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## Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for September 13th, 2024

### Electric Scotland News

Labour show their true colours

By Joseph Dinnage, Deputy Editor, CapX

Being in government must be terrifying. After spending years campaigning from the opposition benches armed with playground insults for the Prime Minister, you're suddenly thrust into a position where you actually have to start leading. This is the predicament Keir Starmer now finds himself in.

Talking to fellow travellers on the centre-right in the build up to the election, there was some cautious excitement about Starmer's plan. After 14 years of failing to boost long-term economic growth rates, the Tories' fate was sealed, and many were happy to let Labour have a crack at taking on our chronic issues.

Who could blame them? For a good while, a Starmer government seemed like a tolerable prospect. Where the Tories failed to, he promised planning reform to get homes built – dismantling a major barrier to our growth. He also purged his party of its lunatic fringe, taking on the Corbynite elements who made Labour unelectable for so long. On the NHS, his then shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting was clear about his willingness to use private capacity to reduce waiting lists. He even castigated 'middle-class lefties' for putting ideology before patient care.

Exciting stuff. But now they're in power, Labour aren't being quite as bold as they promised. That's because delivering on a radical package of reforms requires a genuinely changed party with changed instincts.

Getting the economy growing was a key feature of Labour's electoral offering. 'Growth, growth, growth' remains the mantra offered by Starmer. Yet while the Government's ambitions for planning reform are certainly welcome (although not perfect), they risk undermining their mission in a number of other areas.

Take energy policy, for example. As my colleague Dillon Smith wrote in CapX this week, if Britain wants to maintain a competitive edge in the global economy, there is no doubt that we will have to decarbonise. However, Labour's instinctive statism isn't going to make this easy. To get the cheap energy we need, the private sector has to be brought on board – investors need confidence that the state will allow markets to operate independently. By pushing ahead with plans such as the extra windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas, Labour are giving the opposite signal. This is without even mentioning the creation of the £8bn super quango that is GB Energy.

Fine. Labour might have surrendered to their baser instincts on energy, but surely they recognise the importance of public sector productivity in achieving growth? Not so fast. Despite all of Wes Streeting's guff about reforming the NHS, the major health-related headline of Labour's short time in government has been their offer of a 22% pay rise over two years for junior doctors. The train drivers have got their fair share too, receiving an inflation-busting 14% pay rise over three years backdated from 2022. Yet they still have the brass neck to go on strike!

All of this comes against a backdrop of historically stagnant public sector productivity. Figures from the ONS show that it is now marginally lower than it was in 1997. Yet with Labour's recent handouts have come no obligations to boost outputs. This makes no sense and only adds to the impression that the Government is abandoning growth.

Whether it's tampering with energy markets or genuflecting to trade unions, Labour have proven that when they are confronted by Britain's problems, they still pull the same old levers. While I don't doubt that the transition from opposition to government is a daunting one, for Labour to show their true colours so quickly has been a depressingly predictable spectacle.

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Message from the Governor General on Firefighters' National Memorial Day  
September 8, 2024

On this Firefighters' National Memorial Day, we reflect on the selfless courage of those firefighters who died carrying out their duties.

Whether battling the worst wildfires in our history or responding to emergencies within urban or rural settings, firefighters epitomize bravery and self-sacrifice.

They brave unimaginable situations to keep our communities and our environments safe. And even after they return home, many suffer from physical or mental wounds.

Last month, I visited the Wolfville Fire Hall in Nova Scotia, where I thanked firefighters for their efforts during the recent flash flooding. Whenever I spend time with firefighters, I am struck by their humility, given the weight of their responsibility, and by how wholeheartedly firefighter families support each other.

On behalf of all Canadians, I thank all firefighters for answering the call to service.

To families who have lost a loved one in the line of duty: we will honour their memory with you. Their courage will continue to inspire us.

Mary Simon

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MyHeritage has just acquired MesAieux.com, a popular family history service that specializes in French Canadian genealogy.

Founded in 2004, MesAieux.com has grown to become Quebec's most popular family history service, with over one million users. The website offers an online family tree builder with automated features to add ancestors, and is also home to approximately 15 million historical records from Canada, primarily from Quebec, and several exclusive collections.

As a MyHeritage company, MesAieux.com will soon benefit from MyHeritage's resources and technological expertise, which will facilitate the publication of new historical record collections and provide greater value to MesAieux.com users, who will be introduced to the wide array of MyHeritage services. All historical record content from MesAieux.com will soon be published on MyHeritage, and its users will benefit from the capabilities of MyHeritage's innovative tree-to-tree and tree-to-record matching technologies.

## Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

I am partly doing this to build an archive of modern news from and about Scotland and world news stories that can affect Scotland and as all the newsletters are archived and also indexed on search engines it becomes a good resource. I might also add that in a number of newspapers you will find many comments which can be just as interesting as the news story itself and of course you can also add your own comments if you wish which I do myself from time to time.

Here is what caught my eye this week...

Parliament chef who served 13 prime ministers retires after 50 years  
Terry Wiggins, a chef who leads the catering team at Westminster's Portcullis House, is retiring this month after 50 years. He reckons he has served 13 prime ministers in that time and is still dreaming up new recipes.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3vx0wyl6e3o>

Stonehenge came from Scotland but not Orkney say experts in surprise update  
Scientists have shared a shock new update about the Altar Stone from the legendary Stonehenge site, revealing that it came from Scotland but not Orkney as previously thought.

Read more at:

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/scotland-now/stonehenge-came-scotland-not-orkney-33611993>

Conrad Black: The true threat to democracy - the left  
Trump, Meloni, and Le Pen are the West's best defenders

Read more at:

<https://archive.is/ceNfM#selection-2099.0-2099.55>

Reckless: Scottish Government accused of quietly cutting 1,100 nursing roles  
More than 1,100 nursing and midwifery jobs have been cut this year despite Scottish Government promises not to reduce frontline health staff, we can reveal.

Read more at:

<https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/reckless-government-accused-of-quietly-cutting-1100-nursing-roles/>

The Tragically Hip: The small-town band that united Canada  
A new documentary series premiering at TIFF explores the legacy of the group adored by millions of Canadians but largely unknown to the rest of the world.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20240905-the-tragically-hip-the-smalltown-band-that-united-canada>

Scotland's offbeat world championship of stone skimming  
Not all rock stars play guitars: every September, the Hebridean island of Easdale plays host to the world's most fanatical stone skimmers.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20240905-scotlands-offbeat-world-championship-of-stone-skimming>

Reform neck-and-neck with Tories in key part of UK in dramatic poll surge for Nigel Farage  
Nigel Farage's Reform UK party has surged in support north of the border, sparking panic among Scottish

Tories.

Read more at:

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1946992/Reform-Scotland-Nigel-Farage-poll>

Scotland's only oil refinery confirmed to close next year  
Scotland's only oil refinery is to close by the summer of next year, with the loss of 400 jobs.

Read more at:

<https://news.stv.tv/east-central/around-400-jobs-to-be-lost-as-grangemouth-refinery-to-close-in-2025>

An SNP MSP has told STV News that she has found a potential buyer for Scotland's last oil refinery who could save all 400 slated to be axed.

Michelle Thomson said a North American company, which she said she could not name after signing a non-disclosure agreement, has expressed interest in buying Grangemouth

Read more at:

<https://news.stv.tv/east-central/falkirk-msp-finds-potential-buyer-for-grangemouth-oil-refinery-who-would-save-all-jobs>

Scottish alcohol deaths at 15-year high

The number of people in Scotland whose death was caused by alcohol remains at a high level, with the largest number of deaths in 15 years.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvg5233gn67o>

## Electric Canadian

Pen and Pencil Sketches of Wentworth Landmarks

A series of articles descriptive of quaint places and interesting localities in the surrounding county (1897) (pdf)

You can read this at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/wentworth02.pdf>

Our North Land

Being a full account of the Canadian North-West and Hudson's Bay route by Charles R. Tuttle (1885) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/canada/ournorthlandbei00tuttgoog.pdf>

The Eagle

Rupert's Land College Magazine

You can read this at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/alberta/eagle.htm>

Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto

A collection of historical sketches of the old town of York, from 1792 until 1837, and of Toronto from 1834 to 1908 by John Ross Robertson in 6 volumes. Added this to the foot of our page about John Ross Robertson.

You can get to this at:

[http://www.electriccanadian.com/makers/robertson\\_johnross.htm](http://www.electriccanadian.com/makers/robertson_johnross.htm)

Royal Military College of Canada

Added the 1962 edition which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/forces/royalmilitarycollege.htm>

John Bethune

By Rev. James MacKenzie (1971) (pdf)

You can read about him at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/Religion/johnbethune00mack.pdf>

Researcher defends residential schools

Courtesy CBC, Richard Foot, National Post, March 17, 2001

You can read this article at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/residentialschools.htm>

We're Expanding the sheep business!!

A video from a farm in Ontario which I've added to the foot of our page on Sheep in Canada

You can watch this at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/agriculture/sheep.htm>

Thoughts on a Sunday Morning - the 8th day of September - Identity

By the Rev. Nola Crewe

You can watch this at:

<http://www.electricscotland.org/forum/communities/rev-nola-crewe/26535-thoughts-on-a-sunday-morning-the-8th-day-of-september-identity>

The Beaver Magazine

Added Volume 2 No. 4 (pdf)

You can read this issue at:

[http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/hudsonbay/beaver2\\_4.pdf](http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/hudsonbay/beaver2_4.pdf)

## Electric Scotland

Selections from the records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen  
Presented by Lord Francis Egerton (1846) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/aberdeen/recordskirksessi00unknuoft.pdf>

Rethinking Scottish origins

Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Scottish History, 12 November 2013 by Dauvit Broun (pdf)

You can read this at:

[https://electricScotland.com/history/Rethinking\\_Scottish\\_origins\\_Inaugural\\_Le.pdf](https://electricScotland.com/history/Rethinking_Scottish_origins_Inaugural_Le.pdf)

Scotland's Churches AD 1000-1600  
With Adam Cumming FSAScot

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/bible/scotlands-churches.htm>

Quotation & Picture Series

Scotland, edited by J. B. Reynolds, B.A. (1915) (pdf)

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/poetry/scotland00reyn.pdf>

Scotch Folk

Third Edition enlarged (1881) (pdf)

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/poetry/scotchfolk00folkgoog.pdf>

A critical analysis of Dr Ewan Campbell's paper "Were the Scots Irish?"

By Bridget Brennan (pdf) Added this to the foot of the page of Dr. Ewan Campbell's paper at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/articles/scotsirish.htm>

The Life and Work of Sir Jagadis C. Bose, M.A., D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S., C.I.E., C.S.I.

Emeritus Professor, Presidency College, Calcutta, Director of the Bose Research Institute by Patrick Geddes, Late Professor of Botany (I Niv. Coll., Dundee) St. Andrews University, and Professor of Sociology and Civics, University of Bombay (1920) (pdf)

You can read about him at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/india/Sir-Jagadis-C-Bose.pdf>

Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Bethune

By her son, the Rev. George W. Bethune, D.D., with an appendix containing extracts from the writings of Mrs. Bethune (1863) (pdf)

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/nation/memoirsofmrsjoan00beth.pdf>

Annual Sermon before the American Seamen's Friend Society

At its Seventy-Sixth Anniversary, Sunday, May 8, 1904, by the Rev. Donald Sage MacKay, D.D. (1904) (pdf)

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/america/annualsermonbefo00mack.pdf>

Flavours of Pictish life

Using starch grains and phytoliths to trace late Roman and early medieval culinary traditions (pdf)

You can read this at:

[https://electricScotland.com/history/Flavours-of-Pictish-life--using-starch-grains-and-ph\\_2024\\_Journal-of-Archaeo.pdf](https://electricScotland.com/history/Flavours-of-Pictish-life--using-starch-grains-and-ph_2024_Journal-of-Archaeo.pdf)

Was the Stonehenge Altar Stone from Orkney?

Investigating the mineralogy and geochemistry of Orcadian Old Red sandstones and Neolithic circle

monuments (pdf)

You can read this article at:

[https://electricScotland.com/stones/Was-the-Stonehenge-Altar-Stone-from-Orkney--Investigati\\_2024\\_Journal-of-Arch.pdf](https://electricScotland.com/stones/Was-the-Stonehenge-Altar-Stone-from-Orkney--Investigati_2024_Journal-of-Arch.pdf)

Scots digital powerhouse plans centre on financial assets doubling to £1 trillion by 2030. An article by Bill Magee.

Those folks hopeful of the eventual issuing of a Scots pound are having to curb their enthusiasm. Instead they are keeping an eagle eye on another monetary issue with global implications involving both sides of the Pond.

You can read this at:

<https://electricScotland.com/magee/article0016.htm>

Duncan, Gordon

The most innovative and influential piper of his generation with video

You can learn about him at:

[https://electricScotland.com/history/other/duncan\\_gordon.htm](https://electricScotland.com/history/other/duncan_gordon.htm)

John D. Burgess Full Piping Documentary

This is a full piping documentary about the late great piper John D. Burgess with video!

You can learn about him at:

[https://electricScotland.com/history/other/burgess\\_john.htm](https://electricScotland.com/history/other/burgess_john.htm)

Grandfather Mountain Highland Games 2024

Clan MacLeod produced a video of their visit to this Highland Games and I've added it to the foot of our Clan MacLeod history page at:

<https://electricScotland.com/webclans/m/macleod2.html>

MacLean, Calum Iain

Pioneering fieldworkers of the School of Scottish Studies.

You can read this article at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/other/maclean-calum-iain.htm>

The Emigrant's Directory and Guide

To obtain lands and effect a settlement in the Canadas by Francis A. Evans, Esq., Late Agent for the Eastern Townships to the legislature of Lower Canada (1833) (pdf)

You can read this guide at:

<https://electricScotland.com/history/articles/emigrantsdirecto00evan.pdf>

Story

HIGHLAND MEDICAL LORE  
(Compiled from several sources)

I.—Medical Learning in the Highlands In Olden Times.

The legends of the Gael, says Professor Mackinnon, like those of other nations, credit their heroes, among other accomplishments, with a knowledge of medicine. In old Gaelic tales, cures which far transcend the most brilliant achievements of modern science are recorded with all the circumstantiality and picturesqueness characteristic of the Celt. The Gaelic hero, Fionn, possesses a magic cup or cuach, the contents of which can cure all manner of disease. Accordingly, when James Macpherson makes his Fingal a physician as well as a warrior, with a knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs second only to Agamede, that able man merely put in stately language what legend and tradition uniformly assert regarding the heroes of the race:—

The art of closing wounds is mine;  
Of every flower in wood or glen  
I have plucked the ripe heads on the hill,  
As they bent before me by the stream  
Under the rocky peaks of secret winds.  
—Temora, viii. 320.

It would appear that the early Gaelic missionaries made themselves more or less conversant with the medical knowledge of their day, and that people flocked to the monastery for the cure of bodily ailments as well as for spiritual consolation. Adamnan tells us, e.g. that one day Columba, hearing some one shout across the sound of Iona, spoke in this wise:—“That man is much to be pitied for he is coming here to us to ask some cure for the disease of his body; but it were better for him this day to do true penance for his sins, for at the close of this week he shall die.” The incident, it will be observed, is recorded in proof, not of the medical skill of the monks of Iona, but of the prophetic gifts of St. Columba.

But among the mediaeval Gael, in the Highlands of Scotland as in Ireland, there were

#### REGULAR MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

who devoted themselves to their profession. These men left behind them a large quantity of manuscript written in their own Gaelic tongue, a considerable remnant of which is still preserved, chiefly in the great libraries of Dublin, London, Oxford, and Edinburgh. Twenty years ago Dr. Norman Moore, of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, read eight manuscripts of this class which are in the British Museum, and printed an account of them in the Bartholomew Hospital Reports for 1875. Dr. Moore finds that the larger portion of the documents which he examined is a translation or version of the principal medical works of antiquity and the middle ages, especially of Bernard de Gordon of Montpellier, Galterus, and Philanetus; and fragments of abstracts of Isodorus, Averroes, Hippocrates, Galen, Aristotle, and others. He has been able to trace and identify the originals of several of these manuscripts, and the others he concludes, with reason, to be of the same character.

Our Scottish collection is peculiarly rich in literature of this class, about one-third of our old Gaelic manuscripts being medical or quasimedical in whole or in part. In addition to those in the Advocates' Library collection, there is a large paper folio of nearly 700 pages in the library of the Society of Scottish Antiquaries in Edinburgh, an interesting volume in the University of Edinburgh (Laing collection, No. 21), and three vellums, one of them of great value, in Prof. MacKinnon's possession. There may be others lying in neglected corners. Ninety-five years ago Dr. Donald Smith, a physician and well-known Gaelic scholar, examined the two or three medical manuscripts at the time in the Scottish collection. I am not aware that any other medical man of modern times has read one of these documents. The greater number of them belong to the Kilbride collection. The late Mr. Skene and Dr. M'Lauchlan of Edinburgh both looked through some of them, but I do not know another Scottish scholar who has read any of them. Like all old Gaelic writings, especially those dealing with technical subjects, these manuscripts abound in contractions; and my knowledge of medical literature is not, I regret to say, sufficient to enable me on all occasions to get behind these contractions. Still I can assert with confidence that the manuscripts in the Scottish collection are the same in general character with those in the British Museum so well described by Dr. Moore, ours being more voluminous and of greater variety in form and subject matter.



A considerable portion of this literature consists of scattered leaves of parchment or paper loosely stitched together. Other MSS. contain elaborately and apparently complete treatises, written out with great care and skill. Some are large folios, others tiny volumes. The contents present great diversity, and in one way or another may be said to cover the whole field of

## MEDIEVAL MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

and practice. There are separate tractates on special subjects. In MS. xviii., e g., is a chapter headed "Do tsalchar an croicinn" (On Disease of the Skin). In the University MS., again, is a tract, evidently pretty exhaustive, on Urine. Other treatises are of a more general character. MS. xii., e.g. it contains chapters on Anatomy and Natural History. MS. xxv., the contents of which are religious and ecclesiastical, has for covering a piece of skin which at one time formed part of a treatise on Foods, Fishes, and what not. Here and there one comes upon a chapter headed "De Sensibus," evidently a translation of abstract of a Latin version of the De Anima of Aristotle. In Pharmacy a most valuable manuscript is one in my own possession. It is unfortunately incomplete; but, as it stands, the MS. consists of thirteen leaves quarto size, closely but clearly written, abounding in contractions, and to a layman rather obscure. Here is given, in alphabetical order, an exhaustive list of plants, trees, &c., with the therapeutic properties of each. The manuscript was at one time a full and complete pharmacopoeia. The name of the tree or plant is given in Latin and Gaelic, the explanation and comment in Gaelic only. Two small fragments of a similar treatise were printed by Dr. Whiteley Stokes in the Itevue Critique (vol. ix. p. 224), in a paper entitled "On the Materia Medica of the Mediaeval Irish." Occasionally an elaborate work, carrying one over the whole field of medical practice, is met with. Such is the

### Lilium Medicine

(as the author, following the fashion of the day, calls his book) of Bernardus de Gordon, Professor of Medicine in Montpellier in the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries. The Lilium was written in 1303, and at once obtained a wide celebrity. It was translated into Gaelic among other European languages. A copy in the British Museum was translated or transcribed in the year 1842, and afterwards bought by Gerald, Earl of Kildare, for twenty cows. In the year 1874 the Rev. Donald Macqueen, minister of Kilmuir, in Skye, sent a copy of a Gaelic translation of the Lilium to the Society of Scottish Antiquaries, in whose library it now lies. A memorandmm states that this book was, five generations previously, the property of "Farchar Beaton of Husibost," in Skye, who held the book of such value "that when he trusted himself to a boat in passing an arm of the sea to attend any patient at Dunvegan, the seat of Macleod, he sent his servant by land for the greater security of the Lilium Medicinum. The writer adds that the cost of transcribing a copy of the Lilium was sixty milch cows. The volume in the Antiquarian Library is a paper MS., folio size. The text covers 676 pages. Then follow tables of prescriptions according to the practice of the various schools, and afterwards those favoured by Bernard de Gordon himself.

Among the medical MSS. must be placed

### A TINY VELLUM,

forming No. iv. of the Advocates' Library collection. The volume measures only 2½ inches by 1½ by 1½. It is bound in a stoutish cover, and fastened with a thong and button. The contents are somewhat miscellaneous. The first twenty-four folios, e.g. consist mainly of prayers, psalms, and hymns in Latin. This portion is beautifully written, with capitals daubed over in red and yellow. Then follow two blank pages, on which memoranda were written at a subsequent date. On folio 26 the subject proper commences. It. may be described as an attempt to fix the position of medicine in relation to divinity and philosophy on the one hand, and on the other to physics, astronomy or rather astrology. The treatise opens with a pregnant sentence from Galen, "Quern scientia vivificat non moritur," which the writer translates into Gaelic and explains, The author adds, "And because God is the Creator of us all, it is of Him we ought to speak first of all, and the attempt shall here be made." Paragraphs on God, the Firmament, the Sphere, Substance, &c., follow; after which some short chapters dealing with the

speculations of the Schoolmen, Thomas Aquinas and others. The volume closes with a discussion of the relation between the soul and the body; a description of the members of the body, their functions, ailment, and cure. In other manuscripts — MSS. ii., xxxiii., the University MS., &c.— carefully prepared calendars are found, with marginal notes on several of them, as to the foods and drinks proper for the various seasons, blood-letting, and other observations of a quasimedical character. Separate treatises, containing a description of the planets, the zodiac, and the influence of the heavenly bodies upon the life and health of the man, are also to be found in the same MSS. as well as in others.

Little is known regarding the lives and fortunes of the authors, or, to speak more correctly, the translators and transcribers of these documents. We have still less information as to how these Gaelic physicians received their professional education, about the things they used, where they purchased them, or how they prepared them. In the Celtic polity offices of learning and skill were, or tended to become, hereditary. Among the Gaels the social unit was the tribe, fine, or clan. The headship of the tribe was, as to family, hereditary; as to the individual, it was in theory elective, though in actual practice the heir in line was rarely passed over. The

## ORGANISATION OF THE GAELIC CHURCH

was modelled on the tribal system. The founder of a monastery became its first abbot, and the office remained in the family from which the founder sprung as long as there was a person qualified to occupy it. It was not patronage; it was nepotism of the most exclusive character. In accordance with this practice, the first ten abbots of Iona were, with one single exception, near relations of the founder Columba. The arrangement which appears to us so inept, worked in practice tolerably well, and pervaded all departments of administration. In Ireland the O'Clerys, the MacEgans, the Donleys were historians, lawyers, and physicians for many generations. When Macdonald of the Isles was in the plenitude of his power, Macphee of Colonsay kept the records of the Isles, and Mackinnon of Mull and Skye had charge of the weights and measures. In accordance with the same custom, a family of MacEwans were historians and poets attached to the Campbells of Glenurchy, while the

## M'VURICHS OF SOUTH UIST

were for eighteen generations Manachies and bards of Clanranald. It would appear that the practice of medicine in the West Highlands of Scotland descended in like manner from father to son; and though genius is not always hereditary, men of talent did practice with success in these parts the craft of the bard and the leech under these anomalous conditions.

## II.—Medical Learning In the Highlands In Olden Times.

Among the medical practitioners whose names are preserved, continues Professor Mackinnon, were the M'Conachers of Lorn. It would also appear that a family of Macleans practised medicine in the Isle of Skye, a member of which was living when Pennant visited those parts.

In his "Sketches of Early Scottish History" Cosmo Innes mentions that very early in the sixteenth century Dr MacGonnacher was called from Argyllshire to Rome to attend the family of the third son of the Earl of Argyll; and in 1530 John MacConche, or MacConchr, designated of Stronecormik, pays to "my Lord" forty merks "for ye grassum of ye office of chirurgeon." According to the tradition of the country, the MacConnachers were men of position and consideration, being proprietors of the lands of Ardorain, near Oban. Mr. MacNicol, of Lismore, the author of the spirited reply to Dr. Samuel Johnson, states that a member of the family "wrote all his prescriptions in Gaelic, and his manuscript has been seen by many men still alive in this country." Mr. MacConnacher's manuscript, so far as I can judge, has not yet found its way to the Scottish collection.

But the men who wrote or transcribed the greater number of the medical manuscripts in the Scottish collection, and whose names appear on the margins and blank spaces of a number of them, belonged to a family, or

perhaps two families, which attained to celebrity in Islay, Mull, and Skye, and went by the name of M'Bheath in Islay, Latinised to Beaton at a later date in Mull. The Skye physicians wrote their name Bethune, sometimes also Beaton. The Skye family claim descent from a Dr. Peter Bethune, son of Archibald Bethune of Pitlochry, son of John Bethune of Balfour, uncle of Cardinal Beaton. A lady of this family married in the last century the Rev. Thomas White, minister of Liberton, near Edinburgh, and brought among other things to her husband a MS. history of the Bethunes of Skye, which Mr. White revised and printed in the year 1778. According to this pamphlet, Dr. Peter Bethune aforesaid, "being a famous physician, was called to Argyllshire to practice his skill there, and from thence received an invitation to the Isle of Skye from the lairds of Macdonald and Macleod." The doctor was promised as much land as he inclined to possess, rent free. It was further arranged that one of his descendants, by preference the eldest son, should be educated as a physician, but without any expense to Dr. Peter or his successors. Dr. Bethune married and had a family, the members of which were prudent and prospered. His descendants became clergymen, soldiers, and tacksmen in Skye and elsewhere. More especially they practised medicine in Skye for many generations, and to them certainly belonged the translation of the *Lilium Medicin*® now in the library of Scottish Antiquaries, and at least one other MS. (No. ii. of the Advocates' Library collection).

The physician of Islay and Mull were a much older family, and claim for themselves quite a different origin. Piecing together what may be regarded as well-founded tradition, stray notices in inscription, records, charters, and genealogical tables, the story of this remarkable family is somewhat as follows:—Among the twenty-four sons of clan families who came from Ireland in the train of the daughter of O'Cathan, when she married Angus Og of the Isles, the staunch friend of Bruce, was Beath, whose pedigree is traced in the Laing MS. to Neil of the nine hostages, monarch of Ireland. The administration of the M'Donalds included the office of Chief Physician to the Isles, which was richly endowed and established in the family of this Beath. When that great house fell, and Islay became the property of Campbell of Cawdor, Fergus M'Beath was holder of this office. He was evidently a man of consequence and consideration. He had sufficient influence to obtain from King James VI. a Crown charter confirming him in his office and in the lands and privileges belonging to it. This most valuable document has fortunately been preserved, and is printed for the first time in the Book of Islay. The charter is dated 1609, and from it we learn that the family of Fergus held their lands from M'Donald hereditary from "beyond memory of man"; that apart from other privileges and casualties pertaining to his office, the Chief Physician of the Isles possessed the lands of "Ballenade, Areset, Howe, and Saligo." It would appear that Fergus was the last physician of the Isles. Under the new regime in Islay there seemed to be no need for such an officer. Fergus died in 1627 or 1628. His son John succeeded to the lands, and disposed of them to Lord Lorne in the year 1629. With this transaction the Islay branch of the family disappears. Some of them may have followed their patrons the M'Donalds to the north of Ireland, from whence several of these MSS. appear to have come to the Scottish collection. One comes here and there upon entries by M'Beaths, dated from Donegal, Coleraine, and elsewhere.

Members of the same family settled in Mull as physicians to M'Lean of Duart, who himself held lands in Islay, and was connected with the M'Donalds by inter-marriage. The Laing MS. at one time belonged to Fergus M'Veagh, who lived at "Peanygros" — without doubt Pennycross in Mull, where the ruins of the Mull doctor's house are still pointed out. A distinguished member of the Mull branch of the family, John Beaton, died in 1629, and was buried in Iona, as the inscription upon his tomb, erected by Donald Beaton in 1674, bears. Fergus Beaton, a member of this family, practised in South Uist, when Martin made his tour of the Western Isles in the end of the seventeenth century. Martin states that this man had in his possession the following ancient Irish MSS. in the Irish character—to wit "Avicenna, Averroes, Jaonnes de Vigo, Bernardus, Gordonus, and several volumes of Hippocrates," some of which are without doubt in the Scottish collection now.

Among the many traditions regarding these distinguished men which float about Islay and the neighbourhood is a persistent one to the effect that on one occasion the Islay doctor of the day was summoned to the Court to prescribe for the King of Scotland. The story goes that the Court physicians attempted by an unworthy device to baffle the country doctor when diagnosing the case. But in vain. As an old Gaelic verse puts it:—

An urgent message came from the king,  
Saying that he was at death's door,  
Their wiles were of no avail,  
To cheat you was beyond their power.

According to the tradition, the Islay doctor succeeded where the Court physicians failed. I know of no historical data to prove that any of these men ever attended a king of Scotland. But there is nothing improbable in the matter; rather the contrary. The King, according to the tradition, suffered from gravel, and their writings show that the Gaelic physicians devoted great attention to this and kindred disorders. And it is on record that, in 1379, Prince Alexander Stewart granted to Ferchard, the King's physician, the lands of Melness and Hope, in Sutherland; and, in 1386, King Robert II. granted to the same Ferchard Leche, in heritage, all the islands from Rhu Stoer, in Assynt, to Armadale Head, in Farr. In 1511 Donald M'Donachy M'Corrachie, "decendit frae Farquhar Leiche" resigned Melness, Hope, and all his lands in Stratbnaver to M'Kay. The writer of the old Statistical Account for the parish of Eddrachillis adds that this Ferchard was "Ferchard Beton, a native of Islay, and a famous physician." The Islay tradition would thus appear to be based upon historical fact.

In Mr. White's history of the Bethunes of Skye it is stated that Dr. Angus Bethune, a distinguished member of that family, wrote a system of physic entitled the 'Lily of Medicine,' which he finished at the foot of Montpellier, after he had studied physic for twentyeight years. This is, of course, nonsense. The 'Lily' is Bernardus de Gordon's treatise, which was written three hundred years, and translated into Gaelic at least one hundred years, before Dr. Angus was born. A few of the more distinguished of these physicians may have left their own land to study medicine. But it is probable that the Highland doctors like the Highland pipers, harpers, and bards, were educated at home or in Ireland. These men wrote in Latin and in Gaelic. One writes his name in Greek characters; but only in one MS., the Laing MS. in the University, is there any writing in English, and that is considerably later than the Latin and Gaelic texts. Their drugs were also very probably prepared by these men themselves. It is said that medicinal plants were grown by the Beatons in Mull, traces of which are or were recently met with. The tradition is still current in Skye, and the secluded spot still pointed out where Farquhar Bethune used to pound his medicines; and exceedingly jealous the good man was, by all accounts, of any who dared to approach him when engaged in these secret operations. Martin, himself a physician, speaks of a Neil Bethune, whom he knew personally, and whom he describes as an illiterate empiric, as being nevertheless an efficient herbalist and surgeon. But, as a matter of fact, little or nothing is known regarding the details of the practice of these distinguished men.

These writings, it need hardly be said, are of no scientific value now. Medical science has undergone a revolution since they were written. But the "Islay Doctor" and the "Mull Doctor" are household words in the southern Hebrides still; and traces of the teaching and influence of these men are recognisable in these parts to this day. The housewife of a past generation might be ignorant of books, but she had a considerable knowledge of simples and salves—a legacy, all believe, from these old physicians. In my native parish of Colonsay the belief has always been that consumption is not only hereditary—that it is infectious. I have been told that Hippocrates, among others, taught this dogma; and his name and word ever turn up in these Gaelic MSS. The teaching of the old Greek physician was transmitted to modern Highlanders through the M'Beaths of Islay. But although these documents and their authors have now been superseded, their historical and literary interest is surely great and fresh still. In hardly any part, even of the Highlands, the rival chiefs and clans fight with greater vigour or with more deadly effect than in Islay during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This phase of Highland life in the past we are all familiar with. But it is not so well known that for centuries there lived in this same island of Islay a Chief Physician of the Isles; that the office was highly endowed; that the men who held it, while knowing little or nothing of English, were conversant with the medical literature which circulated in Europe in their day; that the names of Galen, Hippocrates, Avicenna, Averroes, John of Damascus, Isodorus, Joannes de Forlivo, Joannes de Vigo, Barnardus de Gordon, and, as the writer of MSS. X., with pardonable exaggeration, puts it, a thousand others, were household words among them; that they translated the works of these men into their own Gaelic tongue, and multiplied copies of them, which they valued very highly; they, as early as the fourteenth century, their reputation as physicians was such that, in a grave emergency, one of their

number was summoned from Islay to attend the King of Scotland; and that a grateful monarch rewarded Farquhar the Leech right royally for his services. A chapter on the life and labours of these men might well find a place in the History of Scotland.

### III.—Medical Learning In the Highlands In Olden Times.

“We know very little of ancient Celtic pharmacy.” So sums up Logan in his “Scottish Gael”; and although he gives a goodly number of plants and other remedies which might have been used by the Highlanders, when one looks for his authority, it is found to be an almost one continuous reference to Pliny and his statements as to Gaelic medicine. How far these may be adopted as applicable to the Scottish Celt it is quite impossible to say; and as literature in general gives but little help, we must (writes Dr. Hugh E. Fraser, of Inverness, in the “Caledonian Medical Journal”) turn to tradition for possible enlightenment. In the Celtic nations, as in others, the rudimentary medicine man was first joined to the priest, and up to the Christian era, probably, his evolution proceeded no further. Thereafter he gradually became emancipated; but, since he was at no time scientific, it is not to be wondered at that, as knowledge advanced, he has slowly disappeared, and now is practically no more. Still, whatever is mysterious is always to the popular mind an object of reverence, and old beliefs die hard; so to-day we are able to find traces of what formerly was regarded as good medicine by former dwellers in these parts. In their search for remedies for disease, it would be surprising if they did not come across some of real value among the mass of substances — animal, vegetable, and mineral — collected together, differing according to various adventitious circumstances—locality, fashion, fancy of the physician, and the like.

With these preliminary considerations one may go on to look at the methods of cure, and these are naturally two — (1) subjective and (2) objective. In regard to the former, one could write volumes, including, as it does, the whole range of mysticism and superstition—charms and amulets, good and evil spirits. Accordingly, I must confine myself to the second method, as far as possible, if I am to put limits to a paper such as this.

Let us look in the first place, then, at the diseases known to the Highlanders, and thereafter at the remedies found to be of use. No fixed pathological ideas seem to have been possessed by them, but one can gather from writings, especially religious, that the prevailing hypothesis was that disease was a distinct entity — a power inhabiting the body, for evil in most cases, for good in some; in the former to be propitiated according as the fancy of the physician or patient might dictate; in the latter, to be allowed to run its course. Coming to details, one finds no proper classification of diseases owing to the want of a pathology, but diseases with well-marked morbid processes were naturally recognised easily. Thus, consumption, whooping-cough, epilepsy, colic, insanity, neuralgia, fevers, and surgical diseases received much attention from a therapeutic point of view, while obscurer diseases, as internal inflammations, cardiac and renal derangements, were treated according to their most prominent symptom — pain, dropsy, shortness of breath, as the case might be.

In earlier times material remedies were nonexistent, and ceremonial the prevailing mode of cure, but as observation succeeded dogma, a knowledge of the use and efficacy of remedial substances began to spread. The most simple of these would be the first used, and thus water was from the first held to be of great utility. It was used with varying rites, sometimes required to be brought from one place, sometimes another, sometimes used internally, sometimes externally, according to the prevailing idea of the time.

Of the use of herbs by the ancient Celts, Pliny gives numerous instances, e.g., hyssop for diseases of the eyes (xxiv., 9); samolus for diseases of cattle (Md.); and from Sir R. Hoare’s researches we learn that of surgery they were not altogether ignorant.

In the middle ages a school of medicine was established in the Western Isles, and of the native physicians, perhaps the most famous was Neil Beaton, or Bethune, of Skye, whose skill was such that, from the colour of the flower he was enabled to tell the nature of the remedy! Be this as it may, there is no doubt he attained great celebrity, holding in contempt the practice of his contemporaries, and striking out quite an original path. He died about 1780 (Martin, “Western Islands,” p. 198).

In more recent times we find herbs used for many diseases, and the following may serve as examples. The tops of nettles chopped small, and mixed with the white of an egg, is still used as a soporific, as also is a variety of heather — both in the form of poultices applied to the head. Wild garlic, infused and taken internally, was used for stone. Broom, juniper, and foxglove have been long known as remedies for dropsy, and, of course, in suitable cases, with good results. Foxglove is, in addition, in common use for many other diseases, the last I have come across being “the rose” — a term, in this part of the country at all events, apparently used to denote any erythematous condition of the skin, from simple erythema and eczema to true erysipelas. In this case, which was one of varicose eczema, the method was by direct application of the moistened leaves to the skin. Other vegetable remedies for “the rose” were decoctions of rosewood and leaves, with poultices of the leaves with fresh butter locally, and infusions of wild geranium and stone crop internally. Remedies other than vegetable were used for this disease, and among these we find the application of red cloth sprinkled with flour or alum, the use of which is common for all inflammatory conditions. Again, as the late Dr. Aitken, of the Inverness District Asylum, mentions (“Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness,” vol. xiv., p. 312), the power of individuals' to cure the disease, especially by a “line in Latin,” was firmly believed in.

The remedies for consumption were almost as numerous in the Highlands formerly as everywhere now, and I find that Dr. Masson, of the Edinburgh Gaelic Church, who has had more opportunities than most men, in his double role of qualified medical scientist and clergyman, of studying the subject, gives (*ibid.*, p. 298) a most interesting series of modes of treatment — all the more so as some of them are personal — for the cure of the “white lights,” an old Scottish name for tuberculous lungs. Nourishing foods and fat substances were found to be of great value—the oily drippings of snails, chopped up fine, and hung in a flannel bag in front of a fire, and marrow, being the forerunners of the now ubiquitous cod liver oil. Infusions of bitter herbs—gentian and taraxacum, for example—were given internally, and were no doubt of service in promoting digestion ; while chalybeate springs were much resorted to, especially in mild cases of this dire disease. Other remedies taken internally w’ere a jelly made from the scrapings of deer’s horns, decoctions of the black spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum nigrum*) of heather tops and of nettle roots.

Besides medicinal treatment, another method was in vogue — the mechanical — consisting in the forcible expansion of the lungs by drawing the lower ribs outwards with the hands lubricated with fresh butter, the operator standing behind the patient, who was seated in a chair before a fire. I came across a native of Stratherrick on whom a similar mode of treatment was carried out when he was a boy. In addition, in his case, the performer attempted raising the body by drawing upwards the clavicle and head, and this was supposed to be especially useful if headache were present. During treatment the patient was advised to drink as much milk as possible, and of especial value were the strippings of the cow considered. The milk of the goat, ass, or mare was highly thought of for the same disease. A point in diagnosis was the behaviour of the sputum when expectorated on to a plain surface: if it fell flat it was regarded as a pathognomonic sign, while if it broke and scattered, the disease was at all events not consumption.

For diseases commencing with chills sweating was a remedy in great favour, and to induce it a common method was the following:— A fire was lighted in the middle of the room, and the floor being earthen, heat was freely absorbed. When a short time had elapsed the fire was extinguished, and several layers of straw or hay placed on the warm ground. Over all a pail of water was poured, and the patient was placed on the wet straw and covered with blankets. Before long a copious perspiration broke out, resulting, as one can understand, in suitable cases, in a cure of the disease. For fever, a large red onion split in two, and hung, one half at an open window, and the other above the door, was thought useful in attracting the disease, as in a short time the onion assumed a soot-black colour.

Elongated uvula was considered a dangerous complaint, and therefore treated sometimes a little energetically, as, e.g., by the tip being snared off by a piece of cord passed through a quill. A more idealistic treatment was by means of pulling upwards a lock of hair from the crown of the head, or by holding the cheeks and neck of the patient as low as the larynx firmly by the hands, and raising them upwards. Again, a charm for the purpose of

keeping it up was a piece of the small red seaweed (altuinn dhearg) found in pools of water when the tide is out, tied with a piece of cord, and carried about the person of the patient. It had to be fathered by some other person, who said, while handing it over to the patient, "Ann an ainm an Athar, a' Mhic, agus an Spiroid Naoimh, air cioch-shlugain A.B." (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the uvula of A.B.)

In regard to diseases of the nervous system the Highlanders were inclined to attribute many of their manifestations to the working of evil spirits; and epilepsy, being an alarmingly sudden and generally striking disease, was looked on as the type of diseases due to malignant spirits, which were to be propitiated or exorcised, if that were possible. The following are a few of the means employed for its cure:— A black cock was taken reverently to the place where the person had been attacked for the first time, killed, and carefully buried, a series of incantations being repeated during the ceremony. Or, again, the parings of the finger or toe nails, carefully wrapped, along with a new sixpence, in a piece of paper, on which was written, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," were placed under the wing of the black cock, which was then taken backwards to the place where the patient had had the first fit, and buried alive by the oldest God-fearing man in the district, who had to watch all night thereafter by a fire, which must not be let out.

Drinking out of a suicide's skull, a mode of treatment common to many localities, is varied on the West Coast by giving the patient to drink the water with which a corpse has been washed. Bishops, and in some places all clergymen, were credited with the power of curing the disease, as also were persons who had been born breech or footling, which power was supposed to be sometimes transmitted in families.

Besides epilepsy, bishops were supposed to be able to cure insanity, which was a disease in which the person's heart was believed to be out of its proper position. In order to get it back, the following ceremony must be performed by some "wise" i.e. sane, person. Some melted lead, after the aid of the Trinity had been invoked, was poured into a wooden vessel containing water, which had been placed on the patient's head, and if any piece of the solidified lead at all resembled a heart, it was taken and turned round, with the result that the patient's heart returned to its place, and the disease was cured. The piece of lead was carefully preserved afterwards so as to prevent relapses.

This remedy of "casting the lead" is mentioned by the Rev. James Macdonald, Reay, ("Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness," vol. xix., p. 274), as being used in his district for the cure, among other diseases, of typhoid fever. The patient was given water to drink which had been drawn from a spring — not from a running stream — and which had been poured over the leaden heart, and recovery was confidently expected thereafter.

For the cure of toothache and neuralgias, spine-wort placed in a limpet shell and applied to the jaw, a poultice of red onions applied to the cheek, fly-blisters placed on the back of the neck and on both wrists, are common remedies in this district; while the following incantation for the same purpose is given by Dr. Aitken, who had it from an old inhabitant of Glen-Urquhart. It was repeated by some other person, and written on a piece of paper to be worn by the sufferer:—

"St Peter sat on a marble stone,  
Jesus Christ came to him alone,  
'Peter, what aileth thee to weep?'  
'My Lord and God, it is the toothache.'"

As it stands this is evidently incomplete, and Mr. Alex. Macbain ("Highland Monthly," vol. iii., p. 291), and Mr. William Mackenzie ("Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness," vol. xviii., p. 151), supply us with the complementary lines, which are:—

"Rise up, Peter, and not you alone,  
But everyone who in this charm doth have belief  
Will from the toothache never lack relief."

Mr. Mackenzie says the charm is common all over the Highlands, but, strange to say, rarely met with in Gaelic, probably, as Mr. Macbain suggests, due to the fact that few old Highlanders could write their native tongue. A Latin version is found in the Maclagan MSS. In the "Folk Lore Journal," 1st February, 1894, Mr. W. Pengelly, of Torquay, communicates the fact of this charm having been in use in Cornwall for the cure of toothache, which is of interest, as its inhabitants are of Celtic origin. Other incantations exist some of them implying a belief in the cause of the toothache being a worm eating into the tooth.

END

Weekend is almost here and hope it's a good one for you.

Alastair