



*Calum J. Maclean*

## *The Late Calum I. Maclean*

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Dr. C. I. Maclean, Senior Research Fellow in the School of Scottish Studies, who died in South Uist in his forty-fifth year on 16th August 1960, was, according to one well qualified to judge, "the best equipped and most successful collector of all time of Scottish Gaelic tradition".\*

Born on 6th September 1915, Calum Iain Maclean was the third son of the late Malcolm Maclean, the tailor of Raasay, and Christina Nicolson, a native of Braes in Skye. Both Nicolsons and Macleans were keenly interested in oral lore and literature, and both produced men who enjoyed a reputation for song making. The family proved exceptionally gifted, two brothers becoming doctors, and two secondary school headmasters—one of these being Somhairle Mac Gilleathain, widely regarded as the finest Scots-Gaelic poet since the eighteenth century.

While at Portree Secondary School, Calum Maclean became deeply attracted to the study of the Gaelic language and literature and, after distinguishing himself in W. J. Watson's Celtic class in successive years at Edinburgh University (1935-1937), he graduated in 1939 with first-class Honours in Celtic under J. Carmichael Watson. Awarded the McCaig and Macpherson Scholarships, he continued in Dublin his studies in Old Irish, under Osborn Bergin, and in Mediæval and Modern Welsh under J. Lloyd-Jones.

While studying in Ireland Maclean soon became interested in its folklore, inspired (according to his own account) mainly by the influence and writings of Douglas Hyde and, having acquired particular skill in the modern Irish of the Connaught Gaeltacht, he was appointed by Professor Delargy as full-time collector in that area for the Irish Folklore Commission. He soon proved to be the ideal collector of oral tradition and, when the Commission extended its work on Gaelic folklore to Scotland in 1946, Maclean was the obvious choice for the task. Within little more than four years he had assembled, in Barra, South Uist and Benbecula, the largest collection of folk-tales yet made

\* Professor J. H. Delargy, Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission, in a letter of 20.8.60.

in Scotland—only to be compared with that of J. F. Campbell of Islay.

Meanwhile Maclean's old University planned to set up in Edinburgh an archive of the oral traditions of all parts of Scotland as a central feature of a new research institute, the School of Scottish Studies, and with characteristic generosity Professor Delargy not only released Maclean for this purpose but also (among other things) deposited in the School a complete microfilm copy of the eighteen MS volumes of Hebridean material which Maclean had assembled during his work for the Irish Folklore Commission.

With Maclean's appointment at New Year, 1951, the School of Scottish Studies may be said to have begun, and during the next nine and a half years he gave himself unsparingly to the great work of recording the traditional tales, customs and beliefs of his own countrymen. It has been estimated that the enormous Gaelic collection he made during that time amounts to nearly a hundred miles of tape; but his constant warning was that this was very far from being enough. Realising the urgency of gathering any comparable material remaining in the non-Gaelic regions of Scotland, he made extensive recordings in Shetland, and some also in the Borders, but he was only too well aware of the impossibility of attempting single-handed anything like adequate coverage over wide areas of the country. The labour and often great personal hardship involved could only have been borne by one passionately devoted to what he regarded as a patriotic duty. The very first recordings he made for the School included no less than 524 Gaelic tales from a roadman encountered (as he afterwards recalled) "in the dead of winter, and Lochaber lay white and deep in snow". The last were made, literally, on his death bed in South Uist. Of the physical difficulties of his last years (especially acute since the loss of his left arm in 1957) he rarely spoke, but somehow still contrived with indomitable courage and good humour to travel great distances, often on foot and carrying a portable tape-recorder, collecting a wide range of valuable material much of which would otherwise have been lost for ever.

The full significance and range of the oral material preserved as a result of Calum Maclean's work in Scotland will only become apparent after years of study, but already Scandinavian and other scholars who have had access to it have expressed their admiration for the skill and care displayed in the recording no less than the intrinsic value of the material.

The unique combination of his inherited gifts, training and experience, lends particular weight to his own final conclusion that, for richness in oral tradition, no area of these islands—not excepting even the west of Ireland—can compare with South Uist. It was entirely characteristic of him, however, that, always appreciating the necessity for a systematic, “geographical” approach to cultural studies, he devoted years of his life to the far more difficult task of seeking out and recording the comparable material so widely dispersed in the mainland areas of the country, much of it (as he said recently) “as fine as anywhere in Scotland, but, to collect it properly and in time, not one but a whole team of collectors is necessary”.

Because so much of Maclean’s life was spent in recording, and the concomitant heavy labour of transcription and indexing—the School’s index system is based on the translation made by him in 1952 of the Uppsala system—he had little time for publication, and an important research project he began eight years ago was interrupted by his illness. Nevertheless he contributed important articles and reviews to many journals, Scandinavian and German as well as British and Irish. His book on *The Highlands* (Batsford 1959) is almost unique among general books on this subject, not only by reason of its width of knowledge, but also because it presents Highland history and the contemporary scene uncompromisingly from the point of view of a Gaelic-speaking Highlander—it is the Scots *Gaidhealtachd* as seen from within.

He lived long enough to hear a few weeks before his death that the University of St. Francis Xavier, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, had decided to confer upon him the degree of LL.D., *honoris causa*, in recognition of his work for the preservation of Gaelic oral tradition.

Innumerable friends throughout Scotland, and folklore scholars in many lands, will mourn with us the loss of Calum Maclean, a man whose heritage and life’s work were indissolubly united, and whose earnest purpose it was, not only to record, but also to cherish and safeguard the traditions of his own people.

B. R. S. M.

# *Calum Iain Mac Ghille Eathain*

## *nach maireann*

Chan 'eil duine a bha còlach air Calum Iain Mac Ghille Eathain, M.A., nach bì 'g a chaidh's g a ionndrainn. Tha aobhar aca air, oir bha e 'n a dhuine càirdeil, ceanalta, anns nach robh mórchuis no uail, agus e an còmhuidh làn spòrs agus fearas-chuideachd.

Rinn e obair mhór fad cheithir-bliadhna-deug a' cruinneachadh na bha aig seanchaidhean ri aithris de sgeulachdan agus eachdraidh an dùthcha, cho cinnteach ri òrain Ghàidhlig, ceòl pioba, agus ceòl fìdhle.

Mar tha e fhein ag innse anns an iris Chuimrich, *Gwerin* 1 (1956-57), is ann airson Cumann Béaloideas Eireann a thòisich e air an obair so, agus cho luath 's a sguir an Cogadh Mór mu dheireadh, chaidh e do Bharraidh, far an d'fhuirich e cóig mìosan. An ath bhliadhna chaidh e do Bheinn-na-Faodhla, agus an deidh sin do Pheighinn-nan-aoirean, an Uibhist-a'-chinn-a-deas, far an robh an seanchaidh iomraiteach, Donnchadh Clachair; ach cho luath 's a chuir Oil-thigh Dhunéideann Sgoil-oilean na h-Albann air chois, thainig Calum do Dhunéideann, agus cha do lasaich air a saothair tuille fhad 's a bha an cothrom aige.

Bha ealain air leth aige airson na h-oibreach so. Ge b'e air bith ceàrna a thaghail e, bha còlas an t-sàr sgoileir aige air eachdraidh an àite, agus cha b'fhada gus an d'fhuair e lorg air seanchaidhean agus seinneadairean, ma bha iad idir ann.

Tha naidheachd éibhinn aige anns an leabhar cireachdail a thainig a mach an uiridh *The Highlands* (Batsford 1959) air a' cheàrd, Alasdair MacPhàdruig, a lorg e o chionn cóig bliadhna ann an àite ris an canar Tomaich, eadar A' Mhanachainn, an siorramachd Inbhirnis, agus Am Blàr Dubh, an siorramachd Rois. Cho luath 's a chuala an ceàrd gur h-ann a Ratharsaidh a bha e, thionndaidh e le feirg air Calum Iain. An e mac do'n ghreusaiche a bha aige? Cha b'e: is ann a bha athair Chalum 'n a thàillear. Chaidh còrdadh a dheanamh eatorra, agus chuala Calum Iain ùirsgeulan gu leòir aig a' cheàrd. Is i té dhiubh, "Am Ministear agus an Claban" (Aarne-Thompson 470) a chaidh fhoillseachadh anns a' chiad

àireamh de'n iris, *Scottish Studies*, a tha an sgoil a' toirt a mach dà uair 's a' bhliadhna.

Bha Calum Iain grinn, snasail 'n a sgrìobhadh, agus anns na h-uile rud a ghabh e os laimh. Is e an dòigh-sgrìobhaidh a bha aige na litrichean a chur sìos air leth anns na facail, mar gu'm bitheadh iad air an clò-bhualadh. Bha eòlas sgoileir aige air a' Ghàidhlig Eirionnaich, agus, air uairean, is e litreachadh Eirionnach a chleachdadh e: "leanbh" an àite "leanabh", agus "Dia-" airson "Di-" ann an làithean na seachdaine.

Chan e a mhàin gu robh Calum Mac Ghille Eathain measail 'n a dhùthaich fhein agus thall an Eirinn. Bha meas mór air ann an dùthchannan eile, gu h-àraid am measg sgoilearan aig am bheil tlachd ann an cleachdaidhean an dùthcha agus ann am béul-aithris an t-sluaigh.

A. D.