

**CELTICISM  
A MYTH**

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Celticism a myth by James Cruikshank Roger

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**JAMES CRUIKSHANK ROGER**

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# CELTICISM A MYTH.

BY

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He that has a mind to believe, has half ascended already : and he that, by often arguing against his own sense, imposes falsehood on others, is not far from believing himself."—*Locke*

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## CELTICISM A MYTH.

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The title "Celticism a Myth," is intended to express my conviction that the assumption of Celtic civilisation and Celtic art is utterly without foundation. The doctrine that a high state of culture existed among the aboriginal inhabitants of these islands has been made to pass current with the multitude through the ingenuity of writers committed to a particular hypothesis, whose arbitrary conclusions, in contempt of the rules of evidence, have been implicitly accepted as immutable truth. I can only suppose that the reason why Celtic expositors have so long enjoyed immunity for their favourite idol is, that not being a subject of vital importance,<sup>1</sup> the interest

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<sup>1</sup> Some years ago, meeting with a well-known learned Professor—an enthusiast in Celtic literature—at the house of George MacDonald, I discussed with him the ethnological question of the Picts, who, he contended, were a Celtic race. I afterwards submitted for his opinion the print of a paper on this subject, contributed to *Notes and Queries*. His deliverance, as it appeared to me, was neither very profound nor particularly relevant, and concluded with the remark that even if the Picts were a Gothic people, it would not interfere with his eternal salvation. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to add that I did not perceive the connection between the eternal salvation of the learned Professor and the Gothic origin of the Picts.

in it is limited to very few persons, and that in this utilitarian age the more capable, who apply themselves to questions of greater practical interest, will not be induced to give the matter their serious consideration. Besides, a degree of obloquy is attached to the placing of one's self in antagonism to those who are conventionally regarded as the oracles of archæological faith, and whose dictum it is an offence to question. Not being imbued, however, with a superstitious reverence for mere names, I venture, in the interests of truth, to direct attention to this subject, in the hope that the matter may be taken up by some one with more time and better appliances at his disposal than I can command.

It is satisfactory to know that the cobwebs of Celticism which surrounded the Scottish Brochs, and the so-called Celtic structure of Maeshowe, in Orkney—two strongholds of the Celtic theorists, have at last been completely brushed away by the masterly hand of the author of *Rude Stone Monuments*,<sup>2</sup> who has proved to demonstration, so far as the thing is capable of proof, that these were the work of the Northmen. "If" this writer concludes, "it can be shown

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<sup>2</sup> *Rude Stone Monuments in all Countries*, by James Fergusson, D.C.L., F.R.S.



that the Celts in this land reached a degree of civilisation between the years 500 and 1000 sufficient to render it probable that they were the builders of the Brochs, it has not been done, and till it is it seems more probable that the men who could build ships and organise fleets which were the terror of not only the North of Scotland, but of England and Ireland, and even of France, were a superior race, and in so far at least as constructive necessities were concerned, more likely to be the builders of the Brochs. Even, however, if a better case can be made out for the civilisation of the Celts in Brochland than I am willing to admit, it must I think be conceded that the Norwegians were their superiors, not only for the reasons just stated, but because they conquered and occupied their country, and finally extirpated or expelled the Celts from these islands, and the parts of the Continent where they first and most frequently settled. We know their position and prowess; we wait for an account of that of the races they conquered and annihilated." This is the language of common sense, and appeals to the judgment of every man of rational intelligence. Certainly as regards the construction of the Brochs it consists with probability that a people of whom

Dr. Johnson observes that they "possessed the arts of life" would display all the engineering skill necessary to the defence of their new conquests. Worsaae says the Irish chronicles attest that in the art of fortification the Norwegians were far superior to the Irish (p. 323). There seems little reason to doubt that the so-called "British Forts" found in different parts of Wales are also the work of the Northmen. The Danes, Worsaae tells us, made themselves masters of that country. It has been objected that the Norwegians were a wood-building people, but they could hardly build with wood in a country where wood was not to be found. The whole history of the Northmen goes to show that, like their progeny the modern Scotch, they adapted themselves to circumstances and used the materials within their reach. That analogous structures are not found in Norway is entirely wide of the question. Norway was the country of the Norwegians and they would hardly want forts to defend themselves from the Celts of Great Britain, who had neither ships nor appliances of any kind by which they could assail an enemy. It requires something more than wild beast skins, and flint arrow heads, and fleetness of foot to make a race formidable as an attacking

force. Dr. Joseph Anderson, it is true, furnishes the Celts with a *sword!* which he finds on the Govan Sarcophagus, a work of the twelfth century, and on a Roman legionary tablet, in the Antiquaries' Museum. Lord Neaves stated in an address to the antiquaries in 1859, that the great object of archæological research is to be able from a few scattered and imperfect hints to call up the entire image of the forgotten past. I remember he founded an argument from analogy with osteology remarking that from a fossil toe or tooth the whole anatomy might be given of creatures that had trod the earth many thousand years ago. Dr. Anderson has been happy in finding a fossil tooth, which takes the form of a Celtic sword. The popular notion of a Celtic sword is the *Claymore*. The form of that represented on the sarcophagus is scarcely distinguishable from the confessedly Norse weapon, and it is hardly to be supposed that the sculptor of this mortuary remain was the armourer of a Viking chief. Worsaae in his *Account of the Danes, etc.* (pp. 45, 52, 326), gives five examples of the Viking-sword, each differing from the other in the form of the pommel and guard, but all possessing the distinctive character of the Danish weapon. It may even