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Notes on the Study of Gaelic

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*Ballads of a Country Boy.* By SEUMAS McMANUS.

Dublin : Gill and Son. 1s. 6d.

One of the leaders of young Ireland said, 'Come and let us make national songs to warm the hearts of our people,' and truly to-day Ireland is a nest of singing birds. This neat little volume of poems gives fresh justification to the statement. There is achievement and genuine promise in the Country Boy's work. The ballads are, however, of unequal merit, and there is sometimes a lack of artistic finish which perhaps shows that some of them may be juvenile. Though the poems can hardly be said to strike a new note, they are full of Celtic atmosphere and genuine feeling. There is no affectation, all is simple and sincere, as befits the Country Boy. There is also the cry of the city dweller for nature, for the heath-clad hills of Ireland, and a yearning, touched with exquisite regret for the fresh young days that are past.

Perhaps Mr. McManus is most universally successful in his love-songs. Yet humour and pathos are not wanting. 'Father Phil' and the poem describing the old schoolmaster are gems in their way, and 'The Mountain Waterfall' is a fine piece of descriptive work that reminds one of 'Coire Cheathaich.' Many of the ballads are full of rousing patriotic enthusiasm and of that love which all her true children feel for Eire. From one such poem come the following lines:—

'There's not a little bell that blows in Ireland's dewy glens,  
There's not a sagan waves a spear above her many fens,  
There's not a tiny blade of grass on all her thousand hills  
But this fond breast with tender love to overflowing fills.  
O, Ireland for your holy sake I'll joyful bear all pain,  
To your high cause I'll consecrate my heart, my hand, my brain.'

Beautiful as some of Mr. McManus's poems are, however, his reputation will probably continue to rest on his prose work, which has many keen admirers.

M. N. MUNRO.

[*A number of Reviews are held over.*]

## NOTES

### Notes on the Study of Gaelic

#### INTRODUCTORY

These Notes, attempted at the suggestion of the Editor of the *Celtic Review*, are intended to help in some degree those who possess a conversational knowledge of the Gaelic language, and desire to speak and write it with accuracy. There are, it is believed, many such. Gaelic is still vernacular in most parts of our Highland counties, and there are abundant indications that the Scottish Gael are awakening to a consciousness of the loss they would sustain by the death of their language. In the meantime

teacher and pupil have to face difficulties not only in the matter of suitable text-books, but also in the lack of any definite tradition. In the teaching of Latin or English every one knows fairly well what course to follow. New and improved methods, it is true, are being adopted, to the saving of time and effort; but after all the old tradition has produced good scholars, and may do so still. The case of Gaelic is different. Here there can hardly be said to be any *via trita*: each goes his own way according to his lights. If the study of Gaelic goes on, as we hope it will, we may expect in the course of some years to see an evolution of method which, with suitable text-books, will at once facilitate the labours of teacher and pupil, and raise the standard of the work. Just at present it ought to be useful to outline a plan of study such as might be sufficient to cover the ground of the leaving certificate in Gaelic. It need hardly be said that the scheme is tentative, and subject to improvement in the light of further experience. The style and scope of the papers set for the certificate will necessarily exert a powerful influence; so far we know these only in a general way.

In an introductory paper such as this, it is pertinent to ask what are the objects to be attained by a study of Gaelic. What is the good of it? By this is not meant its immediate utility from a commercial point of view, a test which, strictly applied, would, I fear, make short work of most of the subjects in our ordinary school curriculum, but rather whether it serves any serious purpose of educational value or of practical importance. Something may be urged on both these sides. So long as Gaelic is vernacular, we shall require ministers and schoolmasters with a scholarly knowledge of the language. This surely need not be insisted on, and there is at the present moment a very real need of both. From an educational point of view, it must be admitted that in Gaelic we in Scotland possess an instrument of culture which has never been properly utilised, because we have not been taught its value. Others—Germans, Frenchmen, and Englishmen—have found the study of Gaelic to be the ‘open sesame’ to the understanding of certain facts and conditions of primitive Aryan civilisation. Mr. Alfred Nutt’s study of Cuchulainn, the Irish Achilles,<sup>1</sup> may be cited in illustration. The ‘sea-divided Gael,’ Scottish and Irish, possess an inheritance, traditional and linguistic, closely akin to that of the Greeks and Romans, yet different and complementary. The key to all this is a knowledge of the language. Coming to more recent things, we may say that a knowledge of Gaelic is essential to the right understanding of the history of Scotland. Scotland, most of it, was Gaelic speaking up to the time of the Reformation. Its church and its institutions were thoroughly Celtic up to Malcolm Canmore. Scotland north of the Grampians was opened to Saxon influence only after the rising of 1745. The Highland boy who reads Latin should know that Calgacus is Calgach, that Dumnorix is Rìgh an Domhain, and that Caractacus is, etymologically, the ancestor of MacCarthy. Our Duncans and Donalds

<sup>1</sup> David Nutt. 6d.

should have added respect for their name and race from learning that they represent the old Gaulish *Dunocatos*, Fort-warrior, and *Dumnovalos*, World-chief. Modern Scottish Gaelic literature, from the Dean of Lismore downwards, even including the forgeries of Macpherson—which after all are not wholly forgeries—is valuable both on account of its form and of its matter. It possesses qualities of its own, distinctively Celtic, which have been frequently insisted on, and come as a revelation to the less imaginative, but still appreciative Teuton. In point of form, no language, not even excepting ancient Greek and modern French, is richer in idiomatic and felicitous terms of expression. Shrewd, racy, and pungent, with proverb or apothegm to illustrate and enliven every turn, Gaelic is an ideal language for narrative or argument. Differing *toto caelo* from English in its idiom and its manner of thinking, it affords a discipline in translation closely analogous to that given by Latin. Above all, it is *our own* tongue.

In all teaching of language, and certainly not least in the case of Gaelic, the first essential is correct pronunciation. Clearness and distinctness of enunciation must be insisted on from the beginning and right through. For this, a necessary preliminary is a thorough drill in the sounds of the Gaelic alphabet, vowels and consonants. It is unnecessary at this stage to go into details; we shall see hereafter how essential this is for the sake of spelling. Once the values of vowels and consonants are understood, Gaelic spelling loses most of its terrors, and indeed is seen to be highly serviceable and very fairly consistent in representing the spoken word.

Spelling, writing, and dictation should be practised from the start. It is a sound principle that we should enlist the services of the ear, the eye, the hand, and the tongue, and exercise in the written forms of words should not be deferred to a late stage.

With regard to grammar, it sometimes seems to be implied that it should be left over for the advanced stages. This may be partly true of a language such as English, which has practically lost its inflections, and therefore can hardly be said to have a grammar. It would certainly be a serious error to teach an inflected language like Gaelic on such a principle. In Gaelic one is brought up against grammatical facts from the very first, and these have to be understood and put in practice. What is of importance, however, is that the learner should not be burdened with facts of grammar for which he has no immediate use. Grammar is after all not an end in itself, and it should be introduced regularly, gradually, tactfully, with care that the pupil is not at any one time introduced to more grammatical facts than can be fully exemplified in composition. Strictly speaking, of course, matters should be so arranged that the grammar arises naturally and consecutively from the reading, both being combined with practice in speaking and in writing. This is a counsel of perfection.

In the notes which follow I shall attempt to outline a first year's course suitable to children of thirteen to fourteen, as a basis of two hours per week, or eighty lessons in the school year.

W. J. WATSON.

The paper set for the LEAVING CERTIFICATE Examination (Gaelic, 29th June, 2-5 P.M.) is printed here by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

I. Translate into English the following extract :—

*Long mhòr nan Eilthireach.*<sup>1</sup>

'N am measg chunnaic mi aon long mhòr a thug bàrr orra air fad ; bha iomadh bàta beag a' gabhail d' a h-ionnsuidh, agus thug mi fainear gu robh iad a' deanamh deas gu a cur fa sgaoil. Bha duine leinn as gann a thog a cheann fad an latha, 's a bha a nis ag amharc gu geur air an luing. 'An aithne dhuit,' thuirt mi ris, 'ciod i an long mhòr so?' 'Mo thruaighe!' ars' esan, 's ann domb as aithne ; is duilich leam gu bheil barrachd 's a b' àill leam de m' luchd-eòlais innte ; innte tha mo bhràithrean is moran de m' chàirdean a' dol thairis air imrich fhada do America mu Thuath ; agus is bochd nach robh agamsa na bheireadh air falbh mi cuideachd.' Tharruing sinn a nunn d' an ionnsuidh ; oir tha mi ag aideachadh gu robh toil agam na daoine so fhaicinn a bha an diugh a' dol a ghabhail an cead deireannach a dh' Albainn, air tòir dùthcha far am faigheadh iad dachaigh dhaibh fhéin 's d' an teaghlaichean. Cha'n 'eil e comasach a thoirt air aon duine nach robh 's an làthair an sealladh a chunnaic mi a thuigsinn. Cha tig an latha a théid e as mo chuimhne. Bha iad an so eadar bheag agus mhòr, o'n naoidhean nach robh ach seachdain a dh' aois gus an seann duine liath a bha tri fichead bliadhna 's a deich.

II. Translate into English *one* of the following :—

(a) *Badan fraoich.*

Ceud failt' ort fhéin, a bhadaid fhraoich,  
 Bho thir nan aonach àrd,  
 An tìr a dh' àraich iomadh laoch,  
 Ge sgaoilt' an diugh an àl ;  
 Tha snuadh mo dhùthcha air do ghruaidh,  
 Seasaidh tu fuachd is blàths :  
 'S e mheudaich dhomh cho mòr do luach  
 Gu'n d' fhuair mi thu bho'n Bhàrd.

(b) *Ealadhna<sup>2</sup> Dhonnachaidh Bhàin, am Bàrd.*

Dheanainn duit ceann<sup>3</sup> is crann<sup>4</sup> 's an Earrach  
 An àm chur ghearran an éill ;  
 Is dheanainn mar chàch air tràigh na mara  
 Cur àird air mealladh an éisg ;  
 Mharbhainn duit geòidh is ròin is eala,  
 'S na h-eòin air bharran nan geug ;  
 'S cha bhi thu ri d' bheò gun seòl air t' aran  
 'S mi chòmhnuidh far am bi féidh.

III. Reproduce, in Gaelic, and, as far as possible, in your own diction and idiom, the passage read out. (*See p. 93.*)

<sup>1</sup> Emigrant.

<sup>2</sup> Accomplishments.

<sup>3</sup> He who leads the horses.

<sup>4</sup> The man who guides the plough.

IV. Translate into Gaelic *one* of the following passages :—(a) *Shinty*.

The games of the boys were all athletic,<sup>1</sup>—throwing the hammer, putting the stone, leaping, wrestling, and the like. But the favourite game was ‘shinty,’ called *hockey*, I believe, in England. This is played by any number of persons, as many as a hundred often engaging in it. Each has a club, or stick bent at the end, and made short or long, according as it has to be used by one or both hands. The largest and smoothest field that can be found is selected for the game. The combat lies in the attempt of each party to knock a ball beyond a certain boundary in the opponents’ ground. The ball is struck by any one on either side who can get at it. Few games are more exciting, or demand greater physical exertion, than a good shinty match.

(b) *About Seals*.

Very well, then. It is now May, about the 20th, and we are at the other side of the world, in the Island of St. Paul. It is cool and misty ; but there are few warm or clear days in this quarter, even in summer. We can see a few large seals on the rocks, seven feet long every one of them. The nearest one shows no fear of us, and we need not fear him. He is very fat, and it is well for him that he is so. When he has his family gathered round him on that rock, he will stay there to defend them against all comers for the next three or four months, and during that time he will neither eat nor drink. Young ones are there also. When these are about three months old, they venture into the water ; but at first they soon scramble out again, spitting and crying as loud as they can. In a few days, however, they learn to swim perfectly.

V. Answer any *two* (not more) of the following four questions :—

1. Give the genitive singular and nominative plural of *bean*, *bò*, *caora*, *cù*, *long*, *sliabh*.
2. Give, with examples, three cases in which the Article is used differently in Gaelic and English.
3. Translate the following sentences into idiomatic Gaelic :—  
Both are equally good. He gave thirty shillings each for the sheep. I shall be back before Monday. He will be twelve years of age a month hence.
4. Express in English the meaning of these sentences and phrases :—  
Olc air mhaith le càch e. Tha mi sgith, 's mi leam fhìn. Cha b' fhearr a nasgaidh e. Cha bu ruith leis ach leum.

(III. See p. 92.) *This paper must not be seen by any Candidate.*

*To be read out twice, slowly and in an accent with which the Candidates are familiar, by the Supervising Officer (or the Teacher) at 2.45 P.M. The substance of this story is to be reproduced by the Candidates in Gaelic. No notes may be made while it is being read.*

*Before commencing to read it, the Supervising Officer or the Teacher must write upon the blackboard the title of the story as follows: ‘Bàthadh a’ Chuilein.’ He should also warn the Candidates that they are not to aim at reproducing the passage in all its details, and in the same words or order of words as the*

<sup>1</sup> Fearail.

*original. What is desired is that they should attempt to relate the story in Gaelic, in their own diction and idiom. Great importance is attached to grammatical correctness, and full credit will be given for idiomatic phraseology.*

#### BÀTHADH A' CHUILEIN.

Chaidh binn a' chuilein a thoirt a mach air ball, 's b'e sin a bhàthadh; agus air son mo chuid-sa de'n ghnòthach, 's ann orm a thainig a' bhinn a thoirt gu buil, 's e sin ri ràdh, 's ann domh a b' éigin mo chompanach beag, bòidheach a chur gu bàs. Thog mi leam e ann am bhroilleach, 's mo chridhe an impis sgàineadh; agus o'n a bha'n t-uisge a' sìleadh gu trom chomhdaich mi e le sgiath mo pheiteige gu a chumail tioram. 'Nuair a ràinig mi an linne dhubh 's am biodh iad a' bàthadh chon is chat, bha i ag amharc cho dorcha 's nach robh de chruas cridhe agam na leigeadh dhomh a thilgeil innte. Thill mi ceum air m'ais o bhruaich na h-aibhne 's chaidh mi stigh fo phreas beag seilich, agus chrùbain mi an sin gus an robh mi cho fliuch 's ged a bhithinn air mo thumadh 's an abhainn. Cia fhad a dh' fhanainn mar sin na maireadh solus latha cha'n fhios domh, ach bha e nis a' fas dorcha, 's b'eudar an tigh a thoirt orm. Fliuch gus an craiceann, air chrith leis an fhuachd, 's ach beag as mo chiall leis an eagal, leum mi air mo bhonn 's ghabh mi roid chum bruaih na h-aibhne 's thilg mi an dùile bho chd 's an linne. Thug e aon sgàl as. Cha d' éisd mi ri tuillidh; ghlaoth is chaoin mi, 's theich mi cho luath 's a bheireadh mo chasan mi. 'Nuair a rainig mi an tigh, thilg mi dhiom m' aodach 's leum mi do m' leabaidh. Cha bu luaithe thigeadh neul cadail orm na bha sgàl a' chuilein 'n am chluais. Mhair an ghnòthach mar sin fad na h-oidhche. 'S a' mhaduinn bha mise cho tinn 's nach b' urrainn domh mo cheann a thogail bhàrr mo chluasaig. Bha dithis 's an tigh an latha sin aig an robh ionndrainn glé ghoirt. B'iad sin màthair agus companach a' chuilein, 's bha iomadh latha 'n a dhéigh sin mu'n deachaidh sgàl a' chreutair bhig as mo chluais.

[Readers of the Magazine will be interested to notice that the above piece is taken from Mr. Donald Mackenzie's excellent contribution to the first number (July 1904) of the CELTIC REVIEW.]

#### Celt and Semite and the Determination of our Origins

If philology may afford a precious contribution to the determination of our racial origins, no light can be thrown upon the darkness of that distant past without a combined exegesis of the notions we derive from Geology, Palæontology, Anthropology, Ethnography, Epigraphy, and even Astronomy.

*A priori*, the racial formation of the Celtic group succeeding in the West, on its habitat, to the *Race of the Dolmens* was probably anterior to the development of Aryan or Semitic civilisations in the East. Most probably, according to the hypothesis of M. André de Panagüia, the Celtic Race proceeded, at the Stone Age, from the invasion of the habitat of the *Race of the Dolmens* by tribes of the Eastern Black Race, by a mixture of those invaders with that *Race of the Dolmens*.

If the climates of the North have lightened the complexion of the