

THE LAND OF LORNE AND THE SATIRISTS OF TAYNUILT



THE Land of Lorne is, to me, the most interesting in Scotland—indeed in the British Isles. It is the most picturesque, the most diversified by nature and by association. Its scalloped islands, its slender peninsulas, and its deeply indented mainland, with its bens and glens and corries—its lochs and rivers, its varied fauna of sea and land, with its ancient buildings, its sculptured remains, and its human interests—all seem to give it pre-eminence over other lands.

The Land of Lorne is the cradle of Christianity in Scotland, of monarchy in Scotland, and so, in a way, of that merged monarchy on which the sun never sets.

It was the home of Naois and Darthula; of Ardan and Aille; of Fingal and Ossian; a home of epic poetry and song, of art and music. It was there that 'Waverley' originated, and 'Kidnapped' and 'Catriona'—for Stevenson, like Scott, lived there, and to its rugged shores and fronded bens and fragrant birchy glens the heart of Stevenson, like the heart of Scott, ever tenderly turned.

And possibly the dying Stevenson, in the fair isle of Samoa, thought of the Land of Lorne as did the dying Scott in the sunny clime of Italy, when he was heard crooning to himself—

'And it's up the heath'ry mountain,
And down the rugged glen,
We daurna go a-milking
For Charlie and his men.'

And it was of the Land of Lorne that another noble-hearted

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Scot—Ian Campbell of Islay—was thinking when crooning to himself a few hours before he died—

‘Cha till, cha till,
Cha till mi tuillidh!’
‘I return, I return,
I return no more!’

And it was the home of some of the best pastoral poets. For I think there is nothing in all pastoral poetry to excel, if to equal, the ‘Beinn Dorain’ of Duncan Ban Macintyre. And the Land of Lorne was not only the ancestral home of Lord Macaulay, of David Livingstone, of Thomas Campbell, but, as Blackmore himself tells us, of the forbears of ‘Lorna Doone,’ and of those of Robert Burns and John Ruskin.

The bards were the most powerful of the retinue of the Celtic Kings and Chiefs. They roused to war and lulled to peace at will the subjects of the one and the vassals of the other. Edward First realised this when he massacred the Welsh bards, and his successors showed that they understood it, by their atrocities towards the Irish bards. Had Celtic Scotland, like Celtic Wales and Ireland, been trampled under the heel of conquest, that grandest of battle odes, ‘Brosnacha Catha Mhichmhuirich Mhoir,’ had never been written. It may be mentioned that the Macmuirichs were hereditary bards to the Clanranalds for the long period of seventeen generations. They held a freehold farm of the value of £450 a year or thereby for their services, and only lost it when their charter was wiled from them by fraud. The person of the bard was sacred, and his house a sanctuary.

But the bards, being human, fell: they abused their powers, and like other tyrants were deposed. Then many of these ‘sons of song’ joined forces and travelled the country in bands. No band could consist of more than sixteen, and each had a chief—none being admitted into the circle till he had proved his power

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of satire. These bards went under the name of *Cliar Sheanachain*'—Strolling Satirists. They overran the country, going where and when they liked, and preying upon whom they pleased, always choosing good wit, good quarters, and good cheer. They satirised everything and every one and one another—the dread of the people wherever they went. They could remain in a place for a year and a day, unless their satire was overcome by satire. The last Strolling Satirists of whom I have any knowledge were at Nunton, in Benbecula, about the middle of last century. The band was sixteen strong. Clanranald treated them with lavish hospitality, as became a great chief, and of this they availed themselves to the full. But though the Satirists had the civility to pass over Clanranald and Lady Clanranald, they satirised everybody else in the place, till all was excitement and resentment throughout the land. The foolish laughed, but the wise mourned, for nothing was talked of but the vitriolic sayings of these men: society was scandalised, and work was hindered.

The year and a day of their 'sorning' was speeding on, and the forty-second mart was killed for their use, when Clanranald came out breathless and bonnetless, and raising his arms appealingly exclaimed, in the bitterness of his heart: 'A Dhe Mhoir nam feart, agus Iosa, Mhic Mhuire, nan neart, am bheil duin, idir, idir an Clanradhail a thilleas air a ghraisg dhaoine so!' 'O Thou great God of might, and Thou all-powerful Jesu, Son of Mary, is there not a man at all at all in Clanranald can overmatch these scurrilous kerns!'

There was no response. All the wits of the district had already measured swords with these keen blades, only to be discomfited and disarmed, and made the laughing-stock of the land. The only man who had not tried was the fool of Clanranald, and he, being a fool, had not been asked. But the Satirists now attacked him, and the fool retorted—so effectively that they fled the land.

The Strolling Satirists came to the house of Campbell of

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Bailendor, in Lorne. Campbell was a substantial man, and hereditary almoner to the ancient Abbey of Airdchattan. He was generally called from his office, 'An Deora'—the almoner, 'An Deora Mor'—the big almoner. The Satirists and Walter Campbell, son of the Deora, had frequent wit combats—often angry, and many times exasperating. They sorned upon his family, and satirised his clan and his kin—searing him to the soul. He retorted; but his retorts, they declared, were inept. He said—but in vain—

'Dh'ithe tu mo chuid
'Us phronna tu mo ghab,
Dh'ola tu m'fhion
Spiona tu mo bhad.'

'Thou wouldst eat my bread
And bruise my mouth,
Thou wouldst drink my wine
And pluck my beard.'

Walter Campbell felled a tree in a place known since then as 'Glac a Chlamhain'—'dell of the harrier.' The dell is wide and open towards the north-west, gradually narrowing and closing towards the north-east. He asked the Satirists to come and help him to split up the tree. They came. Campbell drove a wedge into the bole and rent it along the stem. He then ranged the men on each side, and asked them to place their hands in the rent, and pull with all their might against one another, as he drove the wedge. The men pulled and Campbell struck the wedge, not in, but out, and the two sides of the rent bole sprang together like a steel trap, holding the men securely. Then Campbell fell upon them and killed them.

Had the Satirists been simple Macleans, Macdonalds, Macgregors, Murrays, Lamonts, or any other clan, the Campbells would have shielded Walter Campbell, however dark his crime. But they were of all clans, and some of them of good family.

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All acknowledged—to use the words of Professor Blackie regarding the murder of Archbishop Sharp—that

‘The loons were weel away. . . .
But the deed was foully done.’

Great sensation was caused, and deep indignation roused, and Walter Campbell fled. He crossed the river Awe at the Brander—where Macdougall and Bruce had fought a battle—and continued his course up Glenorchy and down Glenlyon, among friendly clansmen and possibly kinsmen, and after many weary wanderings to and fro settled down in Kincardine.

Bailendeor is in the near neighbourhood of Taynuilt—Bunawe. Taynuilt means burn-house—from ‘taigh,’ house, and ‘uillt,’ oblique form of ‘allt,’ a burn, stream. Whether Walter Campbell himself ever divulged his real name in Kincardine is not known. But being from Burnhouse he became known among his neighbours in Kincardine as ‘Walter Burnhouse’—shrivelling down through the years to ‘Burness’ and in his great-great-grandson into ‘Burns’.

The practice of calling a man after his occupation, or the place where he lives or whence he came, is common throughout Scotland.

Walter Campbell of Bailendeor in Lorne thus became Walter Burness of Bogjoram in Kincardine, and great-great-grandfather of Robert Burness—afterwards ‘Burns.’ It has often been remarked that the genius of Burns was Celtic—not Saxon. And this shrewd observation was made by those who were ignorant of the historical fact.

His poetical genius, moreover, was inherited; for the Campbells of Bailendeor were known as a race of bards, and fragments attributed to them are still repeated at the ‘ceilidh’ round the winter fires. Walter Campbell’s description of Glenlonan shows that he had a keenly observant eye, and a singularly musical ear—

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' "Clacha dubha" an aghaidh srutha,
Am bun a bhruthaich bhoidheich,
Barragoille an oir na coille,
Am moch an goir an smeorach.'

' "Blackened stones" against the stream
At the foot of the lovely brae,
"Ridge of Gaul" on the woodland fringe,
Where early sings the mave.'

ALEXANDER CARMICHAEL.

