

Tales of the west Highlands

“Tir nam Beann, ’s nan Gleann, s nan Gaisgeach.”

The land of Hills, and Glens, and Heroes

Popular tales of the west Highlands : orally collected

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It seems then, that Gaelic tales attribute supernatural qualities to things which are mentioned in popular tales elsewhere, and that Gaelic superstitions are common to other races ; and it seems worth inquiry whether there was anything in the known customs of Celtic tribes to make these things valuable, and whether tradition is supported by history.

In the first place, then, who are Celts now ? Who were their ancestors ? Who are their relations ? and where have Gaelic tribes appeared in history.

I believe that little is really known about the Gael ; and in particular, the origin of the West Highlanders has been very keenly disputed. One thing is clear, they speak a language which is almost identical with the Irish of the north of Ireland, and they are the same people. The dialect of Irish, which varies most from Scotch Gaelic, is clearly but another form of the same tongue. Manks is another ; and these three are closely related to Welsh and Breton, though the difference is very much greater. Gaelic, Irish, and Manks vary from each other about as much as Norse, Swedish, and Danish. Welsh and Breton vary from the rest about as much as German and Dutch do from the Scandinavian languages. There are variations in Gaelic, and I believe there are in all the five surviving Celtic dialects, as there are in the languages of different counties in England, of every valley in Norway and Sweden, of every German district, and of every part of France, Spain, and Italy. But one who knows Gaelic well, can make himself understood throughout the Highlands, as freely as an Englishman can in England, though he may speak with a Northumbrian burr, or a west country twang, or like a true Cockney.

These, then, form the Celtic clan, the people of the west of Scotland, the Irish, the Manks, the Welsh, and the Breton. Who their relations are, and who their ancestors, are questions not easily answered, though much has been written on the subject. The following is a brief outline of what is given as Celtic history by modern writers whose works I have consulted lately : —

According to Henri Martin, the French historian, [1] the whole of Central Europe, France, and Spain, were once overrun by a race calling themselves Gael, and best known as Gauls. This people is generally admitted to have been of the same stock as Germans, Latins, Greeks, and Slavonians, and to have started from Central Asia at some unknown epoch. They are supposed to have been warlike, to have been tattooed like modern New Zealanders, and painted like North American Indians, to have been armed with stone weapons like the South Sea Islanders and Californian Indians ; but shepherd, as well as hunters, and acquainted with the use of wheat and rye, which they are supposed to have brought with them from Asia. One great confederation of tribes of this race was known to ancient historians, as Κελτοί. They were represented as fair and rosy-cheeked, large-chested, active, and brave, and they found the Euskes settled in the south of France, who were dark-complexioned, whose descendants are supposed to be the Euscaldonec or Basques of the Pyrennees, and who are classed with the Lapps of the north of Europe, and with tribes now dwelling in the far north of Asia. I have

seen faces in Barra very like faces which I had seen shortly before at St. Sebastian in Spain. A tribe of Gauls made their way into Italy, and have left traces of their language there, in the names of mountain chains and great rivers. These are named "Amhra," or "Ombres," and Amhra is translated Valliant. This invasion is calculated to have taken place about 1500 B.C.

The Gael were followed by Kimri or Cimbri, a kindred people of a darker complexion, speaking a kindred language, and their descendants are supposed to be the Welsh and Bretons. These in turn occupied the interior of eastern Europe, and were followed by the Scyths, and these, says the French historian, were Teutons.

According to the learned author of the essay on the Cimmerians, in the third volume of Rawlinson's Herodotus, p. 184, it is almost beyond doubt that a people known to their neighbours as Cimmerii, Gimiri, or probably Gomerini, attained a considerable power in Western Asia and Eastern Europe within the period indicated by the dates B.C. 800, 600, or even earlier.

These people are traced to the inhabitants of Wales, and Gael and Cymri are admitted by all to be Κελτοί ; and still keep up their old character for pugnacity by quarrelling over their pedigrees.

Celts were undoubtedly the primitive inhabitants of Gaul, Belgium, and the British Islands, possibly also of Spain and Portugal ; but no word of the language spoken by these ancient Cimbri has been preserved by ancient authors, except the name, " and perhaps the name Cimmerii may have included many Celtic tribes not of the Cymric branch." These Gauls appeared everywhere in Europe ; and, in particular, they who had probably been driven out by the Scythians invaded Scythia, intermixed with the people, and formed the people known in history as Celto-Scythians ; who the Scyths were (according to the author) appears to be uncertain. All that remains of their language is a list of words, picked out of the works of ancient authors ; and knowing what modern authors make of words which they pick up by ear, such a list is but a narrow foundation on which to build. Still on that list it has been decided that Scyths spoke a language which has affinity with Sanscrit, and in that list, as it seems to me, there are several words which resemble Gaelic more closely than the Sanscrit words given with them. And so, according to this theory, the Basques were found in Europe by the first Gael, and these were driven westwards by Kimri, and these again by Scythians, and these by Teutons, and all these still occupy their respective positions. The Basques and Lapps pushed aside ; the Gael in Scotland and Ireland, driven far to the westwards ; the Kimri driven westwards into Wales and Brittany ; the Scyths lost or absorbed ; and the Teutons occupying their old possessions, as Germans, Saxons, English, Scandinavians, and all their kindred tribes ; and of all these the Basques and their relatives alone speak a language which cannot be traced to a common unknown origin, from which Sanscrit also came.

Whatever then throws light on the traditions of the first invaders of Europe is of interest to all the rest, for, according to this theory, they are all of the same clan. They are all branches of the same old stock which grew in Central Asia, and which has spread over great part of the world, and whatever is told of Gauls is of interest to all branches of Celts.

Rome was taken by Gauls about 390 B.C. ; Greece was invaded by Gauls about 297 B.C., and they are then described as armed with great swords and lances, and wearing golden collars, and fighting savagely. At the end of the third century B.C., according to the French historian, Gaul might have been a common name for the greatest part of Europe, for Gauls were everywhere.

Now, what manner of men were these Gauls, when men saw them who could describe them ?

All the Gauls kept their hair untouched by iron, and raised it like a mane towards the top of the head. As to the beard, some shaved it, others wore it of a moderate length. The chiefs and the nobles shaved the cheeks and the chin, and let their mustache grow to all their length. (Histoire de France, page 33.)

Their eyes were blue or sea-green, and shone under this thick mass of hair, of which the blond hue had been changed by lime-water to a flaming tint.

Their mustaches were “Rousses,” which is the only word I know which will translate ruadh.

The warrior was armed with an enormous sabre on his left thigh ; he had two darts in his hand, or a long lance ; he carried a four-cornered shield, painted of various brilliant colours, with bosses representing birds or wild animals ; and on his head was a helmet topped with eagles’ wings, floating hair, or horns of wild animals ; his clothes were particoloured and he wore “brighis ;” he was always fighting at home or abroad ; he was a curious inquiring mortal, always asking questions ; and truly he must have been a formidable savage that old French Gaul. Men’s heads were nailed at the gates of his towns and his houses, beside trophies of the chase, much as modern Gael now hang up the trophies of their destructive skill, in the shape of pole-cats and crows.

The chiefs kept human heads embalmed and preserved, like archives of family prowess, as the Dyaks of Borneo and the New Zealanders still do, or did very lately. The father had the power of life and death over his wife and children, and exercised it too by burning the guilty wife ; and, though some chiefs had several wives, and there are some scandalous stories of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the islands ; women were consulted together with men by the chiefs on matters of moment, and held a high place amongst the Gauls of France.

Now, this short description of the Gauls, rapidly gleaned from the pages of two modern books of high authority and great research, after my Gaelic stories were collected, agrees with the picture which the Gaelic tales give of their mythical heroes in many particulars. They have long beautiful yellow hair, Leadanach, Buidh, Boidheach. They are Ruadh, Rousses. They have large swords, claidheamh, sometimes duileagach, leaf-shaped. They cast spears and darts, Sleadh. They are always asking questions, and their descendants have not lost the habit yet. Their dwellings are surrounded by heads stuck on staves, stob. They have larders of dead enemies. When a man is described as ragged and out of order, it is almost always added that his beard had grown over his face ; and though beards are coming into fashion now, it is not a highland fashion to wear a beard ; and many a stinging joke have I heard aimed at a bearded man by modern Highlanders. The shields of the warriors are Bucaid-each, bossed ; Balla-bhreachd, dotted and variegated ; Bara-chaol, with slender point ; “with many a picture to be seen on it, a lion, a cremhinach, and a deadly snake ;” and such shields are figured on the Iona tombs. The ancient Gauls wore helmets which represented beasts. The enchanted king’s sons, when they came home to their dwellings, put off cochal, the husk, and become men ; and when they go out, they resume the cochal and become animals of various kinds. May this not mean that they put on their armour. They marry a plurality of wives in many stories. In short, the enchanted warriors are, as I verily believe, nothing but real men, and their manners real manners, seen through a haze of centuries, and seen in the same light as they are seen in other popular tales, but, mayhap, a trifle clearer, because the men who tell of them are the descendants of the men described, and have mixed less with other men.

I do not mean that the tales date from any particular period, but that traces of all periods may be found in them—that various actors have played the same parts time out of mind, and that their manners and customs are all mixed together, and truly, though confusedly, represented—that giants and fairies, and enchanted princes were men ; that Rob Roy may yet

wear many heads in Australia, and be a god or an ogre, according to taste—that tales are but garbled popular history, of a long journey through forests and wilds, inhabited by savages and wild beasts : of events that occurred on the way from east to west, in the year of grace, once upon a time.

Tales certainly are historical in this sense when they treat of Eirinn and Lochlann, for the islands were the battlefield of the Celts and Scandinavians, and though they lack the precision of more modern popular history, they are very precise as to Irish names and geography. “ They went to Cnoc Seannan in Ireland.” Conall was called Gulbanach from Beinn Gulbain in Ireland. There is the “ king of Newry,” and many other places are named according to their Gaelic names, never as they are named in English. The same is true of the manuscript tales in the Advocates’ Library. Places about Loch Awe are named, and the characters pass backwards and forwards between Ireland and Argyll, as we are told they really did when the Irish Celts invaded and possessed that part of the west of Scotland, and that invasion is clearly referred to in more than one popular tradition still current. When Lochlann is mentioned, it is further off, and all is uncertain. The king’s son, not the king himself, is usually the hero. Breacan *MacRigh* Lochlainn is named, or the son of the king of Lochlann, without a name at all, but the Irish kings often have a whole pedigree ; thus Connall Gulbanach Maclulin MacArt Mac some one else, king of Ireland, and I lately heard along story about “ Magnus.”

This again is like distorted, undated popular history of true events. They are clearly seen at home, the very spot where the action took place is pointed to ; less clearly in Ireland, though people and places are named ; they are dimly seen in Lochlann, and beyond that everything is enlarged, and magical, and mysterious and grotesque. Real events are distorted into fables and magnified into supernatural occurrences, for the Gaelic proverbs truly say, “ There are long horns on cattle in mist” or “ in Ireland,” and “ Far away fowls have fine feathers.”

But whether the stories are history or mythology, it is quite clear that they are very old, that they belong to a class which is very widely spread, and that they were not made by living men.

All story-tellers agree in saying that they learned them as traditions long ago ; and if all those whose names are given had been inclined to tell “ stories” in another sense, they could not have made and told the same stories at opposite ends of Scotland, almost simultaneously, to different people. James Wilson could not have told Connall Cra-bhuidhe to Hector MacLean in Islay, about the same time that Neil Gillies was telling Conal Ciobhi to me at Inverary, and a very short time before Hector Urquhart got No. 8 from Kenneth MacLean in Gairloch. An old fisherman and an old porter could not have combined to tell a “ story” which was in Straparola, in Italian, in 1567, to Hector MacLean in Barra, in 1859, and to the Rev. Mr. MacLauchlan in Edinburgh, in 1860, unless these stories were popular facts, though despised as fictions ; and they are curious facts too, for the frame of Conal is common to old German manuscripts, and some of the adventures are versions of those of Ulysses. There are many proverbs which are only explained when the story is known ; for example, “ black-berries in February” means nothing ; but when explained by the story, the meaning is clearly the idea which an acquaintance of mine once embodied in a French toast, as “ les impossibilités accomplies.” The stories do not change rapidly, for I have gone back to a reciter after the lapse of a year, and I have heard him again repeat in Gaelic, what I had translated from his dictation, with hardly a change.

I have now no doubt that the popular tales are very old ; that they are old “ Allabanaich,” Highlanders and wanderers ; that they have wandered, settled, and changed, with those who still tell them ; and call themselves “ Albannaich,” men whose wandering spirit is not yet extinct, though they were settled in their present abodes “ before the memory of man.”

There was and is, a wandering spirit in the whole race, if Celts are Indo-Europeans. In the people who delighted in the adventures of Ulysses and Æneas, a longing spirit of western adventure, which was shewn in the fabled Atalantis, and the Island of the Seven Cities and St. Brandon—the spirit which drove the hordes of Asia to Europe, and urged Columbus to discover America, and which still survives in “the Green Isle of the great deep,” “Eilan uaine an iomal torra domhain,” of which so much is told, which Highland fancy still sees on the far western horizon, and which as “FLATHINNIS,” the Isle of Heroes, has now been raised from an earthly paradise to mean Heaven.

Much has been said about highland superstitions, and highlanders of the east and west, like their southern neighbours, have many, but they are at least respectable from their age ; and because they are so widely spread over the world, I believe them to be nearly all fictions founded on facts.

Thirteen Highlanders would eat their potatoes together without fear, and one of them might spill the salt without a shudder. I never heard of a Celtic peasant consulting his table as an oracle, or going to a clairvoyant ; but plenty of them dream dreams and see visions, and believe in them as men in Bible history did of old.

A man had been lost in crossing the dangerous ford, five or six miles of sand or rock, between Benbecula and North Uist, shortly before I was there in 1859. I was told the fact, and it was added incidentally, “And did he not come to his sister in a dream, and tell her where to find him ? and she went to the place, and got him there, half buried in sand, after the whole country side had been looking for him in vain.” Here is a similar story from Manchester : —

“*Fulfilment of a Dream.*—An inquest was held last evening at Sheffield, before Mr. Thomas Badger, coroner, on the body of Mr. Charles Holmes, button manufacturer, Clough House Lane, who had been found drowned on Monday morning, in the Lead-mill dam in that town. The deceased left his home on Saturday night in company with his wife ; they walked through the town together, and about nine o’clock, at which time they were at the top of Union Street, he said to her, ‘I’m going to leave thee here, Fanny.’ She said, ‘Are you ?’ and he replied, ‘Yes, I want to see an old friend who is going to Birmingham on Monday, and he is to be here.’ She said to him, ‘Well, Charlie, don’t stop long, because I do feel queer about that dream,’ and he replied, ‘Oh, don’t say that ; I’ll just have a glass, and then come home. Go and get the supper ready, and I’ll come directly.’ She then left him. When he got into the house he was invited to drink with his friend, but he exhibited some reluctance, saying that on the night before his wife had dreamed that she saw him dead in a public-house, and that she had dreamed a similar dream about a week before. Unfortunately, however, he yielded to the temptation, got drunk, and did not leave the public-house till after twelve. He was accompanied part of the way home by his friend, and was never afterwards seen alive. Near his house are the Lead-mill dams, and, in consequence of his not returning home his wife felt convinced that he had fallen in and got drowned. A search was made, and on Monday morning his body was found in the water, and was removed to the Royal Standard public-house, where his wife saw the body, and identified it as that of her husband ; The jury returned a verdict of ‘Found drowned,’ and recommended that an opening in the wall, near the dam, through which it is supposed he had fallen, should be built up.”—*Manchester Examiner*.

There are plenty of lowlanders as well as “ignorant” Highlanders who think that they are seers, without the aid of a deal board through which to look into futurity, by the help of a medium, and it is by no means uncommon, as I am told, for the Astronomer-Royal to receive English letters asking his advice, *ex officio*.

It may not be out of place to add a word as to the spoken Gaelic of these tales ; the mode of writing it ; and the English of the translation. First, then, it is admitted by all that the Gaelic of the West Highlands is a branch of the old Celtic stock, that is to say, the language of some of the oldest invaders or inhabitants of Europe of whom anything is known. Why it is I know not, but from works on philology it appears that the Highland dialect has been least studied, and for that reason, if for no other, it is perhaps best worth the trouble. I thought it best to ignore all that had been said or written on the subject, to go direct to those who now speak the language, especially to those who speak no other tongue ; to men who use words as they use their feet and hands, utterly unconscious of design ; who talk as nature and their parents taught them ; and who are as innocent of philology as their own babies when they first learn to say “ Abbi.”

I requested those who wrote for me to take down the words as they were spoken, and to write as they would speak themselves ; and the Gaelic of the tales is the result of such a process. The names of the writers are given, and I am satisfied that they have done their work faithfully and well. The Gaelic then is *not* what is called “ classical Gaelic.” It is generally the Gaelic of the people—pure from the source.

Next, as to orthography. I chose one man, Mr. Hector MacLean, whom I know to be free from prejudice, and who knows the rules of Gaelic spelling, to correct the press, and I asked him to spell the sounds which he heard, according to the principles of Gaelic orthography, whenever he wrote anything down himself ; and in correcting the press for the work of others, to correct nothing but manifest mistakes, and this he has done, as it appears to me, very well.

In Gaelic there are certain vowels, and combinations of them, which represent certain sounds ; and they are all sounded, and always in the same manner, *according to theory*, but in practice it is a very different matter. In speaking Gaelic, as is the case in other languages, various modes of pronouncing the same vowels exist in various districts. The consonants meet and contend and extinguish each other, and change the sound of the vowels in Gaelic more than in any other language which I know ; but they fight by rule, and the conquered and the slain encumber the words which are their battlefields, as dead or dying consonants standing beside the silent *h* which kills or controls them. One difficulty in writing Gaelic from dictation is to ascertain, in words of doubtful meaning, whether the sound *v* is to be expressed by *bh* or *mh*. The first letter was once at the head of a small regiment of letters, and sounded his own note *m* or *b*, and so he regulated the meaning of the rest, but having fallen in with an *h* in an oblique case, and being changed thereby to *v*, the whole history of the word must be known before it can be settled whether it should begin with *mh* or *bh*, and it is much more difficult in other cases, where the letter is silenced altogether. My mother, if Gaelic, might become *vy vother*—father, *ather*, but the sounds would be spelt *mhothar*, *fhather*. The meaning in a book depends on the spelling, but in speaking, it is a different matter. There are shades of sound which an ear used to a language can detect, but which letters are wholly unfitted to express.

Gaelic scholars, then, who have a standard for Gaelic writing, and who adhere to it strictly, will probably find much which will appear to them erroneous spelling.

An English scholar reading Sir Walter Scott’s novels will find plenty of words which are not in Johnson’s Dictionary, and a student of Pickwick will find much in Sam Weller’s conversation which he will not discover in that form in Shakspeare.

Had I found stories in the Isle of Wight I should have spelt good morning good marnin, because it is so pronounced ; falbh is spelt folbh when a story comes from some of the Western Islands, because it is so pronounced there ; and for the same reason iad is spelt eud. I have no doubt there are errors. I can only vouch for having chosen men who did their best in a

very difficult matter; for I do not believe that there are ten men now living who would write a hundred lines of Gaelic off hand and spell them in the same way. I very much doubt if ten men ever did live at the same time who would have agreed as to Gaelic spelling ; and I know that I find forms of words in books which I have very rarely heard in conversation. For example, the plural in IBH (*iv*) is very rare ; the common form is AN.

The spelling of the first book printed in the Gaelic language, Bishop Carswell's Prayer-book, 1567, is not the same as the spelling of the Gaelic Bible. The Gaelic names in old charters are not spelt according to modern rule. The old Gaelic manuscripts in the Advocates' Library are spelt in various ways. Every man who has written Gaelic for me, spells words variously. Manks spelling is phonetic. Irish spelling is different ; and where there is so little authority, I hope to be forgiven if I have ventured to ask men to follow their own own road. I hope they will be forgiven if they have taken a short cut to obtain a certain object, and if they have left the beaten path.

For the translation I am responsible, and I feel that the English needs excuse. It has been the fashion so far to translate Gaelic freely ; that is, to give the sense of the passage without caring much for the sense of words. One result is, that dictionaries give so many meanings that they are almost useless to any one ignorant of Gaelic. There are many words in these tales which were new to me, and I have repeatedly been driven to gather their meaning from the context, or to ask for it at the source, because of the multitude of contradictory explanations given in dictionaries. Let me take one word as an example. In the first tale the hero meets CU SEANG NA COILL' UAINE, and the meaning turned on the word SEANG. To that word the following meanings are attached :—Slender, slender-waisted, hungry, hungry-looking, lank, lean, active, handsome, strong ; (applied to a shirt-front), fine ; “ Sad am I this day arising the breast of my shirt is not *seang* ;” (applied to food in a proverb), meat makes men “ seang ;” (applied to hinds in an ode), neat ; (applied to a horse), spirited ; also slim, small, small-bellied, gaunt, nimble, agile ; (applied to lady), slender-waisted. On looking further it appears that SEANGAN is an ant ; that SHUNKA is the Dakotah for all animals of the dog species, and that the word came to be applied to a horse, as spirit dog, when horses came first to that country ; and it further appears that there is a word in broad Scotch which nearly fits the Gaelic, SWANK ; that SING means a lion in India ; and that the horses of the sun were swankas with beautiful steps in Sanscrit. It seemed to me that the phrase might be thus freely translated “ The Forest Lion.”

But though it seemed to me possible I might be entirely wrong, so I gave the meaning of the words, about which there could be no mistake :—

CU SEANG NA COILL' UAINE.
Dog slim of the wood green.

My belief is, that the word was an adjective, descriptive of the qualities of a lion wherever their likeness is to be found— as strength, activity, high courage, bold bearing, slender form, hunger, satiety ; but I did not venture to translate CU SEANG by “ *lion*” nor by “ *grey hound*,” as I was advised to do. I translated it by those words which seem to give the present meaning of the Gaelic. Cu, a dog ; seang, slim; and the phrase stands, “ The slim dog of the green wood.”

And so throughout I have aimed at giving the present real meaning of every separate word, but so as to give its true meaning in the passage in which it occurs. Where I have not been able to do both, I have tried to keep as close as I could to the original idea involved. For example, “ In the mouth of night” is new to English, but it is comprehensible, and it is the exact meaning of the phrase commonly used to express the first coming on of darkness. The expression is poetical. It seems to refer to some old mythical notion that the sun went into a cave or a tent to sleep, for “ Take thy sleep in thy cave” is a line in Ossian's “ Address to the

Sun,” and though it was suggested to me to alter this translation, and make it “ good English,” I thought it best to adhere to my original plan. Generally where the phrase occurs it is translated “ in the mouth of night,” though I was advised to Write, “ in the dusk,” “ in the evening,” “ at nightfall,” “ in the mantle of night,” “ at twilight,” “ in the grey of the evening.”

I admit that all these phrases express ideas which might be attached to the words ; but what could an unfortunate student make of a passage in which a word meaning *mouth* according to all dictionaries, should seem to mean *mantle*, or *fall*, or *grey*. It is very much easier to write naturally and translate freely ; and as I have tried hard to make my translation a close one, I hope the bad English will be forgiven.

Those only who have tried to turn Gaelic into English can understand the difficulty. There are in fact many Gaelic phrases which will not go into English at all. For example, THA SO AGAM (I have this), is *this at me*, or *with me*, or *by me*, is a phrase which cannot be rendered for want of a word equivalent to AG or AIG, which expresses position and possession, and is combined with *am*, *ad*, *e*, *inn*, *ibh*, and changed to *aca* to express the persons. Gaelic will not bear literal translation into English, but I have tried to give the real meaning of every word as nearly as I could, and to give it by using the English word which most resembled the Gaelic ; and thus I have unexpectedly fallen in with a number of English words which seem to have the same origin as Gaelic, if they are not Survivors of the language of the ancient Britons. I have translated CLAUDHEAMH, pronounced *Clauv*, by *glave*, TRAILL by *thrall*, and so throughout wherever I have thought of an English word that resembled a word admitted to be Gaelic.

It is my own opinion, and it is that of Mr. MacLean, that the Gaelic language is the same from Cape Clear in Ireland to Cape Wrath in Scotland, though there are many dialects, and there is much variety. The language was taught to me by a native of Lorn, and he was chosen by the advice of men well able to judge, as a native of the district where the best Gaelic was then supposed to be spoken. Speaking from my own experience, I can converse freely in Lorn Gaelic with Scotch Highlanders in every district of Scotland, and with natives of Rathlin. I can make my way with natives of the North of Ireland, but I cannot converse with the natives of some Irish districts. I could not make the Manksmen understand me, but I can readily understand most of the words in Manks and in Irish, when pronounced separately.

There are a very great many words in Welsh and in Breton which I can understand, or trace when they are separately spoken, but the difference in these is much wider. Peasants come from Con naught to Islay, and in a very short time converse freely, though their accent betrays them ; but an Argyllshire Highlander is known in the north by his accent, just as a Yorkshireman would be found out in Somersetshire. An Islay man is detected in Mull, and a native of one parish in Islay is detected when he speaks in another ; but though there are such shades of difference, a Highlander used to hear languages variously spoken should have no difficulty in understanding any dialect of Gaelic spoken in Scotland, and most of the Irish dialects.

But which of all these is the best, who is to decide ? The author of a very good dictionary says, under the word COIG, that “ in the islands of Argyllshire every word is pronounced just as Adam spoke it.” Dr. Johnson pronounced the whole to be the rude speech of a barbarous people ; and the Saxon knew as much of Gaelic as the Celt did of Adam. One Gaelic scholar wished to change the island words ; a good Highlander told me that Dalmally was the best place for Gaelic, another was all for Western Ross. Nobody has a good word for Sutherland Gaelic, but it is very pure nevertheless in some districts ; north country men are all for Inverness. I have heard excellent Gaelic in the Long Island. On the whole, I am inclined to think that dialect the best which resembles the largest number of others, and that is the dialect spoken by the most illiterate in the islands, and on the promontories furthest to the west. I

will not venture to name any district, because I have no wish to contend with the natives of all the others.

The spirit of nationality is one which has a large development amongst my countrymen, and the subject of language brings it out in strong relief. It is but a phase of human nature, a result of the quality which phrenologists describe as combativeness, and it seems to be common to all the races classed as Indo-European.

It is a common opinion in England that one Englishman can thrash three Frenchmen ; and I have no doubt that a similar opinion prevails in France, though I do not know the fact. Highlanders believe that lowlanders generally are soft and effeminate ; lowlanders think that mountaineers are savages. An Irish Celt detests his brother Celt over the water. A Scotch Celt calls another Eireannach when he abuses him, but let a common foe appear and they will all combine.

England, Ireland, and Scotland are up in arms, with rifles on their shoulders, at a hint of the approach of a Frenchman ; but they joined France with heart and hand to fight the Russian and the Chinese ; and as soon as the battle was over, they came back and fought at home.

The English lion stirred up the Scotch lion in the English press, and the northern lion growled over his wrongs. Ireland began to tell of the tyrant Saxon, and a stranger might think that the Union was about to fall to pieces. It is not so ; it is but a manifestation of superfluous energy which breaks out in the other “ union ” over the water, and makes as much noise there as steam blowing off elsewhere.

I maintain that there is chronic war in every part of her Majesty’s dominions. Not long ago a dispute arose about a manner of catching herrings. One set of men caught them with drift-nets, another with drag-nets, and one party declared that the other violated the law ; blood got up, and at last a whole fleet of fishing-boats left their ground and sailed twenty miles down to attack the rival fleet in form. A gun-boat joined the party, and peace was preserved ; but it was more the result of a calm, which enabled the light row-boats to escape from the heavier sailing fleet. Both parties spoke the same language, and on any subject but herrings, they would have backed each other through the world.

The purchase of an orange, and a box on the ear, grew into a serious riot in a northern town last year. The fight spread as from a centre, and lasted three days ; but here it developed itself into a fight between Celt and Saxon. Both sides must have been in the wrong, and I am quite sure they were both ignominiously defeated, although they may hold the contrary.

Every election in the three kingdoms is a shameful riot, according to some public organ, whose party get the worst of it.

There is a regular stand-up fight in Paris periodically, the rest of Europe goes to war in earnest at every opportunity, and when there are no national or class wars, men fight as individuals all over the world. I was once at Christmas at a hurling match in Ireland. The game was played on ice on a lake, and after some hours the owner of the lake sent down a Scotch butler with bread and cheese and whisky for the players. They gathered about the cart in perfect good humour, when suddenly, without cause, an excited banker’s clerk shouted, “ Hurro for —— ” (the nearest post town), and performed a kind of war dance on the outside edge of his skates, flourishing a stick wildly, and chanting his war song, “ I’ll bet ere a man in England, Ireland, or SCOTLAND.” A knobby stick rose up in the crowd, and the Scotch butler was down ; but an Irish boy who had not opened his mouth was the next. He went head-foremost into a willow bush amongst the snow, and three men in frieze great-coats kicked him with nailed shoes. In ten minutes the storm was over, the butler was up again in his cart

dispensing the refreshments, the man in the bush was consoling himself with a dram, and all was peace. But that night the country party took up a position behind a stone wall, and when the others came, they sallied forth and there was a battle-royal.

So I have seen a parish shinty match in the Highlands become so hot and furious, that the leaders were forced to get two pipers and march their troops out of the field in opposite directions, to prevent a civil war of parishes.

And so, a part of her Majesty's guards having gone out to exercise at Clewer, and being stationed as "the enemy" at some point, obstinately refused to "retreat in disorder;" but stood their ground with such determination, that the officers had to sound the retreat on both sides to prevent a serious battle.

So at Eton, shins were broken in my tutor's football match against my dame's; and boys injured themselves in rowing frantically for the honour of upper or lower sixes.

Two twins, who were so like, that one used to skip round a pillar and answer to his brother's name, and who probably would have died for each other, still fought in private so earnestly, that one carried the mark of a shovel on his forehead for many a long day; and so boys fight, and men fight, individually and collectively, as parties, races, and nations, all over Europe, if not all over the world.

I decline to state my opinion as to which Gaelic is the best, for that is a peculiarly delicate subject, my countrymen having ceased to use their dirks, are apt to fight with pens, and I would rather see the children of the Gael, in this as in other matters, fighting shoulder to shoulder against foes, and working side by side with their friends.

The Gaelic language is essentially descriptive, rich in words, which by their sound alone express ideas. The thundering sound of the waves beating on the shore is well expressed by TONN, a wave; LUNN, a heavy Atlantic swell.

The harsh rattling and crushing of thunder by TAIRNEANACH.

The plunge of a heavy body thrown into deep water by TUNN, plunge.

The noise of small stones and fine gravel streaming seawards from a beach in the undertow is heard in SCRITHEAN, gravel.

The tinkling of shells as they slip and slide on the sand at the edge of the sea is heard in SLIGEAN, shells.

The hard sharp knocking of stones in CLACH, a stone, and thence all manner of compound ideas follow as CLACHAN, a village; CLACHAIR, a mason; CLACHARAN, a stone-chat.

The names of domestic animals usually resemble their notes. Bo, a cow; gobhar, a goat; caora, a sheep; laogh, a calf. Words such as barking, growling, squealing, coughing, sneezing, suggest the idea by the sound, as they do in English. Many names of beasts and birds, which are not of this class, are descriptive in another sense. The grouse are the reddish brown cock and hen; the fox, the reddish brown dog; the wolf, the fierce dog; the sandpiper, the little driolichan of the strand. The crow is the flayer, the falcon, the darter; the otter the brown or black beast.

It is a language full of metaphorical and descriptive expressions. "He went to the beginning of fortune;" "he put the world under his head;" "he took his own body home;" "he

went away”—that is, he went home sick, and he died. “ There were great masses of rain, and there was night and there was darkness.” “ Ye must not be out amidst the night, she is dark.”

It is rich in words expressive of war, by no means rich in words belonging to the arts. CRANN, a tree, means a mast, the bar of a door, a plough, and many other things made of wood. BEAIRT means a loom, a block and tackling, and engines of various kinds.

It seems to contain words to express the great features of nature, which can be traced in the names of rivers and mountains in a great part of Europe, such as EAS, a rapid (pr. ace) ; ATH (pr. A. and Av.), a ford ; AIMHAINN, OBHAINN, ABHAINN, a river, variously pronounced, *avain, a-wen, ovain, o-in, o-un, o-n*. Calais I take to be CALA., a harbour ; the word has no meaning in French. Boulogne might be BEUL OBHAINN, river’s mouth ; Donau, the Danube, might mean the brown river. Tana might mean the shallow, and both are descriptive.

Rhine might mean the division, and there is a district in Islay whose name is pronounced exactly as the name of the great German river. Balaclava is exceedingly like the name of an Islay farm, and might mean kite’s town, BAILE CHLAINHAIN ; but though such resemblances can hardly fail to occur to any one who knows the Gaelic language, it requires time and careful study to follow out such a subject, and it is foreign to my purpose. There are plenty of Gaelic words which closely resemble words in other European languages. Amongst the few Sanscrit words which I have been able to glean from books, I find several which resemble Gaelic words of similar meaning—JWALA, light flame, has many Gaelic relations in words which mean shining, fire, lightning, the moon, white, swan.

DYU, day, is like an diugh, to-day ; MIRAH, the ocean, like muir, mara, the sea ; but this again is foreign to my purpose.

My wish has been simply to gather some specimens of the wreck so plentifully strewn on the coasts of old Scotland, and to carry it where others may examine it ; rather to point out where curious objects worth some attention may be found, than to gather a great heap. I have not sought for stranded forests. I have not polished the rough sticks which I found ; I have but cut off a very few offending splinters, and I trust that some may be found who will not utterly despise such rubbish, or scorn the magic which peasants attribute to to a fairy egg.

[1] Histoire de France, par Henri Martin ; 1855.

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