

II.

NOTICE OF AN OLD GAELIC POEM FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF THE FAMILY OF FASSIEFERN. BY THE REV. THOMAS MACLAUCHLAN, F.S.A. Scot.

The MS. which forms the subject of this paper was handed to the author by the Rev. Archibald Clerk, of Kilmalie. In preparing for the press the interesting volume which he has lately published, on the life of the late Colonel Cameron of the 92d, who fell on the field of Quâtre Bras, he was led to look minutely over a large collection of family papers. Among these he found a loose sheet, containing a short Gaelic poem (which is now exhibited); and, although having no connexion with the subject of his search, he observed that it possessed other features of interest. In an accompanying letter, Mr Clerk says, the writing can be easily proved to be older than 1766. This is no very ancient date; but the fragment does not depend so much on its date for its interest as on its other peculiarities. It is well known to all interested in Celtic literature, that while the Scottish and Irish dialects of the Gaelic language differ considerably, the same style of orthography is now used in writing both. That orthography is manifestly of a very ancient date, having originated in the early ecclesiastical establishments of Ireland and Scotland. It was based on truly philosophical principles, and was an indication of the high cultivation to which the Gaelic language was early subjected. It may appear somewhat cumbrous to a classical or English scholar, but that arises from the limited power of the Roman letters to express the sounds of the language, more than from anything unphilosophical in their

application. The guttural sounds of the Gaelic have no letters to represent them in the Roman alphabet; the same is true of the broad or palatal *l*, a sound which it is almost impossible for a Saxon even to conceive. Hence the necessity for the multiplying of articulations, giving the language to an unpractised eye the appearance of hopeless confusion and irregularity. The constant use of the letter *h* has more especially this aspect. It seems to appear in all circumstances, and serving all purposes; and yet there are few unnecessary *h*'s in the language. It is used chiefly for the purpose of aspiration, as Gaelic grammarians call it. Words beginning, in their nominative case absolute, with the letters *m* or *b*, and sounded accordingly, have often in that and other cases to appear with the initial sound of *v*; those in *p*, with that of *f*; those in *f* and *s*, with a mere aspiration; those in *g* and *d*, with a guttural *g*. Thus "muir" becomes "vuir," "fear" becomes "ear," "suil" becomes "huil," "geug" becomes "yeug." These changes are said by recent grammarians—but inaccurately in some cases, as where aspiration decides the gender of a word—to be required not so much by the grammatical inflection of the words as by euphony. The terminal changes are said to be inflectional, the initial euphonic. But they belong to the language, and must be expressed in its orthography. Two methods of doing so exist. The one is by writing the words as they are sounded; thus, "muir" becoming "vuir," "suil" becoming "huil." But that implies a radical change in the various forms of the same word, and goes to the entire obliteration of anything like orthographical resemblances, presenting the most formidable difficulties to the learner. In fact, to write Gaelic as we write English would, from the peculiarities of the language, render its acquisition a matter of almost insuperable difficulty. The other method is that which has been adopted, viz., to insert a letter *h* after a consonant, as is done in Scotland, or a point above it, as is done in Ireland, to indicate that it must undergo aspiration. This is our present system, and once the peculiarities of it are mastered, no system can appear simpler or more truly philosophical. The radical forms of all words, a matter of so much importance in familiarising the eye with a written language, are thus retained, and "muir" becomes "mhuir," "vuir," *vuir*, by inserting an *h* or a point. The only other method besides these that could well exist is that of adopting a different alphabet; and there have not been want-

ing scholars who have proposed the adopting of the Greek alphabet for the Gaelic language. And unquestionably the χ and the η would be very important acquisitions, and would save our ancient tongue from many groundless and foolish animadversions. But progress in the multiplication of alphabets is not progress in a right direction. Were it possible, it would be desirable that the world possessed but one. It may not be possible to bring all mankind to the use of one language, but surely it is possible to bring them to the use of one alphabet. And while on this subject, it may not be out of place to say that the Irish have neither been doing themselves nor their literature any service by retaining the use of the old Saxon alphabet. There are many, we doubt not, who would give their language more of their attention, and labour for its acquisition, were it not for the necessity, at the very outset, of familiarising themselves with a new character.

The phonetic style of orthography referred to above has been to some extent practised among the writers of Scottish Gaelic. This kind of orthography, the peculiarity of which is that the words are spelled just as they are sounded, is indeed well known among the Celtic races; it is, in fact, that which is employed by the greater number of them. Any one acquainted in the slightest degree with the Manx, the Welsh, the ancient Cornish, or the Armorican, must be aware of this fact. All these languages have, in the writing of them, the words written in Roman letters as they are sounded; with this distinction, that the Welsh have attached sounds of their own to some of the letters, as the *f*, the *dd*, the *ll*, the *u*, the *y*—an arrangement which the peculiarities of the language itself require. But this phonetic style of writing was entirely unknown among Irish scholars, even of the very earliest ages, and has not apparently prevailed to any great extent in Scotland. The only specimen of it hitherto known has been Dean M'Gregor's MS., of which the writer of this paper furnished some notices to the Society a few years ago, and in which both the Irish and Scottish dialects are written in a phonetic orthography, neither the same with that of the Welsh or of the Manx, and yet an orthography so regular and so fixed, from beginning to end of the compilation, that it is impossible to believe that it originated with Dean M'Gregor, or was not generally known and used. The fragment to which I now call the attention of the Society is in the

identical orthography of M'Gregor's collection, but of a date at least two hundred years later. It is entitled, "A Song composed by a Priest to a Lady after her Death." It is an elegy, perhaps, on one of the Fassiefern family, much in the usual style of such compositions among the bards, and of very considerable poetical merit. It is in pure Scottish Gaelic, just such as is spoken and written at this present day. The poem is given here in the orthography adopted in the MS. (No. I.); and, corresponding to it I have given the modern orthography (No. II.) A translation follows.

No. I.

ORAN REINIG LE SAKÀRT DO VRUI
OUSAL AN DEYIJ A BASH.

In nanir chun me mo chadul
Nach ro agum in nour a dusk me
Sha me ichuinichig nach boy uh
Yak in dortis er mo hulin
Cha dour me yit ach shola rouar
Strou nach ro im broutar batich
Go falkin gach nee mo court dut
Gin osukle om houn go mattin.

Vein mo hulin mur baust
Gaurk er altich do phers
Turlich holis selan darsich
Chosin graieh gach armin vukol
Do vunail mur kannach sletiv
Do yed gle gal is do veil mechar
Do chorp na uran des daloich
Calapanin mar alabastir.

Bevin usolas lem chlousen
Do chaint hourk is do yloir hatnich
Bo veena lum na koil organ
Vic ikestich ree to chora blast
Lara tu go fisrich oilich
Lara tu go conart spesal
Lara tu le reson barrant
Cha varral churig fech ort.

No. II.

ORAN RINNEADH LE SAGART DO MHNAOI
UASAL AN DEIGH A BÀIS.

An ainnr a chunnaic mi a'm chodal
Nach robh agam an uair a dhuisg mi,
Is e mi chuimhneachadh nach beo thu,
Dh'fhàg an doirteadh's air mo shùilibh,
Cha d'fhuair mi dhìot ach sealladh ruathar,
'Struagh nach robh am bruarar 'n a
b'fhaide,
Gu 'm faicinn gach ni mu'n cuairt duit,
Gun m' fhuasgladh o'm shuain gu ma-
duinn.

Bhitheadh mo shuilean mar a b'abhaist,
'G amharc air àilleachd do phearsa,
D'urla sholuis 's gloine dearrsaidh,
Choisinn gràdh gach armuinn bheachdail.
Do mhuneal mar chanach sléibhte,
Do dheud gle gheal 'us do bheul meachar,
Do chorp 'n a fhiùran deas dealbhach,
Calpanan mar alabastair.

B 'aoibhinn an sòlas le 'm chluasaibh,
Do chainnt shuair 's do ghlèir thaitneach,
Bu bhinne leam no ceòl orgain,
Bhì'g éisdeachd ri do chomhradh blasda
Labhradh tu gu fiosrach eolach,
Labhradh tu gu comhnard spéiseal,
Labhradh tu le reusan barrant,
Cha bharrail a chuireadh féich ort.

Yanat er in atrijs ousal
 Nglana va fout reit havie
 Gun anait er a cholinn freesol
 In tanum ro breeg is calick
 Gun anit ort von va ut lenon
 Gum bi tu go bannoll baigoil
 Gum bi to go brieroch skailoch
 Gum bi tu go keiloch naroch.

Cha to veul u et na barol
 Bi tu barrich na ban alin
 Bi tu fenix na ban femol
 Bi tu echkok treich staoil
 San it choirlich yot u fousklich
 In nour vic douress er do chartiv
 Va u lan mishnich agis kroutal
 Gach art vouy fout reet nator.

[*A religious verse left out.*]

Catigh ga an glikis yoni
 Nis for nach beo u Anna
 Catigh an gavi geolie gintie
 Catigh an eirin catigh glonigh
 Catigh gave in laoirit vlash
 Catigh an gave in reason conie
 Catigh gave gulin bonall
 Nis Anna o nach beo u.

Strou lem do clan vi na doora
 Strou lem bron vi er in cartiv
 Strou leom do pearich an deorich
 Mad yeain is nach dean e stawe yaie
 Strou leom trom osnich do vrainin
 Is nach douar parlie on eige yout
 Vo nach aick me go la vra
 Mo vennight go paras De yut.

Dh' aithnichte air an aitreabh uasal,
 An gloine bha fuaighte ri d' àbhaist,
 Gun aithnichte air a cholunn phriseil,
 An t-anam 's an robh brigh 'us càileachd,
 Gun aithnichte ort o bha thu 'ad leanamh,
 Gum bitheadh tu gu banail baigheal,
 Gum bitheadh tu gu briathrach sgeulach,
 Gum bitheadh tu gu ciallach nàrach.

Cha do mheall thu iad 'n am barail,
 Bu tu barraich nam ban àluinn,
 Bu tu Phenics nam ban feumail,
 Bu tu eachdag treabhach stàthail ;
 Is ann a'd chomhairle gheibhte fuasgladh,
 'N nair bhithheadh diùras air do chairidibh,
 Bha thu lan misnich agus cruadail,
 Gach ard bhuaidh fuaighte ri'd nadur.

C'aite an gabh an gliocas còmhuidh,
 Nise o nach beò thu Anna ?
 C'aite an gabh an gealladh einnteach,
 C'aite an fhìrinn, c'aite an gloine ?
 C'aite an gabh an labhairt bhlasda,
 C'aite an gabh an reuson còmhuidh ?
 C'aite an gabh an giùlan banail,
 Nise, Anna, o nach beò thu ?

'Struagh leam do chlànn bhi 'n an deoir,
 'Struagh leam bròn bhi air an cairdibh,
 'Struagh leam do pheathraichean deurach,
 Ma 'd dheighinn 's nach dean e stà dhoibh ;
 'Struagh leam osnaich do bhraithrean,
 'S nach d'fhuair parlaidh o'n eug dhuit,
 O nach fhaic mi gu la a bhràth thu,
 Mo bheannachd gu Pàrras Dhé dhuit.

Translation.

SONG BY A PRIEST TO A LADY AFTER HER DEATH.

The maid whom I saw in my sleep,
 I had her not when I had wakened ;
 It is the remembrance that thou art dead
 That has left this shedding of tears on my eyes ;

I got of thee but a passing glimpse,
 It is sad that the dream was not more lasting,
 That I might see everything about thee,
 Without any break in my sleep till morning.

My eyes would be, as usual,
 Surveying the beauty of thy person ;
 Thy countenance, like light so shining,
 Winning love from wisest men ;
 Thy neck like the downy grass of the mountain ;
 Thy teeth so white, thy mouth so comely ;
 Thy form like a well-formed plant ;
 Thy limbs like alabaster.

Men knew by its noble dwelling
 How excellent was thy nature ;
 Men knew by the form of thy body
 That within were power and virtue ;
It was known by thee in thy childhood
 That thou wouldst be womanly and soft,
 That thou wouldst talk well and wisely,
 That thou wouldst have sense and modesty.

Nor didst thou deceive them in their opinion :
 Thou wert the first of choicest women ;
 Thou wert the Phoenix of the most useful ;
 Thou wert a charmer, noble, enterprising ;
 Thy counsel loosed from difficulties
 While other friends were at a loss ;
 Thou wert full of courage and hardihood ;
 Every excellency knit to thy nature.

Where will wisdom have its dwelling,
 Now, Anne, that thou no more livest ?
 Where the sure and certain promise ?
 Where will truth now dwell, and pureness ?
 Where will dwell the sweetest speech ?
 Where will reason have its dwelling ?
 Where will dwell womanly bearing,
 Now, Anne, that thou no more livest ?

I mourn thy children, now made orphans ;
 I mourn thy friends, so filled with sorrow ;
 I mourn thy sisters, now so tearful
 For thee, while all is unavailing ;

I mourn the heavy sighs of thy brothers,
 While death would give thee no delay.
 As till the judgment I shall not see thee,
 My blessing go with thee to the Paradise of God.¹

It is manifest, from the M'Gregor MS. along with this fragment, that two systems of orthography existed in the Highlands side by side for several centuries—what is now called the Irish, which came finally to prevail in all Gaelic writing; and the phonetic, which has been adopted by the Welsh, Bretons, and Manx. It is worthy of observation that the two existing specimens of phonetic writing were found towards the central parts of the Highlands, and thus farthest away from Irish influence, M'Gregor having been a native of Perthshire, and the writer of these verses probably a native of Lochaber. Not a fragment of Gaelic writing in the Irish character and orthography (with the exception of the recently discovered Book of Deer, a remnant of Culdee scholarship) has been discovered as having been written previous to last century, in any portion of the central or eastern Highlands; while abundant remains of that description have been found as written in the Hebrides and on the west coast of Argyllshire. And the only remains we have so far as yet discovered are of a different description, being either in the modern Roman or Saxon character, and in an orthography purely phonetic. Does not this fact suggest some historical inferences of importance? Does it not suggest very manifestly the inference, that, while Irish influence was very powerfully felt on the west coast of Scotland, the large body of the people in the central and eastern Highlands were strangers to that influence, and with regard to their literature, as well as their history, followed a course of their own; and may it not also shed some light on the question as to whether the Scottish Highlanders are, as an entire people, simply an Irish colony?

¹ A Gaelic copy of this song is given in Gillies' "Collection of Gaelic Poetry." Perth, 1786. It is there called, "Do mhnaoi uasail ann an Gleanngaraidh," *To a Lady in Glengarry.*