

ALEXANDER MACDONALD, THE POET.

[By Rev. JOHN KENNEDY.]

ALEXANDER MACDONALD, or Mac Mhaighstir Alastair—the name by which he is popularly known—was born about the year 1700 A.D. He was the son of Rev. Alexander Macdonald, who was parish minister of Ardnamurchan before the Revolution, but who was deposed in 1697 for non-jurancy. Alexander was the second son of a large family, and, as was natural, his father meant him to follow in his own footsteps and become a preacher; but this proposal, on account of his own disinclination, or, some suppose, at the instigation of his chief, who wished him to study law, was not entertained. For some years he was a student of the Glasgow University, which held then, as still, a high educational position. What academical success attended his career is not recorded, or how long it continued; but the familiarity with the classics which is manifest in his poems proves that he had put the period to good account. At an early age he married Jane Macdonald of the family of Dail-an-Eas in Glenetive, and shortly afterwards settled down as teacher in his native parish—first in a small, then in the principal, school.

When the Highland Chiefs in 1745 rose in arms to support the claims of Charles Stuart, the poet's patriotism and loyalty found expression not merely in song, but in active deeds with the army under the younger Clanranald. He received a commission, but shared fully in all the disasters of that disastrous campaign, and finally lost all that he possessed. After the defeat of Culloden he had recourse to concealment amid the wilds of Arisaig and Moidart; but after the Indemnity Act was passed he received from Clanranald the appointment of land-steward of the Island of Canna.

In 1751 we find him in Edinburgh unsuccessfully in quest of a position as teacher; and in some respects like his more famous countryman and fellow-poet—Burns—returning home to obscurity and the ordinary routine of life, and residing at a place called Sandaig where "he died at a good old age, and was gathered to his fathers in Eilean Fionain in Loch-Shiel."

It is readily granted that Mac Mhaighstir Alastair was, with the exception of Ewen Maclachlan, the most learned of Gaelic bards: and, for that reason, the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge entrusted to him the compilation of the first Gaelic vocabulary—which was published in 1741. Ten years afterwards he published his own poems under the suggestive title, *Ais-eiridh na Seann Chanain Albannaich*—"The Resurrection of the Old Highland Language"—the first volume of Gaelic poetry given to the world. In this sense he was a great pioneer, and still holds the foremost place. His poems have been at least five times republished, but it is unfortunate that many of his metrical compositions have been lost.

All Macdonald's poems are lyric—the spontaneous outburst of a heart overflowing with emotion; and as it is not possible to arrange them in chronological order, except approximately according to internal evidence, the following classification may be accepted as at least convenient:—

I. Love Songs.

II. Patriotic and Jacobite Songs.

III. Descriptive Poems.

The book opens aptly with a song in praise of the old Gaelic language—a song from which quotations is still rife. Beginning broadly he assigns as the prerogative and purpose of all language to reveal and communicate thought and to praise God. He then particularises and reflects the belief of his time that Gaelic dates from the days of Eden.

" 'S i labhair Adhamh,
Ann am Pàrras féin
'S bu shiubhlach Gàilig
Bho bheul àluinn Eubh."

A contrast is then drawn between Gaelic and Latin, Greek and French, and pre-eminence attributed to the first—specially in satirical epithet and effect.

Then we have the bard's invocation to the Muses—not to the Malvina of Ossian or any Celtic ones, but to "the nine daughters of high Jove," who are individually and appropriately addressed. The material parentage of "mild Mnemosune" is not omitted. The whole picture indicates that the poet's classical training was

not in vain—all are asked to aid him in his undertaking. “Clio fair and firstborn,” “Urania of the golden keys,” “Calliope load-star of song,” “Euterpe rich in strains and ready to criticise,” “Erato, eloquent, source of song,” “Melpomene super-abundant font of inspiration,” “Terpsichore of woods and verse,” “Polyhymnia youngest and fairest,” “Thalia with nectar divine—favour my soul and lip with flowing song.” Nor does he forget Apollo, and Minerva—patron of poets, whose aid he pleads—and if vouchsafed, he doubts not of success.

So much by way of introduction. We come now to his

I. *Love Songs*—and first among them stands unrivalled “*Moladh Mhòraig*,” pronounced to be “one of the finest productions of the Celtic Muse.” The divisions of it are peculiar to Gaelic poetry. They are called “*Urlar*” and “*Siubhal*,” for which there are no corresponding terms in English. They seem to have been connected with bagpipe music, in which there are pauses and marches that are thus indicated. There is no discontinuity in thought, only in outward form—the effect of which is to enliven the composition.

He opens with a description of a wood, in which Morag is the central figure—bringing the Rosalind of Shakespeare to one’s recollection. Then comes a playful allusion to rival beauty, and a full portraiture of Morag. She has an eye like a blue-berry upon a dewy morn, cheeks coloured like the orange, and harplike harmony. As the sun among the stars, she is peerless among the maidens—a guiding star among the stars undimmed. Thus sings he, till he is lost in wonder and in the wood, and asks whether Morag can possibly be of earth. Then comes a contrast with others he had known, but she excels them all. Again he awakens with the dawn, and goes forth with Phoebus to find suitable emblems in the forest and among the roses. Venus and Dido help his song in praise of her whose teeth are as the driven snow. As an example of abundant, but yet not superfluous, epithet, the following may suffice :—

“ My heart is all but broken
 Since I saw thy golden locks,
 In twisted folds of beauty
 Curled and twirled
 In ringlets, folded o’er,

Wavy, glorious—
 In starry circles,
 As if with pearls adorned,
 Or powdered in fashion—
 Fair, sun-kissed, and golden hair."

The next that may be mentioned is "Morag" which, though in the guise of a love-song is really an invocation to Charles Stewart, who is represented as a young maiden with wavy locks of yellow hair—to return with a party of maidens—that is, with an army to crush the English force. After descanting on the personal qualities of Morag—of the Prince—he shows how many in the Highlands have fallen in love with her, and how ready they are to fall in her cause—not merely "to gain the bauble reputation at the cannon's mouth," but out of pure devotion. Then follows an enumeration of the districts where such true and loyal men are to be found, all armed and prepared for action.

Another well-known and popular love-lyric is "Cuachag an Fhàsaich" in which the attractions of a dairymaid are set forth. Dairymaids are great favourites among the Gaels, and recall the time when they were a wholly pastoral race. All the incidents connected with such a life are fondly dwelt on—rising early to milk the kine, accompanying them to the hill or plain, returning at mid-day or milking-time, going in quest of them when the shades of evening begin to fall, and finally setting them up for the night. In all this we have a very touching and true picture of happiness.

Next we have a pretty lyric full of poetry in which the bard dwells on the charms of his wife. The language is very fine, but in some cases it is somewhat extravagant. He supposes that all the elements must have combined and exerted their utmost powers in order to produce her—their fairest work. She has the appearance of an angel, but withal a maiden's grace. He concludes by saying :—She is lively, wise, songful, and thrifty—the precious fair one whose hand is ever active.

II. We come now to the *Jacobite or Patriotic* songs. We have already seen that Macdonald was an ardent admirer of Prince Charles, and that all the ability and talent he possessed were freely used in support of the latter's claim. As is well known the Highland Clans rose as one man in favour of the Stewart, and against

the Hanoverian, line or dynasty. It was a time when feeling ran high, and when also it found convenient expression in song. It is hardly conceivable what influence one popular song exercises in such circumstances over a race capable of being deeply moved, and most enthusiastic when roused to action. The Scottish national song, "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," is a good instance and illustration of this—as is also the one now to be considered.

"The song of the Clans" is a spirited address to the respective Highland Clans to come forward, and to aid in placing Charles on the throne. All craven-hearted or half-hearted are bid stay at home as hinderers of the good cause and hamperers of the zeal and energy of the rest. Æolus will send a raging wind against the enemy, and Neptune will smooth the sea for the brave and loyal. The people are compared to a helpless brood—the mother gone—or a flock of gentle lambs at the mercy of the fox.

The Clans are individually described—their valour, fidelity, character, indicated. It may be condensed thus :—

The true Macdonalds with martial fire
The foe they shall level soon upon the heath,
The brave Campbells led by the great Argyll
Shall boldly face and fell the enemy ;
The warlike Macphersons with Cluny at their head
Blood shall freely shed by their dexterous lance.
The spirited Macleans their blades shall not let rust ;
The heroic Macleods shall win or die ;
The stalwart Camerons with lance like flash of lightning,
Head and heart and hand shall smash as against rocks ;
The ready Johnsons as burning heather under wind—
Or with horses dashing, fast as spark-enkindled powder.
The sure Mackenzies of Kintail, bold and strong
With true steel, tempered to fear no foe ;
The proud MacIntosh in order and in strength
Shall strike the oppressor to the ground,
The stately Grants as tiger bold and fierce
Shall lay many a struggling foeman low.
The Frasers of surpassing strength and skill—
Woe betide the man that feels their arm.
The bold McLauchlans with the poisoned arrows
In haste to front and feel the steel ;
The swift Mackinnons, skilled in war,
Shall dash as waves against the shore—

Thick shall be the dead upon the field—
 Food for greedy ravens and hungry carrion ;
 Sad shall be the moaning at early morn,
 But crowned with pomp shall be Prince Charlie.

In the same strain is the song "Health to Charlie," which health the bard would drink though death were in the cup. It discusses the characteristics of the Clans, and concludes with a hope that the much-loved Prince shall yet be crowned king—when waxen candles shall be lighted, every castle top illumined, and the jolly cup and cheer shall go round. The reference to candles of wax throws light on the customs of the Highlanders. Firwood cut into small pieces was then, and in some instances still is, their ordinary means of lighting their houses. The next stage in the illuminating process was that of tallow candles ; but these would be superseded by candles of wax on this joyous occasion.

Two songs to the Prince follow in which his prowess is described, and the effect his commanding presence had upon his loyal followers. Their pride and spirit would awaken as they sing—"He comes, he comes—the king we want ; let us be armed and clad in kilt." He predicts the doom of the *Red-coats* with their cockade, and he would gift the maiden—a machine for beheading criminals, still to be seen in the Museum of Antiquaries of Scotland—to the Duke of Cumberland. "But well, and welcome wherever he goes be the Prince."

The song of "The Year of Charles" is a spirited defence and exposition of the claims of the Stewart line. It is aptly set to the tune, "Let History Record," and is evidently intended to reflect and record the incidents of the period. It opens by drawing a gloomy picture of the state of things in the absence of the rightful Prince, but goes on to predict the commencement of a golden epoch in the year of Charles. It recalls and very closely resembles the glowing account given by Horace of the blessings of the reign of Augustus. The earth itself will rejoice and literally the winter of discontent will change into glorious summer by this son of hope. France is looked to with much expectation, and the time believed to be at hand when its wines will flow freely and cheer the heart. The clan bards—a guild well-known among the Celts—are charged to commemorate these events. The sun shines

more benignly, the dew descends more gently, milk and honey flow freely, and silver and gold are abundant. There is nothing to be hoped for from King George, but all from the rightful heir. It is interesting to notice how the poet vindicates the religion or Catholic persuasion of the Prince. He asks, if faith must be placed above everything, is it his fault that he was not educated according to Luther? But if that were the real difficulty and drawback, why should his great-grandfather (Charles I.) have been so ruthlessly put to death. He blames the fickleness of the people as the more likely reason. He looks upon King George as at best a step-father that cannot cherish or care for the Gaelic nation. He pleads for the return of the true father under the Father of all that they may no longer be hunted over mountains, rocks, and wastes.

Macdonald is believed to have had the honour of an interview with the Prince when the royal standard was unfurled at Glenfinnan, and to have recited the following song, "Charles son of James"—in which his loyalty finds expression thus:—"If I could walk beside thee, thy presence would so elate me, and my step would become so elastic, that I should almost fly betwixt earth and sky; and I should feel as if intoxicated with the joys of war.

(To be continued.)

long poem the bard sings. The inspiring power of this instrument is well-known, and has been all along admitted down to the present day—specially at Tel-el-kebir where its unwonted sound struck terror into the foe. It is questionable whether anyone has described its structure and effect with greater vividness than Macdonald has done ; though Duncan Bàn is certainly not far behind. It is quite impossible to render into English the numerous epithets which so happily hit the poet's meaning—a meaning set forth with great clearness and fulness. He shows the superiority of the national instrument over all others, from a warlike point of view. At the first outburst of its martial music hundreds of men startle into strength, all their dismay and misgiving depart, and their courage fails them no more. Their feats of arms are performed amid the play of sharp lances, while the chanter trills, and thrills the soul with its awakening and sweetly-sounding tones. He personifies the favourite pipe as with warlike aspect, and bent neck, and looking out at its windows, whence issue the heart-stirring notes that produce such admirable effect. "When thy hard voice is heard on high, Mars is aroused and soon gallops sky-ward on his red fleet-footed horse, brandishing his sword in his hand, and war-intoxicated in his movement. Then also the whole army feel the pulse of fight, and every man becomes lion-hearted, bent on blood and irresistible." The concluding comparison is that of a fair and faultless spouse void of jealousy, but full of joy, and giving joy to others. Such is this instrument of song when taken up and skillfully touched.

And as illustrative of the hospitality and social customs of the Highlanders, perhaps no more typical song can be selected than "Oran Rioghail a' Bhotail"—The Royal Ode to Whisky—in which are found many touches that resemble, and remind one of, Burns' John Barleycorn." It is set to the well-known tune, "Let us be jovial, fill our glasses," and begins characteristically enough—"Let us be jovial and drink a glass ; we are strangers to sorrow. Let us not think of misfortune as long as our cup is full. It is a prime article in the creed of Bacchus to believe thoroughly in whisky, and to continue drinking heartily till the head is somewhat disturbed."

Nor is the bard's loyalty long forgotten—"Let us fill our

glasses to the health of the absent James, and double health drink to Charlie. If there is a man who cannot let him depart hence." The virtues of whisky are then dilated upon. It makes the sad joyful, the miser liberal, and the coward brave till the foe is dispersed. It makes the silent full of speech, the dull man gay, the strong man gallant, and the timid daring. It makes a lover of the lorn and puts the itch of dancing in the heels that never danced before. It makes the inhospitable frank, the stern man to relax, a gentleman of the ignoble, and of the weak a mighty man. Sweeter than the tuneful mavis sweetly carolling upon the branch is the quick music of its liquid flow. Pleasanter than the black-birds song, as it utters its artless lays is the sound that glass and bottle make. Dull care is driven away and sadness is buried in the grave.

In all this the poet does not advocate intoxication, but expressly condemns it towards the close of the song ; and it may be added by way of explanation, that in those times drunkenness was comparatively rare. This may have been due partly to the fact that the staple drink was not then adulterated.

To sum up and conclude the Jacobite productions no better poem could be selected than the one styled "The Ark," which had its origin in this way. A gentleman in Argyleshire dreamt that a deluge should soon overwhelm the country on account of the principal heads of houses having sided with King George. This suggests to the poet the idea of an ark, in which all those who remained loyal to Prince Charles should be placed, and in addition all who should be found willing to confess their disloyalty in the past and swear allegiance in the future. It is a very long and extremely interesting poem—reminding one by its scathing sarcasm and quaint humour of Lord Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." It contains a picture in miniature of all the prominent families of the period, and has thus a biographical as well as a poetical interest.

After stating that Brigadier Campbell, who fell in the Prince's cause, had appeared to forewarn as to the coming deluge, the supernatural voice is said to enjoin Campbell—a relative of the late Brigadier—to build an ark not too large and not too small, but as strong as a rock. None is to

be admitted who had accepted the least favour from King George. Then all those who stood faithful are described, their peculiar prowess and fidelity recorded, and the right of admission claimed for them. Such are Loudon, Campbell of Lochnell, Campbell of Inveran, Captain Duncan Campbell—upon whom the bard's finest eulogy is bestowed. "He is the soldier and Christian in one. In thought, highborn, as gentle as a maiden, kindly, without defect. Steady, self-controlled—without boasting; fearless in the hour of danger. Erect, stately, full of purpose. Without pride, deserving respect. Moderate and wise in all his conduct, heroic, noble, humble. Daring and fierce in the hour of combat, but full of pity when the field is won." To those who showed special kindness to the Prince the best place is to be given; but to those who were lukewarm, or wavered, a process of penance is prescribed. Some of them are to be thrown overboard until they come to their senses, and then they may be admitted. Some are to be consigned to the tender mercies of Neptune—let them sink or swim. Some are likened to backsliders from the true faith, and are to be handed over to church-discipline, which at that time, and indeed till recently, was a source of great terror to all delinquents. There is one poetess who seems to have espoused the wrong cause, and who finds no favour at the hands, or rather the tongue, of the bard. She must be summarily hurled overboard, and may get a bottle of brandy with which to treat the seals. If her fate should resemble that of Jonah, the poet wishes her all joy of it, and finally to be landed on the Isle of Canna. There were others of whom better things might have been expected—these, on undergoing a process of purification, might be afterwards admitted, though somewhat reluctantly. But there were still others on the other hand, to whom no mercy was to be shown, such as Duncan, the Provost's son [Culloden]—a coward wight; the wicked Melvin; and black Lachlan of Balligrogan, who, because he had betrayed the Camerons and Mackinnons, must be sacrificed to the god of the sea, with a millstone round his neck; and who for companions is to have a dog, a cat, a serpent, and a fox. At the close he desires that justice should be tempered with mercy in the case of every Georgian rebel that should retract; and that the assigned task—the ark to be built of good Loch Sheil oak—should be speedily

accomplished. It has been well remarked that almost every line of these poems breathes rebellion ; yet they were published five years after the battle of Culloden, and the author escaped with impunity.

III. We come now to the descriptive poems in which Macdonald is seen at his best. Nature was to him instinct with meaning and delight. In this respect he may well be compared to Wordsworth—

“ O, many are the poets that are sown
By Nature ! men endow'd with highest gifts—
The vision and the faculty divine.

He is minute and exact in his representations. He holds converse with nature as with a loving friend. We may begin with his “*Faile na Morthir*,” in which he depicts the beauty and fascination of his native country in the month of May. “That green, lovely, and sun-touched land, fertile and full of all good things. Men, women, and children enjoy life in the happiness that surrounds them. Beautiful are the hills and glens, and pleasing to the eye the silver-shining salmon in the streams. Herds of deer dwell on the heights. Cattle brouse on the abundant grass. Birds sing merrily in every branch. Primroses and daisies flourish, and honey-laden bees buzz all round.” The whole is a complete picture of country life and happiness.

Next we have a very fine pastoral piece—“*The Ode to Summer*,” in which the poet, rising betimes, describes a summer morning, while the dew still lies on the trees and grass in a cosy glen. Soon the birds awaken the woods with their notes, and echo responds. Sweet is the smell of the birch under the influence of the kindly-shining sun, as its buds shoot forth in the genial month of May. Every copse and thicket become gradually green while the sap is silently ascending. In the afternoon the mavis sings its carol on the green twigs. This month drives snow and cold and gloom even from the high hills, and clothes with beauty the dreary and dark fields. As an illustration of the wealth of description used, one verse may be quoted :—

“ Am mìos lusnach meallach
Feurach, failleanach, blàth ;
'S e gu geugach, duilleach,
Luachrach, ditheineach, lurach,

Beachach, seilleanach, dearcach,
 Ciùrach, dealtach trom, tlàth ;
 'S i mar chùrneanan daoimein,
 Bhratach bhoillsgeilair làr."

In this verse we have the different kinds of flowers, of grasses, and of leaves, changed into adjectives, and applied to the month. Then follows a minute account of the haunts and habits of birds, their varying notes, the concert they make together, and the felicity it indicates. After this we have an extremely graphic picture of the characteristics and movements of the salmon, which has a striking resemblance—even in the use of the same words—to the similar one by Duncan Ban. But there is no probability, almost no possibility, that either could have been indebted to the other. Such remarkable coincidences are frequent, and arise from similar minds seeing similar things in the same way. In other than skillful hands, the profusion of epithet would become tedious, and hence the difficulty of giving a literal translation. As the "loves of the Plants" have been made famous by a masterhand, so may it be said that the loves of the birds and of the wild deer have been made familiar by Macdonald.

By way of contrast to the last ode, may be taken the "*Ode to Winter.*" All the glory and beauty alluded to above begin to disappear when the sun, king of planets, enters the sign of Cancer. His chariot seems to slacken speed, and winter weather is at hand. The fragrance of flowers is felt no longer, the trees erewhile laden with fruit become bare, the chrystal streams of the glens are in gloom, and the fountains cease to flow for deer and for roe. The earth mourns—the knolls become bare. The gay birds with varied colours are silenced now, and go in quest of sheltered spots, or seek a more genial clime, lilies and daisies are gone, and with them the busy bee. Salmon and herring find their winter quarters in the depth of the sea, etc. So will it be till the sun returns to Taurus. While he is in gloomy Capricorn, there will be hail, lightning, thunder, and storms—darkness, wild winds, snow-drift, frost, ice, in short, all winter's ungenial brood. The various methods and devices for resisting the inroads of cold and climate are next described, and some of the popular customs are noted. The various additional habiliments, as plaids, gloves, etc., strong boots

also, and thick stockings; the numerous drinks too, from *sowans* to whisky; and the kinds of meal, are all passed in review. At last, when the sun enters Gemini, and his kindly beams greet the earth, there will be a general resuscitation, or resurrection, of nature's manifold life. There will be a universal song or shout of praise uttered to the great Creator, and every living thing will exclaim in its own way—winter is gone and summer has come.

"The Dispraise of Caber-Feidh," though a descriptive poem, reveals also Macdonald's satiric power, but the pieces that were unmixed satire seem to have been so scurrilous as to be unfit for publication. "Cabar-Feidh," which means the antler of a deer, was the coat-of-arms of one of the ruling clans—the Seaforths—who seem to have fallen into disfavour at this time. Hence this heavy invective. The very name jars upon the ear; and the men of Moidart, in Argyleshire, would refuse to rise or join with the Seaforths. This recalls the unreasonable and unseasonable pride that sometimes marked the Highland clans, and their determination to die rather than yield. No better instance can be adduced than the refusal by the Macdonalds to fight at the battle of Culloden, because they were not placed on the right wing of the army—the position which belonged to them by immemorial right. Honour in such a case was dearer than life—a fact which finds admirable expression in this song. The men of Sleat would take no part with men who were pronounced feeble in fight, and who should therefore feel ashamed to stand side by side with the brave followers of Mac-Cailen—men who are bold, brave, hardy, and dauntless. The sound of their guns is compared to the headlong rush of a mountain torrent—a figure frequently used in the poems of Ossian. The Seaforths seem to have committed some blunder at the battle of Alt-Eire [Auldearn]—to have, in fact, deserted their post—in reference to which the poet says—The heavens wept, the stars fell to bid you stand, but you would have fled as far as Egypt, had there been no barrier in the way.

From this unpleasant picture the bard turns, and lavishes praise on the lion, king of beasts, by way of lauding Prince Charlie. Its fame and power, strength and hardihood, pride and honour, valour and fierceness are descanted upon at length, and in choice language. After a fine compliment to the Macdonalds, as with

strong arms and sharp swords cutting off heads and dividing asunder bones and sinews, there is a graphic account of the flight of the Seaforth's to Perth, in such hot haste that there was not a single Lot's wife among them who even looked back. At Sheriffmuir, if the story of the song be accurate fact, it fared no better with this clan, who are said to have been the first to make for Stirling.

In contrast to the above there follows a song, wholly in praise of the lion, and partly already anticipated. The description in this instance is more minute, and details all the well-known qualities—fighting and friendly—of the lion. It may be noted that the clan Macdonald claim the lion as their own coat-of-arms—a fact which appears to have lent inspiration to the poet on this occasion. He begins by welcoming the brave lion of incomparable mettle, not to be overcome by unarmed, unworthy, or undisciplined opponents. "Awake! thou lion of bold deeds, arise in all thy might, with thy spotted, red-and-white banner, topped with mountain heather." "Thy forefathers had no defect, fortunate and full of pride they were, full of fight and constant." There is an inconsistency in the carrying out of the figure here, for the transition is suddenly made, without hint, to the men who effectively use gun and sword and spear. In the enumeration of the good qualities of the Macdonalds the poet is particularly felicitous. They are men who need no urging on to war—they are, so to speak, to the manner born, and the merest occasion is enough. Like lightning flash their swords are seen amid the wild havoc of falling and fallen. Theirs is the hardness of the rock, the swiftness of the roe, and afar their strokes are heard. Headlong they rush like the mountain flood, or sweep along like fire that wastes the heather. They are again finely compared to an oak that defies the ravages of time, and then to a goodly wood with branches and with twigs, which, in its united might, can resist all onsets. This comparison reminds one of Shakespeare's Macbeth, in which the wood of Dunsinnan is seen advancing to certain victory. The poem concludes by an admonition to be brave, and by stating that there is no record of the clan ever having turned their back to the foe, but rather of having always been found in the thickest of the fight.

(To be continued.)

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III.

THE next poem to occupy attention is one in many respects unrivalled—"Allt-an-t-Siucair"—the Sugar Brook. It is an animated and accurate reproduction in glowing words of a beautiful scene in the country on a lovely summer morning. The dew is seen glittering on every flower and leaf. Richard and Red Robin sing cheerily, and the cuckoo tells her tale. The solitary mavis, the lively blackbird, the bent birch-bird and the black-cock with his mate all warble pleasantly. The fish are leaping out of the water, and catching the fast-moving flies. The honey-sucking speckled bee flits from flower to flower, and seeks no other food than the sweet fragrance of the rose. The clear and crystal rivulets rejoice, and the cascades of Allt-an-t-Siucair murmur pleasing sounds. Their banks are made beautiful by water-cresses and green herbs, and from gold-decked thistles, red and yellow bees collect their stores. As music to the ear, is the loud lowing of the cows with the responsive calves. The dairymaid fills her sounding pail, and the herd is near at hand. The ground is bespangled with many flowers of richer hues than the most costly gems, and the primroses look like candles set to illumine the whole. Nature has indeed with rare care adorned thy banks with daisies and other flowers that resemble the expanse of bril-

liancy seen in the sky on a frosty and clear night. Many sorts of fruit grow here—nuts and berries in abundance. It is in short a miniature paradise where all desirable native products come to maturity. Here also the sea withholds not her treasure—fish in great variety and number are found. Horses gather together, attracted by the sound of the streamlet, to drink of its cooling waters; while kids and roes disport themselves on its green slopes. It is a pleasing sight to see its rose-strewn banks made golden by the play of sun-beams. Here the lily, king of flowers, excels in beauty the reddest rose; and here, among the bushes, many birds build their nests. From this favoured spot the eye of the poet turns to the Sound of Mull, where many ships with all their white sails bent to the gentle breeze, or driven by the cold breath of the north, are seen slowly or swiftly sailing along. This completes the picture. One stanza may be quoted to indicate the style and smoothness of the verse—

“ An coire brocach, taobh ghorm,
 Torcach, faoilidh, blàth;
 An coire lonach, naosgach,
 Cearcach, craobhach, gràidh:
 Gu bainneach, bailceach, braonach,
 Breacach, laoghach, blàr;
 An sultmhor mart a's caora,
 'S is torach, laoimsgir bàrr.”

We come now to the poet's master-piece—“*Birlinn Chlann Raonuill*”—a sea-piece, in which he shows his perfect mastery of the Gaelic language, and an accurate acquaintance with the sea-faring habits and experiences of his time. It reveals a spirit of daring—ready to brave and enjoy any danger. It has been remarked in regard to this poem, “that for subject matter, language, harmony and strength, it is almost unequalled in any language.” There is a kind of epic dignity and flow in the verse—worthy of the governing conception, mastery over all difficulties—that runs through the whole. “*The Skiff of Clanranald*” is divided into parts according to the subject-matter. It opens with the dedication of the ship—on which the blessing of the Highest is asked to rest. For favouring gales the poet pleads, for the safety of the hardy sailors, for the security of each part of the ship, and for the Spirit's guidance to the desired haven.

Next comes the dedication of Clanranald's armour—swords, lances, heavy mail, hand-arms, plaited shields, shoulder-belts, unfailing birch-arrows, bayonets, daggers and hilts. The men are then exhorted to be brave, so long as a plank of the skiff remains, or an inch of it is above water. The ocean's roar they must not heed—indeed, if they continue undaunted, the proud waves will cease their bellowing and become obedient.

Again we have the Rowing Song, which is full of power and animation. The oars are described, and then their effect. They buffet the sea into sparks of fire, that rise into the sky. The phosphorescent light gleams. The haughty waves must bend their heads, and over the hilly billows speeds the skiff. By strength of sinewy arms, falling and rising as with one motion, the blue ocean glens are traversed—strong shoulders work their way through the mountains of the main—and, as if in sympathy, the creaking boards respond. The skiff is strained in every plank; but, forced onward by the might of unwearied arms and skilful oaring, it ploughs its way, heedless of danger.

This is more in the way of arousing the sailors, after which we come to the oarsmen's Iorram. It is explained that this song is called for by Malcolm, son of Ronald of the seas, after the sixteen men have taken their place at the oars. The substance of what Malcolm sings is somewhat thus. As you have been selected let your forward movement prove not unworthy. Let the barque brave the blast and dare its full force. Let this song stimulate you when your oars are twisted in the breast of the waves. Let your cheeks be ablaze, your hands part with their skin, and your sweat fall in drops on the boards. Bend and pull, and make the grey fir win against the sea-streams. Together, strong and bold, split the dread and roaring waves—a gleesome task. Strike straight and look on one another to awaken courage in your veins. Let her oar-prow disperse the swollen billows, and her sides smash all obstacles. Let the sea overflow her, but let your mighty arms overmatch, and at last raise the sails to catch Uist gales.

Having now come by anticipation into the open sea and having a fair wind the oars are taken in and the sails quickly set up, The Macdonalds, as choice sailors who fear no storm-spirit or danger of any kind, are put in charge.

All the men having received and obeyed orders, the helmsman is called to his post and addressed as follows:—Let there be at the helm a stout and doughty man that billows cannot move—a courageous and powerful fellow—a cautious, patient, and cool sailor, that deviates not by an inch from the due course, that remains unmoved when the sea heaves over his head, and that guides the vessel in the stormiest hour straight to the desired haven.

The position of *Fear-Bearirte* is set forth as follows:—He must be constantly on the alert—must tend the spars-tackle or let loose as the case may demand. He must know the directions or *airts* of the wind, and, according to the sailing course, constantly tighten or loosen the ship's gear.

The *Fear-Sgoid* or sheet-man must have a strong, stout, and bony arm and sturdy fingers, to bring in and let out the sails—to pull in against the buffeting wind, and when there is a lull to relax.

The *Fear-cluaise* is next appointed, whose duty it is to watch with careful eye whether progress is made or the reverse. And if he finds that the wind is rising or veering round, he must shift the "lug" accordingly.

The duties of look-out man are next described. He must go in front, where he can see clearly, and be a tower of strength and a source of information. He must look to the four points and tell the steersman how to act. This is done by carefully noting the land-marks.

Another man—*Fear Calpa-na-Tairne*—is put in charge of the haulyards of the ship. He must give or draw back as the vessel goes windward or leeward. He must be accurate, punctual, and fail not for a moment, else the ship may suddenly become a wreck upon the rocks.

Another man's duty under stress of weather is to watch the waters, and to stand beside the steersman, whom he must apprise whether wind and wave strike "fore or aft." If danger is imminent, he must aid to keep the prow to the storm.

Next we have the man who is to pump out, or empty the ship, in the primitive way with a wooden pail, when the water enters. He must never quit his post or faint at the roar of ocean; and, even when the waves constantly drench him, he must never

pause in his task, or for a moment stand erect until the last drop is driven out. This arduous labour is not to be suspended, though the sides of the ship should become as full of holes as a corn riddle—a work not unlike that assigned to the daughters of Danaus.

As the storm increases, two other men are sent to take down some of the sails—men of stature and strength. Six men are kept in reserve in case any of the preceding should fail or fall overboard, and these are to go from end to end and from side to side of the ship to see that all is right. They must be lively as a hare on the hill-top, and climb the masts as nimbly as a squirrel in May goes up and down the trees.

After all had been thus arranged, and every man knew and was expected to do his duty—the start is made on St. Bridget's morn from Loch Ainneart in South Uist. The sun rose in golden hues, but soon the heavens gathered darkness and gloom—the sea became dark-green, billowy, boisterous; and the sky contained every hue that is found in a tartan plaid. From the west the brewing storm came on—clouds were careering along, torn by the wind. The speckled sails were raised aloft, the cords were strained—all was tightly bound and fastened by iron hooks. Each man was in his place. Then opened the windows of the sky—a threatening hour. The dark-grey ocean assumed its rough, dark and awful mantle—and suddenly it swelled into shaggy mountains and deepened into dreary glens. Then the blue deep opened wide its cavernous mouths, and there was a deadly conflict in the yawning whirlpool. Phosphorescent light illumined each mountain-billow, and the white-crested waves wildly roared. When the ship rose on those perilous heights the sailing-gear was quickly taken down; and when it descended into the depths the sails were snatched from the masts. Long before the waves came near their vehement heaving was heard. It seemed as if death lurked everywhere. When under the ridge of the high billows the good ship was all but doomed—in a seething, churning, upheaving ocean caldron. All the contents of the deep—fish, shells, weeds, were huddled together. In this plight, when lightnings gleamed thunders rolled, and the storm grew more terrific—in the blackness of darkness, with the

elements above and below at war with us, still we despaired not; and because we did not yield, the sea pitied our state and made peace with us. But not before every mast had been bent, every sail torn, every plank and spar strained, every oar shattered, every fastening loosened, our helm twisted, every spike cracked, every stick away, our cordage snapped, every nail displaced—in short, all our tackle breaking or broken. In the Sound of Islay the rough and furious winds journeyed to the upper regions of the air, and the sea became smooth as a level plain. Then gave we thanks to the Almighty, who preserved Clanranald from death. We reached the safe harbour of Carrick-Fergus, threw out anchor slowly, refreshed ourselves and rested.

As indicating in a large measure the style and spirit of the original, it will be of interest to add a short extract from Professor Blackie's rendering :—

“ Come, stretch your limbs, my lusty callants,
 Lift the oars and bend them,
 From your firm palm, strong and sinewy
 Pith and vigour lend them.
 Ye brawny boatmen, stout and stalwart,
 Stretch your length, and readily
 Let your hard and knotty muscles
 Rise and sink full steadily,
 Making the smooth and polished blades,
 Whose lordship reins the ocean,
 Cuff the rough crests of the fretful brine,
 With a well-tuned motion.

Come now, thou man of the first oar,
 Thou king of lusty fellows,
 Raise the song that makes men strong
 To mount the heaving billows,
 Raise the iorram that will drive
 With shouts of glee the Birlinn
 Through the bristling bellowing rout
 Of waters wildly whirling.
 Ho! for the waves as they hiss and spit
 To the storm-blast ramping and roaring;
 Huzza for the boat, in its plunging fit,
 Where the foamy streams are pouring!
 Ho for the blade, so limber, lithe,
 When it twists the writhing billow
 Huzza for the hand where blisters burn
 To each hard-pulling fellow—

Fellows with shaggy-breasted might,
And stout heart never quailing ;
Though oak and iron creak and start,
And boom and spar are failing,
They in the face of the sea will steer
The slender craft nor borrow
Fear from the breath of the cutting blast
Or the gape of the salt sea furrow.
This is the crew, o'er the waters blue,
With a kingly strength presiding,
Untired, unflagging, and unspent,
On the breast of the rough wave riding."*

* *Language and Literature of the Highlands of Scotland*, pp. 129-130.

A HIGHLAND ESTATE, 1792-1800.

[By THOS. SINCLAIR, M.A.]

(Continued.)

It is interesting to find that improvements were always going on, and the labours and accounts of the workmen are very suggestive. Hugh Mackay for three days' work at the garden-house is credited, but the sum is left out, though for three fraughts of 1798 and one of 1799 he gets 8s ; while for working with John Gunn at the threshing-machine water-run 117 days at 6d a-day and 11 threshing at 5d he has due credit, as also 10s for his daughter's half-year's wages. Next year he has 69½ days at the water-run at 8d a-day, and in 1800 he works 27½ days at 8d with the same John Gunn.

But the great improvements of the home farm were done by Alexander Gow. For a cut of the water-run he had by agreement with Sandside £1 1s ; 73 yards clay ditch in Finlay's park at 1½d came to 9s 1½d ; covered piece of mill wait, 12 yards at 1½d ; 67 yards ditch in wet corner of Liach Park at 1½d ; 80 yards covered drain at 1½d ; 38 yards in bog of Knocknashallag at 1½d ;