results. The kingship did not pass to a minor, but to a grown-up member of the royal house. In later centuries Scotland was again and again to know the evil that came to the land when the king was a child. Further, apart from the succession through the female line, if Bede is correct, the king was chosen or elected out of several claimants in that line.

2. Tattooing, as a Pictish practice, is alleged to be non-Aryan. Caesar says that the inhabitants of Britain dyed themselves with woad. Herodian reports that the northern tribes were tattooed.[2] Claudian speaks of the colours fading on the dying Pict. Coins of Gaulish tribes show marks on the faces depicted thereon which suggest tattooing.[3] The evidence of etymology has also suggested that the Picts gained their name from their being painted or tattooed, a supposition already made by an Irish bard, Duald MacFirbis, regarding the Cruithnigh. He says that they were so-called because they painted the forms of beasts, birds, and fishes on their bodies.[4] Isidore of Seville and the Pictish Chronicle, of course, connect "Picti" with tattooing.[5] If Pretani and Cruthnigh really come from words

[1] See my *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, p. 222f.

[2] Caesar, v, 10; Herodian, iii, 14, 8.

[3] *Zeitschrift für Celt. Philologie*, iii, 331.

[4] Duald MacFirbis, in the Irish *Nennius*, p. vii.

[5] Isidore, *Origines*, ix, 2, 103, Scotti is here used for Picti; W. F. Skene, *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, p. 45.

denoting "forms" painted or tattooed on the body, then this just means that all British tribes, not only Picts, had this custom. This is also suggested by Caesar's words.

3. The notices of the religion of the Picts are brief and vague, but such as they are they do not differ from what we know of Celtic religion in general.[1]

4. Of the language of the Picts it is unnecessary to say much. Bede speaks of it as one of the languages of Britain, the others being those of the Britons, Scots, Angles, and Latins.[2] It was, therefore, distinct from that of the Scots—Gaelic, and from that of the Britons. Adamnan says that St. Columba required an interpreter when speaking to the Picts. Yet their language may have been Celtic. A Gaelic-speaking man would not easily be understood by a Welshman. On the other hand, Ninian, a Briton, does not seem to have required an interpreter when preaching to the Picts. Their tongue was, if a general view be taken of place and personal names, a form of Brythonic.[3] "The toponymy of the Island of Britain", says Hubert, "appears to be homogeneous and exempt from Goidelism before the establishment of the Scots"[4] from Ireland. Prof. Stokes, after collecting and examining all the known Pictish words in old records, says: "The foregoing list contains much that is still obscure; but on the whole it shows that Pictish, so far as regards its vocabulary, is an Indo-European and especially Celtic Speech. Its phonetics, so far as we have been able to ascertain them, resemble those of Welsh rather than Irish."[5]

This view, that Pictish speech belonged to the *p* group of Celtic, is taken by all competent Celtic scholars to-day.

Thus the Picts were Celtic, speaking a form of Celtic speech akin to Brythonic. They inhabited the north and east of Scotland, and parts of the west.

V

It must be obvious that, as in every other part of Britain, so in the north a large substratum of pre-Celtic peoples must have survived, and, as time went on, must have mingled with the

[1] See my article "Picts", section 6, in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*.

[2] Bede, i, 1, 7.

[3] For details see Prof. Watson's *Place Names*, and W. Stokes, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, iii, 392.

[4] H. Hubert, *Les Celtes*, p. 253.

[5] "Linguistic Value of the Irish Annals," *Transactions of the Philological Society*, iii, 392.

Celtic incomers. Thus those tribes north of the wall of Antoninus, whether regarded singly, or summed up, first, as Caledonians, then as Picts, must have contained different racial elements. But the typical Caledonian or Pict was tall, fair- or red-haired, like the British tribes south of the wall. The speech of the conquerors must have prevailed : evidence shows that this speech was Celtic, of the Brythonic type.

The group of tribes known as Picts became a great and powerful people. As far as is known, they were not mere savages, as is often asserted, though some may have been on a lower level than others. Archæological and other evidence proves this. The brochs, whether built by Picts or not, are found almost entirely in the Pictish region. They show much architectural skill. Another important evidence of comparative civilization is the elaborate symbolism of the sculptured stones which are known to be Pictish, the symbolism showing no trace of Irish Celtic art.

The civilization of the Picts increased with their conversion to Christianity. The Pictish church was by no means the least notable of the forms which Christianity has taken in Scotland ; certainly it had less self-complacency than some of the more modern forms current there.

From the seventh century onwards the Picts had to contend with the Scots, who had come from Ireland, and with the Saxons. Eventually, and partly as a result of the Norse conquests, the Pictish rule passed to the aggressive Scots in the ninth century. The Picts were no longer called by that name. The Gaelic speech of the Scots prevailed over the Pictish speech as it prevailed over the kindred speech of the Britons of Strathclyde, and largely, as it appears, through the influence of the Scoto-Irish church.[1] In spite of the Scottish conquest and the change of speech, the Picts were not extirpated, as the tenth century Pictish Chronicle alleges. There must, therefore, be a large Pictish element still in the Scottish population north of the Forth.

VI

There is another Pictish problem to be considered—that of the Picts of folk-tradition, a folk akin to trolls or dwarfs. In medieval writings the name " Picts " was still used for the people who had encountered the Romans, harassed the Romano-British,

[1] Cf. Boece, ii, 416, who says that the names were changed " Of everie toun and land to put the Pechtes haill out of memorie ".

and struggled against the Scots. The Scottish literary forms of the name were Pegchtis, Pights, Pechtes, corresponding to Anglo-Saxon and Old English Peohtas, Pehtas, and Pyhtes. In colloquial Scots the forms were Peht, Pecht, and Pegh. Now from Northumberland to the north of Scotland these names in folk-tradition became those of a mysterious race, and some of the traditions about this race were borrowed from those told by Norsemen about their *duergar*, or dwarfs. This folk-tradition associated the Pechts with megalithic remains and large buildings, and with legends of the origin of these. If these colloquial names were really those of the Picts of history, that people had undergone a strange transformation in tradition.

They had become a mysterious folk, half-goblin, half-human, " unco wee bodies, but terrible strong ", " short, wee men, wi' red hair and long arms, and feet sae braid that when it rained they could turn them up ower their heids ". The Roman wall, Glasgow Cathedral, the Round Towers of Brechin and Abernethy, were their work, no less than " a' the auld castles in the kintry ". Such buildings of unknown or forgotten origin, or mysterious because of their appearance, demanded some explanation. What more likely than that the Picts built them ?

Their method of building was to stand in a row between the quarry and the site, and to pass the stones from one to another. They also brewed the mysterious heather-ale, its secret carefully concealed—a tradition gravely recorded by Hector Boece, " They never showed the craft of the making of this drink but to their own blood." When at last only two Picts were left, a father and a son, the Norse or the Scottish king (the legends vary) threatened torture if they would not reveal the secret. The father agreed to reveal it if his son were first slain. This was done. Now he said that his son might have weakened under torture, but he would never tell the secret. It died with him, much to the grief of his foes, who could not enjoy this cheap and delectable liquor. In one version of the legend, the old man was kept a prisoner, and on his death-bed he begged to feel the wrist of one of several youths who were amusing themselves at his expense. In sport they held out an iron bar to the blind old man. He snapped it in two, saying, " It's a gey bit gristle, but naething to the shackle-banes o' my days ". This incident is told of the Drakos in modern Greece. The heather-ale story, so romantically told by Stevenson, is similar to one told of the last of the Niflungs.

As to the Pechs and their building, the same structures are also ascribed in Scotland to the devil, witches, fairies, the Féinne, King Arthur, and Christian Saints. So the prehistoric remains of Greece were attributed to the Cyclops, just as megalithic and other structures are very widely connected with all kinds of supernatural beings.

Strangely enough the Pechts who, if all tales be true, were in conflict with Arthur, were said to be with him within Arthur's Seat.

VII

Thus floating traditions of all kinds were attached in Scotland to the Picts.

The problem is—Are the Pechs or Pechts a reminiscence of the historic Picts, and, if so, why were these legends told of them in regions where their descendants were still living? If so, obviously their true historic character must have become obliterated as far as the folk were concerned. Or were the Picts a dwarfish race, as some hold? There is no archæological evidence that a dwarf race occupied Scotland, certainly not within the Pictish period. I do not myself believe and I do not think there is a scrap of evidence to make us believe that the Picts were a small people, or that they were identical with the Féinne or Fians, the heroes of Goidelic legend, who are, moreover, invariably represented, not as dwarfs, but as of gigantic stature, or that, on philological grounds these Fians were dwarfish Finns. Medieval writers spoke contemptuously of the Picts, but never twitted them with being abnormally small. As the Picts were akin to the Caledonii, they must have been tall or of normal stature. No classical observer hints otherwise. And Pictish remains in Orkney include skeletons which are not those of dwarfs.

To explain the origin of this dwarfish legend and its existence among descendants of Picts, two theories are possible.

1. The name "Picts", no longer applied to an existing people, lingered in folk-memory as that of an older race, more or less mysterious. Floating legends, some of them learned from Norsemen regarding their dwarfs, attached themselves to these legendary Picts, who were now thought to have built such structures as could not be accounted for. "Eirde-houses" or "Picts-houses", found all over Pictland, belong to the early

Iron Age, but were used in post-Roman times. The Picts may have actually constructed them, and used them in connection with surface dwellings, remains of which exist beside some of them. Their underground position demanded a restricted height, and this may have aided in forming the legend of dwarfish Picts. Some antiquaries suppose that these Eirde-houses, as well as bee-hive dwellings (some of them used in the nineteenth century by people of normal height), and so-called " mound-dwellings " (really places of sepulture), were made by men " of great personal strength " but " of remarkably small stature ", as one antiquary puts it, a combination recalling the " unco wee bodies but terrible strong " of folk-tradition ! Such strong people might as easily have made roomier structures, since even for dwarfs they could never have been comfortable. But being so constricted, what more likely, in the minds of the folk and of imaginative antiquaries, than that Pictish pygmies made them ? Tradition thus finds support in archæology ! In the same way the name Chiquitos (" very small ") was given to Bolivians by the Spaniards when they saw the low doorways of their huts ; and the small rooms and entrances of Arizona cliff-dwellers gave rise to dwarf traditions there. Mounds with burial-chambers are wrongly regarded as dwellings of dwarfish Picts, i.e. of a historic race who were dwarfs. Stories of their supernatural inhabitants, the sudden appearance of these through a small or concealed opening, and the like, are told of elfin beings dwelling in mounds in regions far from Pictland and where no Pict ever existed. They have nothing to tell us of an actual race of men. Popular tradition can hardly be relied on for evidence of early races. Even in Scotland there are traditions not only of dwarfs, but of giants. To what race did these giants belong ? The truth is that pygmy and giant legends are world-wide. " Tradition," said Sir W. Scott, " is as frequently an inventor of fiction as a preserver of truth."

The earliest documentary reference to the Picts as a dwarf race occurs in 1443, in a book on the Orkneys by Thomas de Tulloch. He says that, in the ninth century, two peoples, Peti and Papae, inhabited the Orkneys. The Peti were pygmies, who built at morning and evening, but lost their strength at mid-day and hid in subterranean dwellings. The Papae were presumably Christian monks. If the Peti are Picts (Norse, Pettr), the tradition existed at least in the fifteenth century. Tulloch's statement

has been taken as fact, though it belongs to obvious folk-lore, and was recorded by one living six centuries after the time of which he wrote. Not impossibly the legend arose from observation of the restricted underground structures with which recent digging has made us familiar. They gave rise to the idea that a pygmy people alone could have made and dwelt in them.

VIII

A second theory which might explain this transformation of actual Picts into mythic dwarfs, and which I offer tentatively, is this. Such words as, or words resembling, Picht, Pecht or Pegh, may once have been native names of a mythic dwarf or elfin folk. This is suggested by the fact that these names are so generally used in folk-tradition, possibly without any reference to the Picts, for a mysterious dark, pygmy people, living underground, with uncanny powers, and virtually identical with elves and dwarfs. In Aberdeenshire the words betoken a diminutive, deformed person, and there also the name " Pecht " was used as a term of contempt. Elsewhere in Scotland, the word signifies simply a dwarf. There is one piece of direct evidence found in the *Catholicon Anglicum*, an English-Latin word-book of 1483, probably compiled in Yorkshire. Here there is this definition : " A Peght or Pigmei, *pigmeus*." There is no suggestion that the word had any connection with O.E. " peohta " or " Pict ", and its comparatively early appearance in the sense of pygmy is significant.

These names of dwarfs, resembling that of the historic Picts or Pehts, would inevitably tend to be confused with the latter. And when the folk had forgotten that their ancestral Picts were an actual people, they would become more and more confused with these traditional dwarfs or elfins called Peghs.

Whether either or both of these theories account for the transformation of an actual people of the past into a legendary people in folk-memory and tradition or not, the transformation itself is interesting, especially to those who may have Pictish blood in their veins.

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