Notes on the Study of Gaelic: First Year's Course (Continued)

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An Deo-Ghreine. Stirling: Mackay. 3d. monthly.

This is the magazine of An Comunn Gaidhealach, and is intended to further the objects of the society. That it is under the editorship of Mr. Malcolm Macfarlane augurs well for its usefulness. No one with any knowledge of the working of the Comunn will disagree with us when we say that, during the years of the existence of the society, no member has done so much steady and solid work for it as Mr. Macfarlane.

The present is an introductory number and contains articles in Gaelic and English, several of them of much interest. We would especially mention that by Mr. Donald Mackechnie. Future numbers will doubtless deal in a practical manner with the objects which the Comunn has in view, and especially with Gaelic propaganda and how to work it. The main aim must be to get at the Highland people. It is earnestly to be hoped that the Comunn Gaidhealach will be supported in this new attempt, and that a fair chance will be given to *An Deo-Ghreine*. If we took our language seriously there would be no doubt as to the future of this little magazine, but unfortunately many of us are only half-hearted. The Mòd in Dingwall has stirred the north, however, and perhaps our race will not much longer be describable as 'An Fheinn air a h-uilinn.'

A. MACDONALD.

Guide to Gaelic Conversation and Pronunciation. By L. MACBEAN. Stirling: Mackay. 1s. 6d. net.

The fact that this book has gone to a second edition shows that it is proving a help to those for whom it is intended. It is so comprehensive in its subjects, sentences, and idioms that it cannot but be useful whether the learner regards it merely as a means of getting up sentences, or as a help to a fuller knowledge and a supplement to grammar and dictionary, or to Gaelic acquired by the *viva voce* method.

NOTES

Notes on the Study of Gaelic:—continued—First Year's Course

I assume that the aim of a first year's course is to enable the Gaelic-speaking pupil (a) to read Gaelic; (b) to understand and apply the principles of spelling; (c) to know the outlines of Gaelic grammar.

Reading and spelling go closely together. It will save much trouble if, not only in the first lessons, but throughout the whole course, continuous attention is directed to the value of the vowels and consonants, and their combinations. This lies at the root of both reading and spelling: once the functions of the letters are understood, there will be comparatively little difficulty. Further, it will be found that even young children can be interested in the part played by lips, tongue, teeth, and palate in the production of sounds, and if some attention is paid to this from the beginning, it will prove at once an assistance and a practical training in phonetics.

A beginning may be made with blackboard examples, preferably monosyllables, to illustrate the vowel sounds : e.g. *cas*, *càs* ; *le*, *glé*, *gnè* ; *mìr*, *màr* ; *tog*, *òg*, *bó* ; *cur*, *cùram*. Diphthongs and triphthongs may be held over, until the representation of the simple vowel sounds becomes familiar. The study of the sounds will, of course, be accompanied by (a) pronunciation of further written examples, (b) writing of dictated examples. A similar method may be followed with the consonants, mutable and immutable. The 'broad' and the 'slender' (or *palatalised*) values of the mutable consonants (*c*, *d*, *g*, *l*, *n*, *r*, *s*, *t*), will require much illustration : e.g. *càch*, *cioch* ; *dàn*, *dé*, etc. Specially important is the differentiation of *c*, *g* ; *t*, *d* ; *b*, *p* : e.g. *mac*, *mag* ; *ite*, *idir* ; *leapa*, *leabaidh*. In all these cases the difference is that *c*, *t*, *p* are accompanied by a 'puff' or *h*-sound preceding ; *g*, *d*, *b*, are not. Note also *marc*, *marg*, *marag*. The only double consonants in Gaelic are the double liquids *ll*, *nn*, *rr*, and these require special attention. Intervocalic *ll* is hardly distinguishable from *l* ; cf. *balach*, a lad, and *ballach*, spotted. Sometimes the only guide is the derivation : e.g. *toll*, a hole ; *Tollaidh*, a hollow place, which, so far as sound goes, might be written *Tolaidh*. The others *nn* and *rr* are easier.

After some experience of monosyllables may be introduced the fundamental rule of Gaelic spelling, *Leathan ri leathan, agus caol ri caol*, 'broad to broad, and narrow to narrow' ; or, otherwise, broad consonants must be in direct contact with broad vowels, slender consonants with slender vowels. The famous rule is scientific and intelligible only in the case of the eight mutable consonants, with the aspirates *ch*, *dh*, *gh*. Here it conveniently marks the distinction of broad and slender consonantal sounds. In the case of the immutable consonants (*b*, *f*, *m*, *p*), which admit of no such distinction, the rule is adopted only for the sake of uniformity. Thus *leabaidh* might be spelled *lebidh*, without violence to the pronunciation. It is as well to understand at once that the rule is partly scientific, partly conventional. Its application to words of more than one syllable necessitates some explanation of the convoy vowels, clearly set forth by Dr. A. Macbain and Mr. John Whyte in *How to Learn Gaelic*, to which this reference must suffice. Further details of spelling, e.g. the use (not always philologically justifiable) of *th* to separate syllables, may be left to the teacher. It is not necessary or desirable that reading or even composition of simple sentences should be deferred until all these principles are understood : reading, writing, and theory had better go on simultaneously. After some progress has been made, it would be useful to exhibit a chart of the principal sounds, for purposes of reference and revision. The pupils might write out examples in illustration.

Gaelic-speaking pupils, or, for that matter, pupils who do not speak Gaelic, can be taught to read Gaelic in a month. There will, however, remain much to be done in respect of (a) articulation, (b) dialectic varieties, (c) expression.

(a) Clear and distinct articulation is of the utmost importance. Slurring

and indistinctness are the natural enemies of correct spelling; conversely, spelling is immensely helped by proper articulation. This is a principle that holds good for all languages, not least for Gaelic. Some dialects are much more deliberate in enunciation than others: in Kintail, for instance, one can almost time the long vowels by the watch. Perhaps the *Tàileach* overdoes it, but the fault is on the right side.

(b) It is desirable that in reading—still more in spelling, except for special purposes—dialectic variations should give way to the literary or classical form as represented by the generally accepted spelling. Some such varieties, indeed, are so widespread and so fixed that it is perhaps as well, in reading at least, simply to accept them. It would be hopeless, for instance, to convert the northern Highlander to the orthodox Argyll pronunciation of *ao* as in *laogh*, *taobh*. He will also persist in saying *Tigheirn* for *Tighearna* (the latter to him savours of irreverence), and *feairn* for *fearna*. The widespread diphthongising of *eu* into *ia*, e.g. *feur* into *fiar*, has better claims to recognition in spelling, but even here it is probably better to accept the standard classical form, especially in view of the oblique cases *fedir*, etc. But there can be no manner of doubt as to the incorrectness of *-adh* pronounced as *-ag*; *each* made into *yach*; *duine* into *duinne*; *feusag* into *fedsag*, or the Strathspey *mèur* for *mùthair*. All such are intolerable both in reading and spelling. Lists of such as occur in the local dialect should be drawn up and kept for practice.

(c) Gaelic reading, like English, is apt to be monotonous. One good corrective is recitation of poetry or prose stories, with proper expression.

Certain common mis-spellings are worth noting at this early stage. The following should have *g* not *d*: *àirigh*, *deagh*, *éirigh* (the noun), *sluagh*, *briagh*, *laigh*. On the other hand *éiridh* (future tense), and *deidh* require *d*. In point of sound *gh* and *dh* are identical, but the above forms are philologically correct. So also are *giuthas*, *abhainn*.

Exceptions to the rule of 'broad to broad,' etc., are *tigh*, *so*, *sud*, *is* (verb and conjunction).

For grammar, it should suffice for the first year to master the article, noun, and adjective singly and in combination, and *written* composition might well be restricted to this. The power of expression is best developed at this stage by *oral* accounts of what was done or seen on such a day, and such like simple exercises involving observation and description. Idioms and phrases from both languages should be specially attended to.

For beginners in reading no better book can be found than the Gaelic Bible, which might be supplemented by the extracts given in *How to Read Gaelic*. For simple exercises from English into Gaelic Mr. L. Macbean's *Lessons in Gaelic* will be found useful; but in any case the teacher must construct exercises of English into Gaelic from the Gaelic prose pieces read.

W. J. WATSON.