

CHAPTER IX

EARLY CHURCH TERMS

WHEN the three Celtic tribes, the Tectosages, Trocmi, and Tolistobogii, settled in Asia Minor about B.C. 280, in the district called after them Galatia, 'the land of the Gauls,' among their first arrangements was to establish a central council of three hundred to judge cases of bloodshed; other offences were left to the chiefs of districts or tetrarchs and local judges. This great council met at a place called Dru-nemeton, 'the chief Nemeton' or 'chief sacred place.' In Gaul, by a similar arrangement, according to Caesar, the Druids met at a fixed time of the year in the land of the Carnutes, which was reckoned the centre of all Gaul, and held a session in a consecrated place. Hither came all who had disputes, and these were decided by the judgment of the Druids. The term *nemeton*, 'a sacred place,' was common in Gaul; probably every tribe had one or more such places of judgment and of worship. They were the local habitations of gods; an inscription records that a certain Segomāros constructed a *nemeton* for the goddess Belisama, and when Gaul came under Roman influence we find Augustonemeton, the sacred place or shrine of the deified Augustus. Ver-nemeton, which occurs thrice in Gaul is explained as *fanum ingens*, 'great shrine'; one of the places so called was in Christian times the basilica or church of St. Vincentius. There was a Vernemeton in Britain, a town of the Coritavi, situated near Willoughby on the Wold in Nottinghamshire. The *nemeta* were usually in groves: in an eighth century list of superstitions and pagan rites there is a heading 'de sacris silvarum quae nimidas vocant,' 'concerning shrines in groves which they call nimidae.' In Brittany there was 'silva quae vocatur Nemet,' 'the wood which is called (the wood of) Nemet.' The early Church found it necessary to enact

special penalties for making offerings to wells and groves. Among the ancient Celts, then, the *Nemeta* were holy places, often in groves, used as meeting-places for purposes of judgment; later they remained the objects of superstitious reverence, and became sometimes the site of Christian churches.

Nemeton is the neuter of *nemetos*, sacred, noble, found in the Gaulish personal name *Nemetos* and in composition with other terms. In O.Irish *nemed* means (1) sacred, noble; (2) sacred place. In the former sense it appears in the expression *in brátha nemed*, 'the dooms of the nobles,' in their capacity of judges. It appears in British personal names, as *Nimet*, *Nemet*; *Guonemet*, 'sub-noble'; *Gornivet*, 'very noble.' *Nemed*, according to Irish tradition, was the leader of a colony to Ireland after the death of *Partholon* and his folk, and the ultimate ancestor of the British people. As a place-name *nemed* seems to be very rare in Ireland; the only instance known to me is distinctly pre-Christian in origin. This is *Nemed* on *Sliabh Fuait*, now the *Fews Mountains*, with regard to which there is an instructive tradition. *Fuat*, son of *Bile*, the story tells, in coming to Ireland fell in with an island called *Inis Magdena*, whose soil possessed the property that no one standing thereon could utter a falsehood. *Fuat* took with him a sod of this island, and on it dooms were pronounced: if the judgment was false, the sod turned soil upward. This sod, which was called *fót na fírinne*, 'the sod of truth,' was placed on *Sliabh Fuait*. The spot was brought into relation with Christianity by the further tale as to how *Patrick's nag* (*gerrán*) lay there and spilled some of the corn which he was carrying: the Christian name for it was *fólán tíre tairngiri*, 'the sod of the Land of Promise.'¹ Here, then, we have an ancient sacred place of judgment, which at a later time was in a manner christianized. In Irish literature *nemed* is not uncommon in the sense of 'holy place, sanctuary, church.' Thus *Patrick's sen nemed*, 'ancient sanctuary,' was at *Dunpatrick*; a chief is praised because he did not molest church

¹ BB 404 a 31; LL 204 a 16; *Fuat* is otherwise 'son of *Breogan*.'

or sanctuary (*ní ra-chráid chill ná nemed*).¹ There is also *fidnemed*, 'a wood sanctuary,' applied sometimes to a pagan shrine, such as that in the Isle of Lemnos.² Violation of a *blái-nemed* or sanctuary was punishable by a fine under the Law of Adamnan.

In Scotland the *nemeton* has left its mark very distinctly on our place-names, and its history appears to be the same as in Gaul and in Ireland—an institution originally pagan, taken over by the Church. The Ravenna Geographer mentions *Medio-nemeton*, 'mid shrine,' which may have been on the line of the Wall between Forth and Clyde,³ but is not represented among our modern names. Fiacc's hymn to Patrick, composed about 800, begins with the statement, 'Patrick was born at Nemthur,' and a gloss adds that this is the name of a city in North Britain (*i m.Bretnaib tuaiscirt*), namely 'Ail Cluade,' that is, Dumbarton; another spelling is *Nemptor*. This O.Irish form is considered to stand for an earlier *Nemetodūron*, 'stronghold of the Nemet.' Now whether *Nemthor* was really an old name for Dumbarton or not, there was in the neighbourhood, or at least not far away, a place or district called *Neved*. *Maldoven* (*i.e.* *Maoldomhnaich*), earl of Lennox, granted to his brother *Amelec* the lands of *Neved*, *Glanfrone* (*Glenfruin*), and other places, and the grant was confirmed by King Alexander in 1225.⁴ From another record it appears that the land of *Nemhedh* lay partly on the eastern side of *Loch Long*, partly on the eastern side of the *Gareloch*. The name survives in *Rosneath*, in Gaelic *Ros-neimhidh*, 'promontory of the Nemet,' on the western side of the *Gareloch* opposite *Row* (*i.e.* *an Rubha*, 'the point'), which latter was doubtless part of the lands of *Neved* just mentioned. It does not appear how far these lands extended along the east side of the loch in the thirteenth century, but the old parish of *Rosneath* is considered by the editor of the *Origines Parochiales* to

¹ *Rev. Celt.*, xiii. p. 84. A number of illustrative passages are collected in *Petrie's Round Towers*.

² *Petrie's Round Towers*, p. 62.

³ See Dr. George Macdonald's *Roman Wall in Scotland*, p. 153.

⁴ *Reg. of Lennox; Orig. Paroch.*, i. pp. 29, 31.

have extended on that side as far as the neighbourhood of Cardross, that is within less than five miles from Dumbarton.¹ It is thus possible that Nemthor, if it was not Dumbarton, was somewhere within the old parish of Rosneath, and on the Dumbarton side of the water. In any case it is certain that a Nemeton existed in this part of the territory of the Damnonians.

The next instance is Navitie and Navitie Hill near the south-east end of Loch Leven in Fife, spelled Neuechi, Nevathy (RPSA); Nevody, 1477 (RMS). At Navitie Hill is Dunmore 'great fort,' and adjacent to Navitie is Kirkland. The land of Neuechi belonged to the Prior and Convent of St. Andrews. This name is the same as Navity near Cromarty, which will come up later.

In Forfarshire there is the old parish of Nevay, of old called 'Nevyth in Angus' (RPSA). The old church of Nevay is a little more than a mile east of Meigle; besides Kirkton of Nevay there are East and West Nevay and Nevay Park, together extending over a mile in length. Another old parish in Forfarshire is Navar, now Lethnot and Navar, Neuethbarr, 1232 (Reg. Brech.); Nethvar (RMS, App. 2); 'the lordship of Neware,' 1472 (RMS). The first part is doubtless *nemed*; the second part is probably Barr, the short form of the name of St. Findbarr of Cork; compare Newyn Crist in Glen Livet, c. 1224 (RM). About a mile from the old church of Navar are the great strongholds called the Caterthuns.

'Nevot in the barony of Alveth (Alva),' 1536, 1573 (RMS) appears to be now 'the Nebit,' a hill north-east of Alva in Clackmannan, but there is not sufficient evidence to claim it as a Nemeton.

Duneaves in Fortingal parish, Perthshire, is Tuneve, 1598 (RMS), Tynnaif, 1598, *ib.*; Tennaffis, 1602, *ib.*; Tennaffis, 1640 (Ret.); the present Gaelic is *Tìgh-neimh*' (for *-neimh-idh*); the plural form is due to there being two farms, Duneaves proper and *Tìgh-neimh*' *Ghearr*, 'short (*i.e.* little) Duneaves,' anglicized Tynayere. The name means 'house

¹ *Orig. Paroch.*, i., Rosneath Parish and Map.

of the *nemed* ; the farmhouse is opposite the church of Fortingal on a rather remarkable bend of the Lyon, which would form a most suitable place of assembly. A field on the farm is called *Dail mo-Choid*, 'St. Coeddi's dale.' The yew tree at Fortingal church is well known ; it was reported by Pennant that its ruins measured fifty-six feet in circumference in 1772. This yew may well have been a sacred tree connected with the Nemeton ; another point worthy of mention is that a spot on the farm of Kyltirie, on Loch Tay side, a few miles away, is reputed to be the central point of Scotland.¹

At Craiggrossie in Dunning parish, Perthshire, is Tarnavie, described in the seventeenth century as 'an artificial knoll, evidently raised and gathered together by men's hands, resembling a ship : whether this has been a work of the Picts or Romans is not well known ; however, 'tis rather thought to have been a work of the Romans, it having to this day a Roman name *Terrae-navis* answering exactly to its form : 'tis commonly called here . . . *Ternavie*.'² In 1665 (RMS) it is Tarnavie. The first part is probably *tarr*, a paunch, belly, with reference, as often in place-names, to a bulging spur of an eminence ; the second part is *neimhidh* doubtless, and the site of the *nemed* was probably on Craiggrossie.

The Newe in Strathdon parish, Aberdeenshire, is *le Newe*, 1508, 1513 (RMS), spelled also Nyew ; Milne gives the vernacular Scots pronunciation as Nyeow (*y* for *j*, strongly palatal). Gilchrist, earl of Mar, granted to the priory of Monymusk the churches of Loychel, Ruthauen,³ and Invernochin (Invernochty or Strathdon). Pope Innocent (1198-1216) agreed to take under his protection all the possessions of Monymusk, including Earl Gilchrist's grant, the churches of St. Andrew of Afford (Alford), St. Marnoc of Loychel, and St. Mary of Nemoth. This does not prove that Nemoth was another name for Invernochty, but as the Newe

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Balmadity, Barmuckety, etc., formed from *madadh*, dog, *muc*, swine. Navity was church land and had a chapel. All Cromarty people are familiar with the old belief that the final judgment is destined to take place on the moor of Navity, and Hugh Miller records a very striking instance of its practical effectiveness.¹ These places in Rösskeen and Cromarty may well have been in use among the Decantæ.

In the east of Sutherland there is Navidale, G. *Neimhe'dail*, in 1563 Nevindell. Sir Robert Gordon states that there was a sanctuary here, i.e. a place that had the right of sanctuary or girth. The formation is Norse, the second part being N. *dair*, a dale; the Norsemen found the *nemed* there as an important place, and named the dale after it.² Off the north coast of Sutherland, east of the Kyle of Tongue, is an islet called on the map 'Neave or Coomb Island.' It has a dedication to St. Columba, and was given me in Gaelic as *Eilean na Neimhe* (? for *E. an Neimhidh*). This may be another instance, and if so it is the farthest north and the only one on an island.

Finhaven was the name of an ancient parish in Forfarshire, now Oathlaw. The hill of Finhaven, with a fort, south-east of the church, appears to be the 'law.' Early forms from RMS are Futhynevynt, 1370; Fothnevyn, Fothnevin, 1374; Futhenevin, 1384. For the first part we may compare Fouthas 1439, Futhes 1440 (RMS), now Fiddes in Kincardineshire, representing most probably *Fiodhais*, 'wood-stance'; Finhaven on this analogy will be for *fid-nemed*, 'wood sanctuary.' As for the final *n*, compare Nevyn, Neuin above; it is very common in charter forms, and can in many instances, as here, be explained only as a trick of spelling; here it has persisted in the anglicized form.

Andóit, now *annáid*, has been already explained as a patron saint's church, or 'a church that contains the relics of the founder. This is the meaning in Ireland, and it is all we have to go upon. How far it held with regard to Scotland is hard to say: our Annats are numerous, but as a rule

¹ *Scenes and Legends*, chap. xiv.

² In *Neimhe'dail*, unaspirated *d* is to be explained on the ground that the first part of the compound ended in *d*, i.e. the word was *Nemed-dal*.