GEORGE BUCHANAN AND THE PICTS

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The mysterious people known as the Picts were, and still are, central to the problem of Scottish origins.¹ They were usually played down in the early version of Scottish history, and still often suffer that same fate today. The Gaels, proud of their descent from Fergus Mor who in the early sixth century A.D. led the Scots from Ireland, are quick to dismiss Pictish pretensions. Consequently, the Picts remain mysterious, dimly perceived quantities which are capable of all sorts of interpretation and manipulation. That has served merely to increase their appeal. There is still, after centuries of earnest discussion and explanation, little about them that is known for certain, mainly because their language has not survived, and the existing sources usually refer to them in a maddeningly offhand way. But that they existed is certain; and that they were a vigorous and artistic people, as evidenced by their splendid if characteristically baffling stone carvings, is also well known.² But who were they? Whence came they? Whither did they go? These are still questions to which no easy answers are forthcoming.

About the one fact that modern scholarship has established about the Picts is that they spoke a form of Brittonic, a P-Celtic language akin to Welsh but closer to Gaulish than to the Brittonic of the south. Those are the findings of Professor Kenneth Jackson, Professor Emeritus of Celtic in the University of Edinburgh, and one of the greatest of living Celticists.³ Jackson's view is the one that commands general acceptance today. But it was not exactly a new conclusion. It was anticipated by the great sixteenth-century Scottish poet and humanist, George Buchanan, in 1582.

But what part the Picts played in the evolution of Scotland


remains a problem, mainly because from the mid-ninth century A.D. onwards they were thoroughly Gaelicised—that is to say, the Picts were converted into Gaels or Q-Celts. Nothing of their native traditions survived, and everything has to be inferred from the relatively sparse incidental references to them in other sources. And yet, through the ages the Picts have been discussed ad nauseam, for nothing, apparently, succeeds like annihilation. To be virtually lost to history is the passport to romance. Far from killing them stone dead, their obscurity has endowed the Picts with a kind of immortality. In short, they can, at the batting of an eyelid, be turned into whatever the heart could desire in the way of ancestors. This aspect of the matter has been well summed up by a modern authority, Dr. Isobel Henderson, who ends a brief, informative essay on the Picts by observing that, “At present, however, it can only be said in sentimental vein, that if we Scots like to think of ourselves as something distinct from an Irish colony then it is the spirit of the tribes who went to make up the Picts that we must invoke”.

Dr. Henderson was doubtless joking; but, in fact, through the ages many Scots scholars, in discoursing about the origin of their people, have in all seriousness sought refuge in the Picts. The idea of being a mere Irish colony has not generally been a welcome one—though personally I can find nothing unhistorical or repulsive about it. National amour propre, however, has made it difficult for the Scots to see themselves as the offshoot of an obscure Dark Age Irish tribe, and the notion has frequently been denied. True, English historians bent on mischief find the thought an entrancing one, since it affords them the double luxury of heaping scorn on Scots and Irish alike. Thus, Lord Dacre has made great sport with the idea of the Scottish Gaels being a mere Irish colony with no real culture of their own.

Still, undeniably, with many Scots the notion of an Irish origin has been a tender one, and numerous historians and antiquarians through the ages have eagerly acted in anticipation of Dr. Henderson’s whimsical advice. At least, I think it’s whimsical, though

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where the Picts are concerned one can never be quite certain if Pictomania can be very far away. Men who were considerable scholars in their day have sought refuge in a Pictish ancestry for the Scots, notably Sir Robert Sibbald (1641-1722), Father Thomas Innes (1662-1744), and John Pinkerton (1758-1826). Nor is that tendency altogether extinct. But in spite of their patriotism the arguments of those old antiquarians were often wild and woolly. We should not be too hard on them, for they were dealing with extremely difficult matters, hampered by all sorts of problems as to material. But that really strengthened their dogmatic views which were of an astonishing and conflicting variety. So their work gave rise to fierce controversies that generated more heat than light, and afforded considerable entertainment to their readers.

Yet, oddly enough, although immortalised in a once-famed passage in a Scott novel, the famous strife of the eighteenth-century antiquaries about the Picts has in our time virtually disappeared without trace. Perhaps the great Sir Walter is no longer as immortal as he once seemed — which would be a great pity. And perhaps for a time we fondly imagined that the problem of the Picts had finally been laid to rest with the publication in 1955 of the learned collection of essays that appeared as a volume under that title edited by T.F. Wainwright, where Professor Jackson’s seminal paper is to be found. If so, we may have been premature in reaching that conclusion, for the questions posed by the Picts are again very much to the fore, as evidenced in Marjorie Anderson’s book on early kingship in Scotland. It may be worthwhile, then, to recall that brilliant passage in Scott’s novel.

An unusual Scott novel, and the author’s own favourite among his works, The Antiquary, published in 1819, is a domestic tale, not high historical romance, and is one of the few Scott novels set in the author’s own times. As a result it casts many revealing lights on the Scotland of Sir Walter’s own day. This is particularly so when the author describes an argument that started up after dinner over the problem of the Picts. In Chapter VI the rival antiquaries, Jonathan Oldbuck and Sir Arthur Wardour, attempt to initiate an innocent young English guest, Lovel, into the mysteries of the Picts. They soon fall out, and engage in a violent exchange of words. It

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all began quietly enough: —

"Why, man," says Oldbuck to Lovel, "there was once a
people called the Piks —."

"More properly Picts," interrupted the Baronet.

"I say the Pikar, Pichar, Piochter, Piaghter, or Peughtar,"
vociferated Oldbuck, "they spoke a Gothic dialect —."

"Genuine Celtic," again asseverated the knight.

"Gothic! Gothic, I'll go to death upon it!" counter-
asseverated the squire.

"Why gentlemen," said Lovel, "I conceive that is a dispute
which may be easily settled by philologists, if there are any
remains of the language."

"There is but one word," said the Baronet, "but, in spite
of Mr. Oldbuck's pertinacity, it is decisive of the question."

"Yes, in my favor," said Oldbuck: "Mr. Lovel, you shall
be judge — I have the learned Pinkerton on my side."

"I, on mine, the indefatigable and erudite Chalmers."

"Sir Robert Sibbald holds mine."

"Innes is with me!," vociferated Oldbuck.

"Ritson has no doubt," shouted the Baronet.

And so they raged on, unable to agree and hopeless of

Sir Walter Scott, of course, was a learned scholar himself and
much of the absurdity of this comic passage comes straight from the
pages of the antiquaries referred to. Only one word of Pictish is
supposed to survive, in the Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History
of the English People, and that single word has always been open to
doubt. Did the Anglian Bede hear it aright? Nothing, however,
seems to ensure the continuing interest of posterity like total eclipse.
The Picts, as Scott cleverly insinuated, were evidently plastic people

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7 Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, ed. and tr., Bertram
Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969), 43. The word was
"Peanfaheil", signifying "end of the [Antonine] wall". The English equivalent,
according to Bede, was "Penneltun"; and the modern place-name, Kinneil, has the
same meaning but is derived from Gaelic.
who can be moulded into any desired shape. And for some people the Picts have their uses to this day, as the existence of a vigorous, if not pedantically learned, Pictish Society bears witness. Its leading light picked up some, but not I hope all of his lore, in the Department of Scottish History at Edinburgh. I like to think that no cause and effect operates here whatsoever.

The Pictish Society's programme today provides good copy for the local press, and so helps, in an agreeably civilised way that is far removed from the fierce style of Pinkerton, to stoke up fires of controversy. Conspicuous here are the exploits of a leading self-styled Pict, Brian Robertson, who is more familiarly known as Robbie the Pict. About ten years ago Robbie renounced his British citizenship to become a Pictish national. He furnished himself with a Pictish passport. Supporters in Skye gave him an acre of land, which he promptly declared was the Micro-state of Alba, an independent Pictland free from the jurisdiction of the English crown. Robbie, you will note, has a proper disrespect for the word British, seeing through the idle piece of pretence. He was arrested in Perth for driving a vehicle with Diplomatic Corps plates which he claimed he was entitled to use as consul for the Mini-state of Alba. He would thus, he hoped, acquire diplomatic immunity, of which, it soon transpired he stood in urgent need. His latest ploy was to refuse to pay car tax on two vans belonging to the Pictish High Commission in Edinburgh, which turned out to be his flat in St. Leonards. Mind you, one would have thought this canny parsimony about money, however high principled, a peculiarly Scottish trait. Not at all, according to Robbie — such canniness is irrefutable proof of Pictishness. Anyway, Robbie was charged with tax evasion, and he carried his case right up to the Appeal Court, arguing that the English crown had no competence in Pictland. In the end, he lost and was sentenced to 40 days in durance vile in the hope that this would help him to get a better perspective on things. But Robbie, if he has no friends at court, has many friends outside. He is, in fact, extremely active in the rock band scene (apparently rock music is down to the Picts as well), and his fellow musicians rallied to his support. They put on a Tax Rebels' Boogie in an Edinburgh pub, and raised enough money to free our local hero. So, the old, old story about the demise of the Picts is, apparently, like Mark Twain's famous reported death, a trifle exaggerated. Anyway, the last has not been heard of the bold Robbie, who plans
to take his case to the European Court in Strasbourg. 8

So, what are we to make of the Picts and the efforts that have been made through the ages to establish their identity? The best, but most neglected and unjustly misrepresented, effort was made by George Buchanan. Numerous canards about Buchanan and his History of Scotland, published in 1582, abound. One such error that can still be encountered would have Buchanan arguing that the Picts, those fathers and mothers of controversy, were of Gothic race and speech, and that, by implication, their tongue survived to give rise to broad Scots. That certainly would be one in the eye for the Gaels; but this canard conveniently overlooks the fact that Buchanan himself was a Gael, and, indeed, made effective use of his knowledge of the Gaelic in dealing with the early history of Scotland. George Buchanan was in fact the first scholar to demonstrate the affinities of the Celtic languages. 9 But here it is Buchanan's views on the problem of the Picts that need to be examined.

In order to tackle the problem of the Picts as perceived by Buchanan, two texts need to be compared — that of Buchanan's Rerum Scoticarum Historia in the original Latin, and the much later Englishing of that work by James Aikman in the early nineteenth century. Aikman's views are of considerable importance as far as the question of George Buchanan's conclusions about the Picts are concerned. Aikman saw himself as Buchanan's champion. Buchanan has always been a controversial figure, largely because of the bitterness with which he, a convinced Protestant, assailed Mary, Queen of Scots. Those who believed in Divine Right Monarchy also recognised in the constitutional theories of Buchanan a hated stumbling-block. So Aikman was kept busy defending his hero's reputation, explaining his strengths, and occasionally explaining away his weaknesses. In particular Aikman sought to refute the furious charges laid against Buchanan by John Pinkerton, who was convinced that he, and he alone, had plucked out the heart of the Pictish mystery. According to Pinkerton the Picts were Gothic in race and speech, a race of Teutonic supermen and, as such, superior in every respect to the degraded Celtic aborigines of North Britain.

8 For Robbie's background, see The Scotsman for 6 January, 1988.

Pinkerton, in fact, was an early and extremely intemperate member of the Germanist school of history that was to rule the roost in nineteenth-century Britain.

Aikman, in "The Life of Buchanan" that he prefixed to his translation of History of Scotland, refutes Pinkerton’s charges and concludes that,

The Picts and Scots he [Buchanan] considers as originally the same people, sprung from a Celtic or Gallic origin, and speaking the same tongue, which the names of numerous places, in the lands known to have been under the dominion of the Picts, and the prevalence of the Gaelic language, in districts which formed part of their kingdom sufficiently corroborate. And as the two nations were completely incorporated, and their speech amalgamated under Kenneth, at the date at which Buchanan’s inquiry into the aborigines of Scotland must be considered to terminate, he does not enter upon the discussion of the origin of the present inhabitants of the Lowlands.\(^{10}\)

But that last point, the present inhabitants of the Lowlands, gave rise to much controversy, centring largely upon Pinkerton’s contents, and giving Aikman considerable unease. Still, Aikman, in his prefatory "Life" rejects Pinkerton’s arguments about the Picts being Goths, and states his own conclusion clearly:

The strong presumption, therefore, is in favour of Buchanan’s hypothesis, that the Picts, or Caledonians, and the Scots were of the same origin, and spoke the same language; and that the introduction of the Gothic language into Scotland is of a later date.\(^{11}\)

Now let us see what Buchanan himself has to say on this matter. His argument is based on a mastery of the classical Latin and Greek sources, and is remarkably acute as well as truly learned. His

\(^{10}\) James Aikman, ed. and tr., Buchanan’s History of Scotland (Glasgow, 1827), vol. I, lxix-lxx.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., lxxi.
citations are famous for their accuracy — when he said Caesar or Tacitus has this or that to say you can accept that that is exactly what you will find in the texts cited by Buchanan. This was an unusual trait in the scholarship of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His history opens with a topographical survey of Scotland, a valuable tour de force. He notes that the earliest inhabitants of the Northern Isles (Orkney and Shetland, that is) were not Picts; but, he goes on to observe, "from whencesoever they originate, they use, even in our day a language different both from the Scots and English, and which does not differ much from the Gothic." Buchanan was weak on the Vikings and their influence on Scotland. The point here, however, is that Buchanan, when restricted to his own words, never considered the Picts to have been Goths. The inhabitants of the Northern Isles of Buchanan's day spoke a language akin to Gothic precisely because they were not of Pictish origin.

So, what of the Picts? Having completed his description of Scotland in Book I, an able performance replete with all sorts of interesting information (he notes, for example, that Gaelic was still spoken in Galloway), Buchanan then proceeds in Book II of his Historia to examine the origins of Scotland's early people as discussed in the classical sources of which he was a great and undoubted master. Those sources, still vital to any discussion of early Britain, have never before or since been put to such effective use. He relates, only scornfully to dismiss, the legendary origin—myths of Brutus and Gathelius. They found no support in the Greek and Latin historians and deserved short shrift, which they got from the brusque Buchanan. Sternly rejecting such idle tales, Buchanan contends that ancient literature proves that the Britons and Scots "sprung from the Gauls." This contention is sustained by a long, learned and ingenious argument. Here Buchanan really shone. It was here that he demonstrated, for the first time ever, the kinship of the various Celtic languages and outlined their complex histories. Others later, notably the Welshman Edward Llwyd at the end of the

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12 Aikman, op. cit., I, 57.

13 Ibid., I, 76-77.

14 Ibid., I, 79; and on p. 97, noting that Tacitus in his Agricola observed that the language of Gaul did not differ widely from that of Britain, Buchanan went on to conjecture that they were formerly the same.
seventeenth century, were to build on Buchanan’s linguistic pioneer work, but without any clear acknowledgment of their debt.

The Gauls, greatest of the early Celtic peoples, were central to the argument. At the outset Buchanan is obliged to discuss a difficult problem. The ancient Gauls had no letters, and were forced, like all the unlettered barbarian peoples, to rely on oral tradition. The Gauls did not commit anything to writing until, influenced by the Massilian Greeks, they made use of Greek letters to represent their tongue in writing. Here we encounter an amazing lapse on the part of James Aikman. Aikman’s translation of the relevant passage into English states with appalling clarity, that “though the form of their letters was Greek, the language they used was Gothic [sic].”15 “Gothic” was what Aikman wrote; but what Buchanan wrote in Latin was “Graecis quidem figuris elementorum, sed sermone Gallico”.16

The wonder must be how Aikman could have blundered so egregiously when the whole tenor of Buchanan’s argument about the language of the Picts denied that it was of Gothic origin. And, indeed, the same position was taken by Aikman himself in his “Life of Buchanan” that has just been mentioned. Other translators got the passage right, but, unfortunately, Aikman’s translation has for long been the standard one — rightly, in the main. But here I can’t deny myself the luxury of quoting from an early English version of Buchanan’s History of 1690. This rendered the passage concerned most charmingly, though doubtless the freedom of expression that the translator allowed himself would make modern purists gasp and stare — “The French first of all received the Characters of Letters from the Marsellian Greeks, by which they used to make up their Accounts, and to send Letters one to another. The figures of the Letters were Greek; but the language was Gallick.”17 We, of course, would sniff at the term “French”, and would doubtless prefer to say Gaulish for the language.

15 Aikman, I, 64.

16 Buchanan, Rerum Scoticarum Historia (Edinburgh, 1582), Book II, f. 14.

Part of the blame for Aikman's slip of the pen probably lies in
the misleadingly suggestive name of the "Gothuni", who play an
important part in Buchanan's argument. The Gothuni, an ancient
tribe in Germany, are brought into the argument because most early
authorities speak of the Picts as coming from the east. Buchanan,
therefore, looks for "painted people" in Europe who were in the
habit of branding their bodies with hot irons. [In parenthesis, one
may observe that Robbie hasn't got round to that yet — but
doubtless, as the Bard says, "It's comin' yet for a' that." ] However
that may be, Buchanan's researches led him to conclude that the
Picts derived from "the ancient colonies of the Gauls, who had
settled either upon the borders of the Swedish sea, or the banks of
the Danube." 18 That brought in the Gothuni. Furthermore,
according to Tacitus in his Germania the Gothuni still spoke
Gaulish.

The people Tacitus so describes he called the Cotini, a small
Gaulish tribe on the Upper Gran, a tributary of the Danube. But,
as the best modern edition of the Germania by Robinson points out,
Gothini often occurs as a rendering of Cotini. 19 Buchanan knew all
that, but finally, on the authority of Claudian, the last great Latin
poet of antiquity, who flourished in the late fourth century A.D.,
he settled for Gothuni. 20

The difficulty for later workers in this particular field was the
fatal ease with which the Gothuni could be confused with an
undoubtedly Germanic tribe also described by Tacitus, the
Gothenes, who ultimately became better known as the Goths. 21
But Buchanan never confused Gothuni and Gothenes. The error
was first wished on Buchanan in 1710 by Sir Robert Sibbald, a

18 Aikman, I, 88-89.

(American Philological Association, Middletown, Connecticut, 1935), notes, p. 125, a
general tendency in the texts to confuse "c" and "g"; and he further observes, p. 247,
that in some MSS. "Cotini" appears as "Gotini".

20 Aikman, I, 81.

21 H. Mattingly, Tacitus on Britain and Germany (Penguin, 1951), 136; for
the Latin text, see J.C.G. Anderson, ed., Corneli Taciti De Origine et Situ
savant who was apt to read as he ran. In his History of Fife, Sibbald wrote, "Buchanan's argument is that the Picts were of a Gothish race and extract, because as the Goths cut figures upon their bodies the Picts did the like." Clearly, Sibbald took Gothuni to mean Goths, and thus the myth of the Gothic Picts saw the light. It was no fault of Buchanan's but even to this day the canard persists that Buchanan identified the Picts as Goths. In his entrancing book, Ruins in a Landscape, writing of Sibbald, Stuart Piggott speaks of George Buchanan regarding the Picts as being of Gothic descent.

The Gothomania that Sibbald thus innocently inaugurated was carried to wild heights by John Pinkerton, who was convinced that the Picts were a Teutonic master race and immeasurably superior to Celtic savages.

On this congenial theme Pinkerton was maniacal and extremely offensive. He was undoubtedly a racist bigot, something that his considerable scholarship highlighted rather than hid. His main work bearing on the Picts is his Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the Reign of Malcolm III, which appeared in 1789. In the "Advertisement" to a new edition of the Enquiry in 1814, Pinkerton states that some asperities in the language have been removed. But little of substance was altered. In each edition the Celts take a hammering. They were, according to Pinkerton, the bane of Scotland, inferior people who had retarded the progress of the country. So much so, he claimed, that the Celts even in Pinkerton's day were, as he put it, "not yet advanced even to the state of barbarism; and if any foreigner doubts this, he has only to step into the Celtic part of Wales, Ireland or Scotland, and look at them, for they are just what they were, incapable of industry or civilisation even after half their blood is Gothic and remain as marked by the ancients, fond of lies and enemies of truth, ... etc., etc." On this theme John Pinkerton was inexhaustible. He

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23 Stuart Piggott, Ruins in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism (Edinburgh, 1976), 137.

24 John Pinkerton, Dissertation on the Scythians or Goths, 69, bound up with vol. II of Pinkerton's An Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the reign of Malcolm III (Edinburgh edn., 1794).
concludes this prolonged philippic thus; "For the Celts were so inferior a people being to the Scythians as a negro to a European, that, as all history shows, to see them was to conquer them."\(^{25}\)

It was probably over-eagerness to rebut Pinkerton that caused Aikman to make his fatal mistake of Gothic for Gallic. That it was a slip is shown by Aikman’s approval of the work of George Chalmers (1742-1825). Chalmers in his Caledonia, although a Tory and bitterly opposed to Buchanan’s political theories, nonetheless paid the great humanist a splendid compliment for his labours on the Pictish question. Chalmers scornfully rejected Pinkerton’s “Gothic mania”, but differed slightly from Buchanan in regarding the Picts as being originally Britons.\(^{26}\) But Chalmers subscribed to Buchanan’s view that the Pictish language was a P-Celtic tongue. Buchanan’s further view that it was closer to Gaulish than to the Brittonic of South Britain is precisely the conclusion reached by Professor Kenneth Jackson today.

I would submit that on the Pictish question Buchanan must be said to have worked to great purpose. It was a marvellous feat for him to have used his superb Latin scholarship to reach a conclusion on this most vexed and diabolically difficult problem that does not differ radically from the best received opinion today.

Yet today Buchanan’s reputation as a historian is in tatters, due largely to Trevor-Roper’s life-long propaganda war against all things Scotch. The real damage stems from the fact that too many people accept Trevor-Roper’s views without putting them to the test. Too many people accept Trevor-Roper’s opinions without bothering to read Buchanan or to confront the problems of early Scottish history. That dismissive view unfortunately mars the latest biography of Buchanan by I.D. McFarlane. McFarlane dutifully follows the Trevor-Roper line as laid down in the English Historical Review supplement article, "George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution", which is a peculiar piece of selective misapplied

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{26}\) George Chalmers, Caledonia: or a Historical and Topographical Account of North Britain from the most ancient to the present times (new edn., Paisley, 1887), vol. I, 225-234.
lores.\textsuperscript{27} Says McFarlane, far too confidently in my opinion, and citing the authority of Trevor-Roper, "On the early history of Scotland, Buchanan clearly has little to offer us."\textsuperscript{28} The only proper retort to that is that Professor McFarlane is a distinguished linguist and excellent on the literary side of Buchanan's activities; but McFarlane is no historian and can offer no real assessment of Buchanan as a historian. He makes no effort to come to grips with the problems presented by early Scottish history, and hence is in no position to assess Buchanan's success or failure here. Long ago, one who did know his Scottish history, Aeneas Mackay, returned a very different and, it seems to me, more just verdict. Aeneas Mackay gave it as his considered opinion that, in spite of faults, Buchanan's history was of value, and particularly its first three Books dealing with the early history.\textsuperscript{29} Hume Brown in his biography of Buchanan (1890) cautiously, after his wont, endorsed that view.\textsuperscript{30}

I would conclude by saying that justice requires that no author should be condemned unread, any more than in a court of law any man should be condemned unheard. Buchanan on the Picts is an outstanding example of that peculiar modern vogue to follow the fad rather than adventure an independent view based on the evidence. The great George was terribly conceited, irascible, scathing of wit and unsparing, and capable of making bad mistakes. My contention here is that he should be condemned for his own mistakes; and not for the mistakes that others have foisted upon him.

But I cannot flatter myself that the mystery of the Picts could be settled by anything that George Buchanan wrote or by anything that I have to say. I am even more pessimistic than that. Whatever\textit{ anyone} writes or says, I cannot believe that the problem of the Picts will ever go away. There are still, for example, those in Scotland who would go to the stake firm in the faith that the Picts, far from being Goths or P-Celts or whatever, were the original Gaels of


\textsuperscript{28} I.D. McFarlane, Buchanan (London, 1981), 427.

\textsuperscript{29} Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. George Buchanan.

\textsuperscript{30} P. Hume Brown, George Buchanan, Humanist and Reformer (Edinburgh, 1890), 328.
Alba, done out of their inheritance by some plausible con-men from Ireland. Against those super-patriots mountains of historical and linguistic evidence can be cited; for them, nothing of substance. No matter. The Robbies of this world know that the only evidence that really counts is the evidence that you feel. In the words of another Robbie, Burns, "The heart's aye the part aye, that mak's us richt or wrang".

Scotland is a peculiar country, as the late J.M. Reid in an excellent little book once memorably put it — a nation yet in no sense a state. But repeatedly Scotland proves that there is life after death. In those periodic rebirths the Picts, far from being left in their Dark Age graves, resumed themselves and march again. The latest news out of Scotland (or should it be Pictland?) is that Robbie the Pict and his comrades are once more on the warpath, summoning the rock bands for a devastating bash at the hated poll tax. They have organised a body know as RAPT ("Rock against the Poll Tax"), and, of course, are appealing for funds to stage a series of Live Aid concerts to inspire young opponents of the Poll Tax. They have a theme song, optimistically said to go to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers". The triumphal dirge runs as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
Governments may perish,
Premiers rise and fall;
Right will be victorious
O'er tyrants after all!
Scots will show the English
How to fight the tax,
Till it's been defeated
We will not relax.
\end{verbatim}

It can only be supposed that you would have to be a Pict to be able to Rock around the Clock to that stirring piece of McGonagallese.

As an interim conclusion let me say this. It would be difficult to parallel the story of the Picts. Many ancient tribes in Europe flourished for a while then vanished from the scene, leaving behind them little more than a name. Such, for example, were the Boii,

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who have vanished completely but whose name is commemorated in Bohemia. The explanation must be surely that the Picts were among the last to perform this vanishing act, and by the time of their demise, the ninth century A.D., there were historians around to record the annals of the times. And so the Picts have provided a convenient bolt-hole for those Scots who don't want to see their nation as a mere Irish off-shoot. Their shades are also invoked in embattled Ulster today by the Paisleyites. The Picts, then, unlike old soldiers, don't just fade away, but, like Banquo's ghost, keep coming back.

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[Note: The text is not fully legible, but the citation at the bottom is clear: For the Boii, see Robert J. Kerner, ed., Csechoslovakia: Twenty Years of Independence (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1940), ch. I by Alex Hrdlicka; A.H. Herman, A History of the Csechs (London, 1975), 7.]