Letter

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had time been granted him. He laid the foundation of the study of Celtic Place-Names, and did much to reduce the study of Norse-Gaelic names to scientific accuracy. From him we know practically all that is known about the origin of our Highland personal names. Truly a great achievement for a man with scanty leisure, who is cut off before he has reached fifty-two.

And now he is gone, and Inverness is a less interesting place than it was. The sturdy, square figure, the massive head, the rugged, kindly face, the shrewd grey eyes twinkling under bushy brows are now but memories. We shall miss his sage counsel and his friendly clasp; we shall long sorrow for the loss of the light and leading that he alone could give in many departments. He was a great man, and he deserved well of Scotland. We shall not look upon his like again. A chuid de Phàras da!

The excellent photograph of Dr. Macbain is reproduced by courteous permission of the proprietors of the *Highland Times*, Inverness.

LETTER.

IN *The Celtic Review* of October 1906, the Rev. Charles M. Robertson, in his able article on 'Scottish Gaelic Dialects,' publishes the following, *inter alia* :—'The Rev. John Forbes, in his Grammar, tries to distinguish three dialects—a Northern, an Interior, and a Southern. . . . The division into three dialects in effect is a division into Northern and Southern (or Western) Gaelic, with a further division of the former into two sub-dialects,' etc.; and, quoting Professor Mackinnon, 'It would perhaps be as easy to distinguish thirteen dialects as three.'

As these words appear capable of conveying the idea or inference to your learned readers and others that Mr. Forbes dogmatised unjustifiably, permit me to give the *ipsissima verba* from the Introduction to the Second Edition of his *Principles of Gaelic Grammar*, viz. :—

'For the sake of convenience (the italics are mine), in tracing the variations of dialect in the spoken language, the regions of the Scottish Gaelic *may* be divided into three grand divisions, viz. the Northern, Interior, and Southern.'

The detailed explanations of each of these 'grand divisions'—which, by the way, seem to have furnished Mr. Robertson with some of the material for his learned article—are too long to quote here, unless called for, but, I submit, they should be read by every one interested, or who has read Mr. Robertson's article, ere accepting that gentleman's dictum, writing, as he has, unqualifiedly, with his great advantages and added light and knowledge of nearly sixty years. Indeed, the assertion that Mr. Forbes might have divided them into thirteen as well as three savours somewhat of the hairsplitting order.

I therefore beg to say that, taking into consideration the time Mr. Forbes wrote, he was not so far wrong in his classification, especially made, as it bears to be, 'for the sake of convenience.'

ALEX. R. FORBES.

The above letter, which was addressed to *The Celtic Review* some time ago, appears to us to show more filial loyalty than judgment. Mr. Robertson in his introductory summary merely quotes Forbes's divisions, and without criticism states that the twofold division is more useful than the threefold one adopted by Forbes and others, and sometimes used by Munro. He does no injustice to Forbes in quoting him and does not misquote.

So far from making use of the Rev. John Forbes for his articles, Mr. Robertson, while not denying the merits of Forbes, tells us he has not got the book, and merely mentioned the above point from memory.

Mr. Robertson's knowledge is all got at first hand, and he seldom, if ever, is satisfied with less. When not speaking of his own knowledge he specifies the fact.

Our knowledge of Gaelic has made great progress since the Rev. John Forbes's time, and his son must not be surprised that his Grammar is out of date. Did he live in these days he would doubtless be abreast of modern scientific Gaelic.—Ed.