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DUGALD BUCHANAN

MY ROMANTIC INTRODUCTION TO HIS POETRY

WILLIAM JOLLY

AFTER a happy Sunday, or Sabbath, as Dugald Buchanan would have rather called it, Alister Cameron and I set out for the summit of Schiehallion. Going some four miles down the Tummel, we ascended the north slope from the farm of Tempar. From there the path, though rough, is clear, especially to a mountaineer like Cameron, and the ascent is comparatively easy. Our heels were light and our hearts lighter; and we soon gained the crest, the centre knot on the garlanded brow of the Fair Maiden Mountain. Unlike Milton, I shall not attempt the impossible, in prose or rhyme, to describe the view from this divine peak of vantage, the rolling tumult of strong waves in crested Atlantean billows, hollow glens, gleaming lakes, sinuous streams, and all the glittering glories of the wondrous panorama. I have ascended since then most of the mountains in Britain. I have climbed Helvellyn and his brother hills in Lakeland; have slept on Ben Nevis, the truly Heaven-Kissing Ben—as best it signifies in Gaelic; have stood and gazed with wonderment at the Jungfrau, but Schiehallion equals all.

Hutton and Maskelyne's wonderful weighing of the world here took place in 1777. It is a unique feature in the cap of the Maiden Mountain. Though a pet name for many a Highland hill, she assuredly and rightfully bears the palm for both beauty of form and this marvellous achievement. The peak is a kenspeckle object seen from far, being visible and easily distinguished even by the monarch, Ben Nevis himself, from whose craggy crown I have often dutifully saluted his distant and handsome daughter, of whose name another and curiously related

meaning is the Fairy Hill. When we had sufficiently realised this monumental problem and its successful solution on the very spot itself, we turned to the wilderness of bens and glens at our feet in search of a way to return. Down below us, towards the west, slept a snug sheiling, evidently the shelter of some shepherd; and, beyond it, wonderful to tell, lay a wreath of snow, still unmelted in August, which nestled in a hollow corrie, known, as my companion told me, as *Coire Chwithe* (Corry-Hooie), the Corrie of the Snow Wreath, in old Gaelic; the very name proving at once its existence in ancient days and its permanence, which caught the keen notice of the Celts and gained its title to distinction. After a glorious lunch, towards these two points we bent our eager steps. The descent was steep and trying, especially to an unaccustomed Sassenach, for we took the hill straight down.

Soon we reached the sheiling or *àirigh* (*ahree*), as it is called in the native tongue, set down there alone in the profoundest of solitudes. This gave me my first feeling, but certainly not the last by many hundred times, of absolutely pure solitariness. It thrilled us to the soul; and entered into my blood with an intensity I still vividly recall and which death only can destroy.

I was certainly fortunate, thus early in life, and in the Highlands, where I was fated to spend the best of my years, to obtain such typical and valuable experiences, in such varied aspects as during these memorable days in Rannoch.

The door of the hut was open to all comers, human or animal, and we gladly entered. We found it dry and snug, with one chair, one small home-made table, and a couch of heather on one side of the fireplace. Near a small window, in a hole in the wall, lay three books, which we examined with interest. We found them to be the strangest of mixtures—the inevitable Bible, a convincing tribute to the religiosity of the Celts and of their pastoral representative here, and *Madeline Smith's Trial*, then lately decided. But to us, strangest of all, there lay a single volume of Dr. Roger's

Scottish Poets, a pretty proof of the Scot's love of poetry, the three volumes rightly representing Religion, Poesy, and Humanity—a not unworthy trinity and epitome of the national character, are they not? The *Poets* we perused with avidity, as we rested by the burnside, and there—who could have predicted it?—we found, at the end, translations from the Gaelic Muse, and among these, from Dugald Buchanan's poetry, which we had sought in vain the night before at Kinloch! With intense surprise and keenest zest, we read aloud the Gaelic specimens and much more, which tasted curiously sweet and delightfully appropriate to the situation—away there alone in the very heart of the old Caledonian hills, by that lonely sheiling, soothed by the murmuring stream, in that inexpressible solitude, on the skirts of Schiehallion! Though nigh half a century ago, it seems but as yesterday since we sat together there; and the very rustle of the leaves in the rising breeze, and the glory of that gathering gloaming in that far-off glen, are as clear to that eye 'that is the bliss of solitude,' as last night's memories, and yesterday's experiences.

After this unexpected and charming literary interlude, and after bathing our weary feet in the burn, we set out once more to clamber to the elevated chamber that hid the Snow Wreath. This we soon reached after a severe scramble; and there we slid on its crystalline surface and threw snowballs at each other till we were tired, in the middle of August! This Wreath, it seems, is perennial, being so set in that Corrie towards the north that the sun's rays cannot reach it, and the snow there has never melted away, a pocket specimen of eternal snows and Alpine conditions. Of such curious patches there are several in the Highlands; and on one property the tenure is dependent on the continuous existence of the wintry Wreath!

But night hastened, while we willingly lagged in highest health and hilarity; and after consuming the last morsel of what now seemed a too limited luncheon, we hastened,

footsore but unfatigued, in that exhilarating air, by Inverhadden to Kinloch, where we slept the sleep that knew no waking, till roused once more to a new day.

CONN, SON OF THE RED

(AN OSSIANIC TALE)

DONALD A. MACKENZIE

THE Fians sojourned by the shore
Of comely Cromarty, and o'er
The wooded hill pursued the chase
With ardour. 'Twas a full moon's space
Ere Beltane's rites would be begun
With homage to the rising sun,
Ere to the spirits of the dead
Would sacrificial blood be shed
In yon green grove of Navity—
When Conn came over the Eastern Sea
His heart a-flame with vengeful ire
To seek for Goll who slew his sire,
When he was seven years old.

Finn saw
In dreams, ere yet he came, with awe
The Red One's son so fierce and bold
In combat with his hero old—
The king-like Goll, of valorous might,
A stormy billow in the fight
No foe could e'er withstand.

He knew
The strange ship bore brave Conn, and blew
Clear on his horn the Warning Call,
And round him thronged the Fians all
With wond'ring gaze.

The sun drew nigh
The bal-fires of the evening sky
And faggot-clouds, with blood-red glare,
Caught flame, and in the radiant air
Lone Wyvis like a jewel shone—
While all the Fians gazed on Conn.