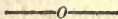


## THE EDUCATION OF THE HIGHLANDER.

BY PROFESSOR BLACKIE.\*



THE fundamental postulate of all healthy education is that it be native and national—that is, growing naturally out of a firm local root, and under the influences of a healthy local environment. On the Highland braes in September a man likes to see the flush of the heather; and, if any man were to take a fancy to pull up all this native bloom and plant rhododendrons, no man will either praise his taste or approve of his work. On my estate, if I were a Highland laird, I should be more proud of having the sturdiest old Scotch pines, and the greatest wealth of graceful-waving birches, than if I had in my pinery all the wealth of California, New Zealand, and Cabool. You ask why—Simply because Nature is Nature, and by Divine right possesses both a strength and a propriety which only a false taste and a shallow affectation will dispute. Let this, therefore, stand. The education of the Highlander, if it is to be natural, vigorous, and graceful, and in harmony with the congruities of his position, and the divinely ordered system of the universe, must be characteristically and emphatically Highland. There is, indeed, only one way of escaping this proposition, and the corollaries which we shall see flow from it; and that is, by asserting that the Highlander is an obsolete animal, and not entitled to any recognition in the social system of Great Britain. And it is unhappily only too true that, in particular districts of the Highlands, the Highlander is not only an obsolete animal, so far as Celtic nature and character are concerned, but actually an extinct animal, inasmuch as, in extensive districts once dotted with happy houses, he is not to be found at all—a most unnatural and unsound state of things, arising from the folly or selfishness of a certain class of Highland proprietors, who, utterly forgetful of their noble position, and their high vocation as the heads and representatives of society in the Highlands, have followed a course of social economy which has ended in the abolition of all local society, and in the extermination of the noble race of peasantry whom they are specially bound to protect. Wherever these persons have had free sway, the Highlander, certainly, has become an extinct animal. Landlords who look upon their estates principally as a means of getting money, which they may spend in luxurious living and idle dissipation, in London or elsewhere, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of their people; or that other class who cannot be distinguished except by the scale of their own performances, from the lowest class of muck-rakes and money-grubbers, and who will willingly surrender a whole beautiful glen to desolation, provided they can screw another hundred pounds or two out of it, with more certainty to themselves and less trouble to their factor; and that third class, scarcely more reputable—certainly not less selfish than the money-loving, rent-gathering absentee—the gentlemen, I mean, who hold Highland estates principally for the culture of deer and other wild beasts, who make a business and a consuming passion of what should only be a manly sport and a healthful recreation. All these classes are

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the natural enemies of the population in the districts that are legally subject to their unfortunate masterdom, and are systematically employed in the unnatural work of making the Highlander an extinct animal in his own country. But it is not our business to discuss their doings in this place; we shall leave them, in passing, to the public reprobation and historical infamy which they deserve, and proceed to remark that though such unnatural landlords have succeeded in doing an amount of social mischief that can never be repaired, the selfish feelings and shallow notions by which they are possessed, though fond enough of parading themselves, are yet not strong enough to contend with certain rooted facts, which, like trees of the growth of long centuries, will stand a considerable amount of windy bluster without showing any inclination to fall. It is not easy to calculate the amount of historical ignorance that may exist in the brain-chambers of shallow witlings, incapable of estimating anything but the current fashion and dominant prejudice of the day; but the memories of nations are not so short; and a peculiar people, with their own struggles, their own blood, their own language, their own poetry, their own music, and their own beautiful country, and a people which has performed such a noble part in the history of Great Britain as the Scottish Highlanders, will not so easily become obsolete. The Bible in the mother tongue ought to form the nucleus of all sound moral and intellectual education in this country. And this is specially true with regard to the Highlanders, who are a decidedly religious people. Do we not as Protestants maintain the peculiar privilege and sacred right of every individual Christian to search the Scriptures? And is it not a plain stultifying of our religious professions if we put the casket into the hands of the people, and keep the key to ourselves? To me, and to any man of common sense, it must seem only a necessary corollary that, in whatever parish Gaelic sermons are preached, in that parish Gaelic Bibles ought to be read, and studied, and expounded, historically, geographically, and grammatically, both in the family and in the school. And if there be any Highlander, naturally speaking Gaelic, in whose schooling this element has been omitted, I cannot feel the slightest hesitation in saying that the most efficient engine provided by Nature and by God for the education of Highlanders has in his case been stupidly neglected, and a less efficient engine deliberately chosen. Then as to the *People's Song Book*, every Highlander knows how rich and various, and how full of noble stimulus and elevating inspiration, the Gaelic song book is. We shall find that there are schools, perhaps in the most Highland districts of the Highlands, where not a single note of your rich popular melody is ever heard, not a single heroic ballad ever read, or a single lay of touching beauty and pathos ever sung. We can only say that such schools, however well conducted in some respects, are just as deficient and as unnatural as a Highland river without salmon, a Highland glen without wood, or a Highland ben without granite rock. I have mentioned the people's Bible and the people's song book as the two grand engines of general education, which ought to be as potently at work in every Highland school, as spinning jennies and other whirring machines are in the Glasgow manufactories. But there are some other engines of Gaelic literary culture which ought to receive a recognised position in all well organised High-

land schools. We should have Mackintosh's Gaelic Proverbs, and another work, which ought ever to receive a prominent place in the furniture of a good Highland school, is the well-known *Teachdaire*, or *Gaelic Courier*, composed principally by the Rev. Norman Macleod, the father of the late Norman, and republished by Dr Clerk of Kilmallie, in three parts, under the name of *Caraid nan Gaidheal*. Any person who has but occasionally dipped into this most delightful volume, full of geniality, humour, practical wisdom, rational piety, and good sense, will not fail to have seen that it is made of the very properest stuff—not to mention the classicality of its style—for the education of young Highlanders; at least all must admit that it contains whole chapters full of useful information, delicate humour, and fine human pathos, that for Highland, or even Lowland, purposes is not surpassed, or rather very seldom been equalled, by any book of English extracts used in the best schools in the kingdom. I have given prominence to the above books principally as specimens of classical Gaelic in prose and verse, with the recommendation at the same time of being literally stuffed with matter of the most strengthening and salubrious quality, for the moral and intellectual improvement of the young Gael. Civil history, or the record of the leading events in the history of human society, and especially of those events out of which the stage of our present social energies grew up, has generally received a certain share of fair treatment in our schools; but I question much if in Highland schools the history of the Highlands proper, or that part of British history on which Celtic heroism and gallantry has stamped such a signature of glory, has received, or does now receive, the prominence which it unquestionably deserves. If there does not exist already, there should certainly be made for every Highland school, a history of Scotland with a peculiarly Highland tinge—a history in which the brilliant exploits of Montrose, and the loyal devotedness of the clansmen in the '45, would appear as prominent scenes in a CELTIC PLUTARCH, performing the same service to young Highlanders that the works of the rare old Chæro-nean did to the Greeks and Romans of the second century. For such a Plutarch there exist the most ample materials, not only in the memories of 1545 and 1745, but in the wide range of the records of our military history and geographical discovery up to the most recent period. And I need scarcely observe, after what I have said, that in every parish of a decidedly Highland character—that is, practically every parish where Gaelic is preached—such a Plutarch should be written in the mother tongue.

So far as Gaelic, and a characteristically Gaelic culture, is concerned, it will naturally either drop, in the middle schools, or assume a subordinate position; and this for the very obvious reason that the mass of the middle and upper classes, for whom chiefly the middle schools exist, are Saxon, if not always in heart and blood, at least in their speech. At the same time a certain provision should be made in all middle schools in Highland districts for the higher culture of Gaelic; for, not to mention other considerations, there will always naturally be found in these schools a certain number of young men, drawn from the lower classes, destined to become preachers and teachers in essentially Highland districts; and if such provision is not made in the middle schools, their Gaelic, as an

organ of expression, will naturally become rusty, and (as has very generally happened in Scotland) will have to be refurbished at considerable expense of time and brain at a less convenient season in later years. Anyhow, under a healthy system, even where English alone is recognised in such middle schools, a certain Highland atmosphere will naturally prevail, and certain peculiarities which would distinctly mark out the style and tone of instruction in such a school, say at Inverness, from a similar institution at Perth or Aberdeen. Highland subjects will be treated with a natural preference—sections of British history in which the Gael had performed the principal part will be discussed in fuller detail. Highland songs will be sung every day, and the most sublime passages of Ossian, along with the beautiful descriptions of scenery in Duncan Ban and Alister Macdonald recited, and perhaps acted in character on show days. Shinty, of course, and every characteristically Highland sport, will be cultivated on holidays. The picturesque, the patriotic, and healthy Highland garb will be worn by all the scholars. The Highland plume will wave on the bonnet of every prizeman, and every young Celtic thane will tread his native heath with a healthy consciousness that he is neither a Cockney nor an Etonian, and has drunk in among the breezes of his native hills more strength and more manhood, and more bracing culture, than if he had been drilled for long years at some great English school in pedantic preparation for a course of meagre mathematics at Cambridge, or of Greek metres, Latin elegies, and High Churchism at Oxford. With or without the Gaelic language he will grow up a Highlander, as he was born, and present to the world, undisguised and unperverted, one of the finest types of manhood that history knows, not, as too frequently happens, transplanted precociously into a soil and an atmosphere in which he is obliged to stint and to starve the best elements of his nature, in order to be transformed into a middle sort of creature, destitute alike of the sturdy energy which belonged to his original character, and the native grace of the foreign model. Such is always the penalty which Nature makes those of her children pay who reject the conditions of life which she gave them, and with a snobbish affectation are eager to appropriate what she had wisely denied them. According to her principle, the boy, as the thoughtful poet says, is the father of the man. But according to the notion which seems to have possessed those who send their sons to Eton and Harrow in order that they might forget to be Highlanders and become Englishmen, it is the father that strangles the boy, and the result of this unnatural strangulation is that the creature, by such process, is in danger of developing into something which is neither a Highlander nor an Englishman, but an accomplished coxcomb perhaps, or a heartless prig, or any other form of what the world calls a fine gentleman.

The third stage of popular education is of course the University; and to avoid expatiation, I shall take the special case of a Highland proprietor, and attempt to sketch a sort of model training for him from the time he leaves the school till his entry on the duties of public life, to which his position naturally invites him. I shall suppose the school course finished, and the manly education commenced at the age of eighteen; and, as a matter of course, a young man destined to perform a public part in the organism of Scottish society should go to a Scottish and not to an English or any

foreign University—at least not in the first instance. Let three years, therefore, be spent in attending classes in the Scottish Universities, those classes preferably which specially bear on the life and occupations of country gentlemen—to wit, agriculture and agricultural chemistry, geology, botany, forestry, moral and political philosophy, sociology, political economy, elements of law, public, private, and constitutional; modern history from the Reformation downwards, and ecclesiastical polity. This is a pretty wide range; but it may be varied of course according to the taste of the individual; philological or mathematical studies, also, where a special talent is indicated, may be pursued into their higher departments; especially the scientific study of the Celtic languages on the inductive principle of comparative philology, ought, if possible, along with a course of Celtic history and antiquities, to receive some academical attention from those who are destined to live as the heads and representatives of a Celtic-speaking population. After finishing this course the young Celtic laird will now be one-and-twenty, and so far as the Celtic root and Scottish growth of his training is concerned, pretty fairly rigged out. But we are Britons as well as Celts and Scots, and we are the subjects of a Gracious Lady on whose Empire the sun never sets; therefore, in addition to a national, but not in anywise as a substitute for it, a certain taste of English, European, and Oriental culture belongs necessarily to every person who is called to take a prominent position in the public life of this country. I therefore counsel two years at an English University, and two years of foreign travel, to equip my model laird completely according to the idea of Plato or the model of John Knox; and after having gone through this rich and various course, at the age of twenty-five he will take his place, not as a stranger unacquainted with the language and the habits of the people, or as a meagre economist, land-merchant, and money maker, much less as an ignorant, self-indulgent, game-preserving, and rent-consuming absentee; but, proud of his position, to use St Paul's noble language, as "a fellow-worker with God" in the social economy of the country, and bound by every principle of honour, and by every bond of human kindness, to maintain and to increase, even to his own loss and hurt, as will happen occasionally, the prosperity of the people to whom he has been appointed overseer. A man so educated as I have sketched will not be apt to surrender his paternal acres to the control of factors or lawyers, a class of men by their position, if not exactly by their inclination, more given to be harsh and severe than kindly and considerate in their treatment of the people. He will see with his own eyes, and if he belongs to the good old school, work stoutly with his own hands as occasion may offer; and while he will gladly follow the example of the good old lairds in bringing down a deer or hooking a salmon in the natural haunts of these creatures, he will not degrade himself nor betray his people by looking on his property mainly as a game preserve, and himself merely as a mighty hunter before the Lord. Such is my model landlord.

It is now your business to ask the question, how far this ideal has been realised? And here I need scarcely say that not only in this case, as in most others, does the real limp lamentably behind the ideal, but the ideal has in a great measure been publicly disowned even by the

Highlanders themselves, while the Lowlander, as before said, has already fully made up his mind that the Highlander is an "obsolete animal," *civiliter mortuus*, as the lawyers say, and entitled only to recognition by way of parade on a holiday to amuse Cockney lords and ladies beholding Bens and bare legs for the first time, or in a page flushed with Stuart or Macgregor tartan in one of Scott's novels. That the Lowlanders should think in this fashion is quite natural; majorities are always insolent, and in the present case the Saxons have both multitude and money; but the abnegation of the Highlanders by themselves is a monstrosity in social pathology which could not have been a notable and lamentable fact now but for the faults and follies of previous generations of Highlanders, working along with a succession of political and economical mischances, all tending toward taking the heart out of the Highlands and leaving the arms with no nerve in them to strike. It is quite unnecessary that I should particularise the series of unfortunate events which, from 1645 downwards, and at a more galloping pace since the brilliant folly of 1745, have tended to empty the Highlands of its best elements, and to depress and denationalise what remains. A class of people there are who are fond to call this state of social depression and degradation "progress." We ought to be thankful, they say, that, at whatever sacrifice, we have at length escaped from the barbarism and tyranny of the feudal system, and have been redeemed into the glorious independence of a commercial age. I have studied this subject carefully for many years, and my conclusion is, that whatever might have been the occasional enormities practised under the feudal or rather the clan system in the Highlands (for feudalism was never native in the glens), on the whole, the Highlanders have lost a great deal more than they gained by its abolition; and as to the commercial system, to which our wonderful modern progress is so complacently ascribed, I can see no comparison in point of social value between the bond of mutual love and respect, which were the cement of Highland society under the clan system, and the bond of cash payment and merchant lairds that are now substituted for it. The commercial system is a very proper law for merchants, but taken alone, it is utterly worthless to produce patriots or heroes, or even good citizens. But let this pass. What I have to insist on here is that the whole doctrine, sentiment, and practice, in regard to the education of Highlanders for the last hundred years and more, has, in a great generality of cases, been exactly counter to the above sketch. It tended directly not to make but to unmake an accomplished Highlander, and has succeeded in general only too well. The Disarming Act of 1746 forbade Highlanders to wear the Highland dress. It would almost seem as if from that period downwards they had become ashamed of nursing a Highland heart beneath a Lowland coat; for they did actually in many respects act as if they were ashamed of themselves, and the disuse of the outward symbol gradually accustomed them to ignore the existence of the inward thing signified. Certain it is that many of the upper classes, whose example has always exercised a strong elevating or corrupting influence on the lower—even those who were most patriotic in show of tartan and sound of pipe—were utterly ignorant of the literature of their own language, told their daughters never to speak a word of Gaelic, and sent their sons to Eton and Harrow that

they might with all speed forget the language they had sucked in with their mothers' milk, make their ears incapable of enjoying the music that had stirred the heroism of a hundred fights, and learn to look on their Highland estates as unkindly solitudes fitted only for rearing mutton to line the stomachs of Edinburgh lawyers and Glasgow tradesmen. These things being so, the practical question remains, how far that portion of the Highland people who, under such a press of discouraging influences, have remained faithful to their old traditions, and still feel the force of their old aspirations, may hope to assert themselves, and carry out to a certain extent the ideal of a genuine Highland education for Highlanders, such as I have endeavoured to set before you. The practical means by which this may be done will be various, according to circumstances. I will mention only two that strike me as peculiarly worthy of support and imitation. The first is that the Highlanders of the present day, if they wish to assert themselves in the face of the flood of ignorance, indifference, and prejudice with which they are constantly confronted, must make it a point of honour to support an organ in the public press where their case may be truly stated and their cause ably advocated; and I need not say that the necessary organ has been provided for them, in a way powerful and prosperous beyond expectation, in the *Ard Albannach* of Mr John Murdoch. I am very far, of course, from wishing to connect myself as an individual with some of Mr Murdoch's doctrines, or advising the Highlanders to connect themselves wholesale to his political, ecclesiastical, or economical guidance. He may have made rash statements, and vented perilous speculations occasionally, but what editor has not? But, as a friend of the Highlanders, I consider myself bound to support *The Ard-Albannach*. Next I advise you to follow the noble example of Mr Mackay of Swansea, who has organised a system of schoolstimulus and encouragement in his native parish of Rogart, the spirit and details of which are worthy of imitation in every parish of the Highlands. But the fact is that whatever means may be thought advisable, according to circumstances, for asserting the Celtic element in Highland parishes as its comparative predominance may require, no means can be of any value, and no machinery will produce any substantial result, unless the people really wish to be Highlanders, and not only wish, but are determined to be so. How much Celtic fire may still stir the veins of the Trans-Grampian people, notwithstanding the long process of depletion to which they have been subjected, I cannot tell. I am only a spectator and a Saxon, anxious, no doubt, that the noble species of the Briton—called Highlander—shall not be extinguished from our glens, but utterly unable to say how far it may be prudent or possible for him to attempt resistance to the dispeopling and depopularizing influences that are everywhere forced so violently upon him. If the lion is not sick, let him roar; if he does not roar I shall conclude that he is either dead or dying. And, if he does die, I shall, of course, drop a few tears over his grave, and console myself in Stoical fashion, by saying that I knew that I had loved a mortal; but if he be indeed sick and ready to die, I am not at all prepared in anywise to rush in with officious polypharmacy to save him. The man who wishes to die is more than half dead already; and the sooner he dies the better, both for the living, with whom he cannot act, and for the dead, to whom he is most akin.