B. NOTES ON COLLECTION AND RESEARCH

Farming and Fishing Scenes on a Caithness Plan, 1772

Authentic drawings of Scottish rural life prior to the last century are seldom found, and the modest, but in its way important, group on an unpublished Caithness estate-plan of 1772 is especially welcome (Pls. IX-XII, between pp. 224-5).

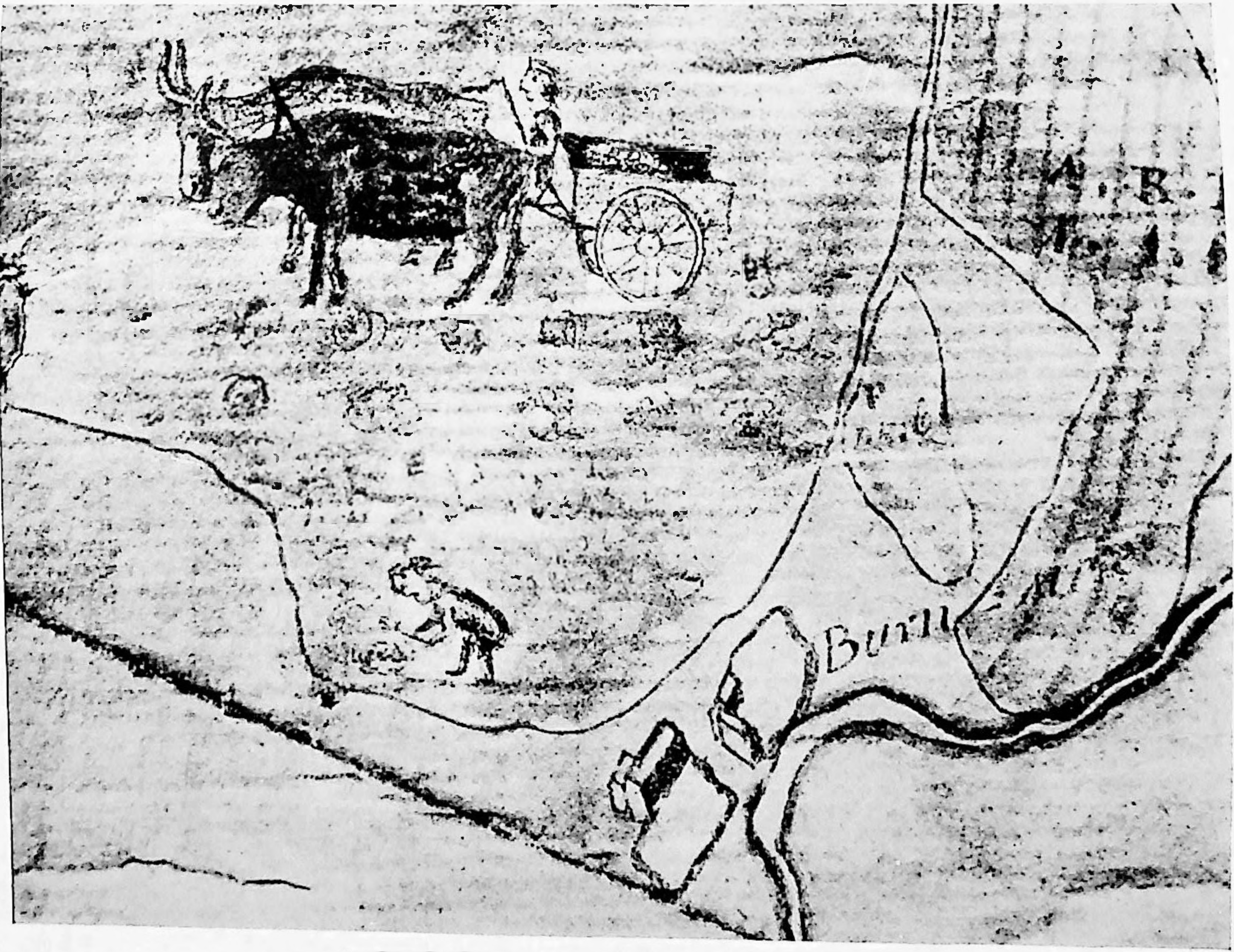
For some time past manuscript estate-plans have been recognised as a primary source for the study of agrarian economics, local history and place-names. Apart from a few pioneer articles, however, comparatively little systematic work has so far appeared on the Scottish material, and a comprehensive index to the scattered material is urgently needed, since many plans remain in private hands and others are preserved in widely dispersed offices and institutions. The purpose of this note is to comment on the drawings on the Caithness plan and, in so doing, to stress that the vignettes and sketches that occasionally embellish the earlier plans are sometimes of considerable documentary as well as decorative value. Apart from those lately reproduced by R. J. Adam (1960: facing p. 32, etc.) from the Assynt Survey of 1774, few Scottish examples have been published, though the sketches of houses on the fine coloured plans of the south side of Loch Tay, drawn by John McArthur in 1769, have been mentioned (McArthur 1936: xxviii-xxx). John Ainslie's plans of the Eglinton estates in north Ayrshire, dated 1790 (Eglinton and Winton Muniments, Scottish Record Office, H.M. Register House), which include a complete series of inset miniatures of all the steadings, remain unpublished.

Enlargements of the minute, carefully-drawn vignettes of farming and fishing scenes on William Aberdeen's plan of the lands of Castlehill, near Thurso, in Caithness, are reproduced here from the original, H.M. Register House plan no. 1220. Here, as in other plans by Aberdeen (cf. Roussell 1934: 88-90), a number of details inspire confidence in the general accuracy of these drawings as a record of things seen on the estate. Of course, estate-plans were produced for landowners with capital and improving ideas, but many "improvers" were practical men who first required a factual statement of things as they were. The inset view, not reproduced here, of the

House of Castlehill, with its outbuildings and walled enclosures, establishes the general reliability of the small-scale, rear view of the same group on the plan itself (Pl. XII). The circular, tower-like corn-kiln at the end of the barn, shown on the larger inset view, is of the well-known Orkney-Caithness type (e.g. Roussell 1934:66 ff.), and the little detail of the boat-shelter is distinguished by the appropriate local term "noust", from O.N. *naust*, a boat-shed or dock. That salmon were at that time taken with seine-nets on the shore of Dunnet Bay need not surprise us, but it is useful to have visual record of the fact; as it is to have a picture (Pl. IX) of a spoke-wheeled dung-cart—a rare subject!—drawn by a pair of oxen, on a Caithness laird's estate in 1772.

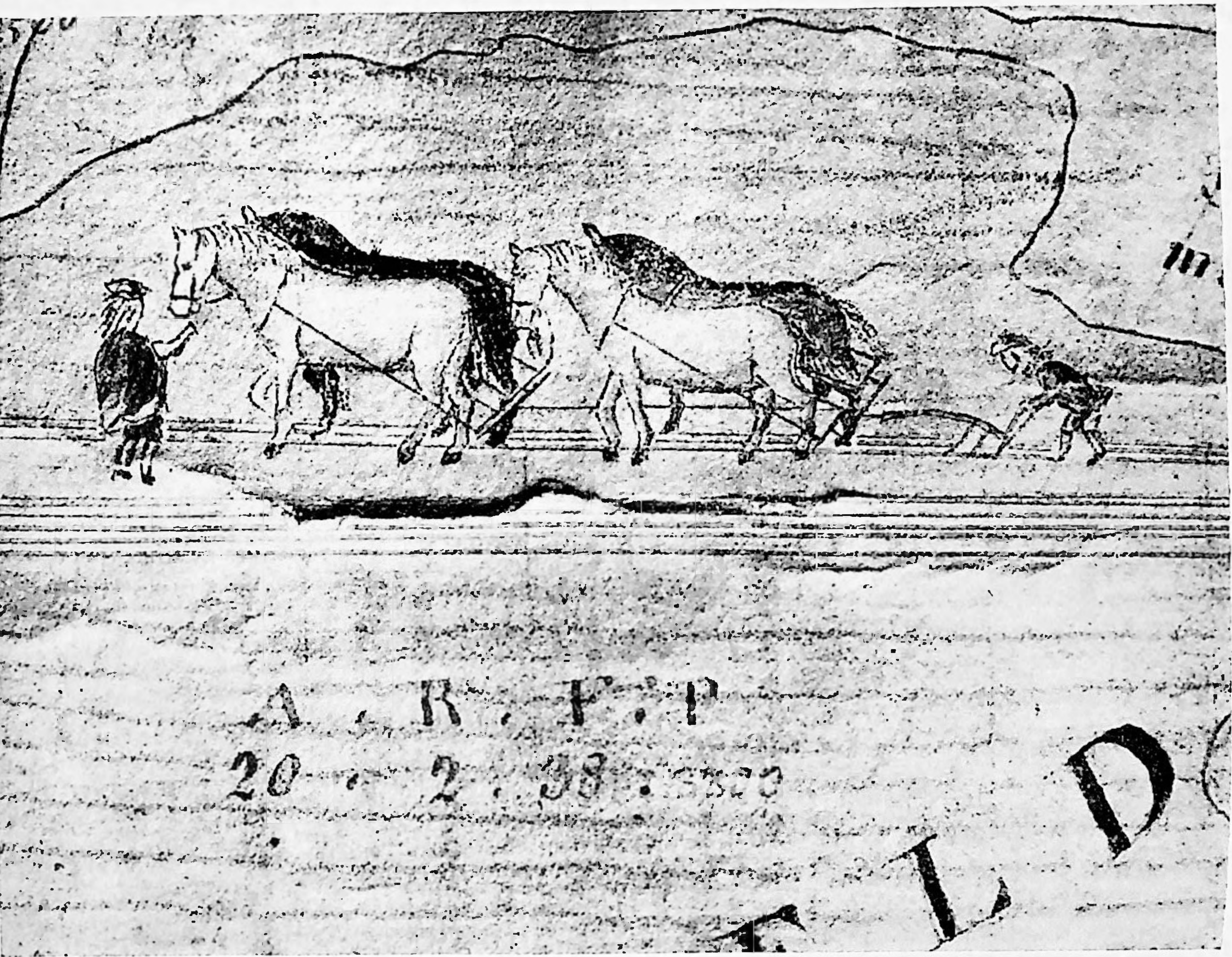
The two ploughing scenes (Pls. X and XI) are of unusual interest, not least because they belong to a time before the triangular-framed, two-horse plough (then coming into use in the Lowlands) had replaced older types in most parts of Scotland. Despite the small scale of Aberdeen's original drawings, it is clear that the Castlehill ploughs were not of the very light, single-stilted kind known to have been used in several forms (in addition to spade cultivation) in the Northern Isles, Caithness, and many parts of the Highlands and Western Isles also, until the early years of last century. Those, like their prehistoric or Viking Age precursors, tended to break up or "harrow" the peaty soils they normally encountered, though the introduction of sown grasses in the eighteenth century gradually produced a firm-knit sward in many of these areas also, requiring a plough that would undercut and turn the sod (Fenton 1963). The Castlehill ploughs, on the other hand, were clearly a form of the widespread rectangular-framed, heavy medieval plough—the so-called "Old Scotch Plough", of which many disparaging descriptions but no examples have survived. Mr. Fenton (in discussion) has remarked that the Castlehill ploughs probably represent a comparatively light, improved form, since one was drawn by only four horses.

The contrast between the two plough-teams, side by side on the same farm, is striking. Apparently drawing the same kind of plough in the same level country we have, on the one hand, four horses harnessed in couples—a "long team"—and, on the other, four oxen harnessed abreast. The contrast in yoking method is no doubt attributable to soil conditions, and Mr. Fenton tells me that to reduce treading down heavy land



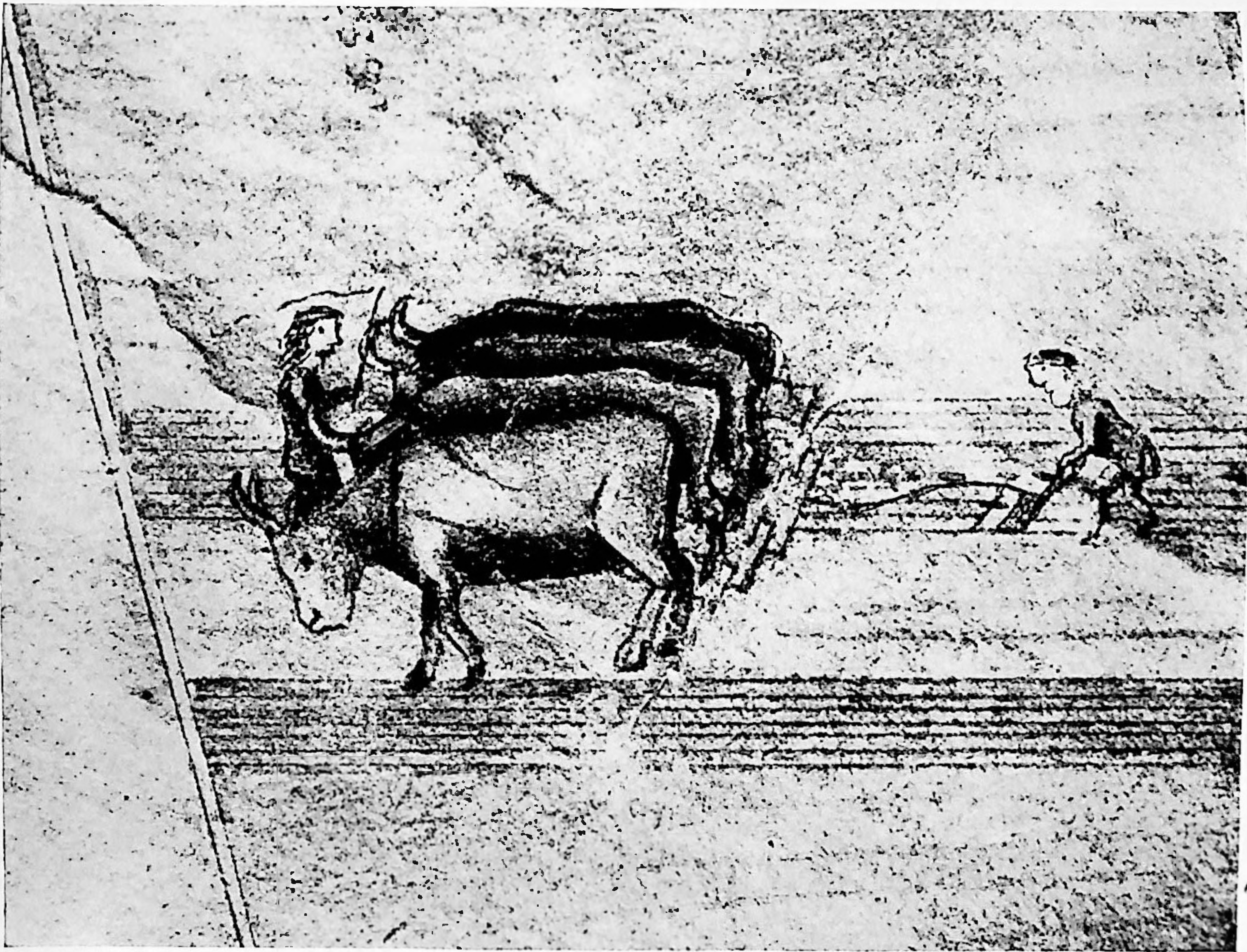
Spoke-wheeled ox-cart, Caithness 1772 (see p. 219).

PLATE X



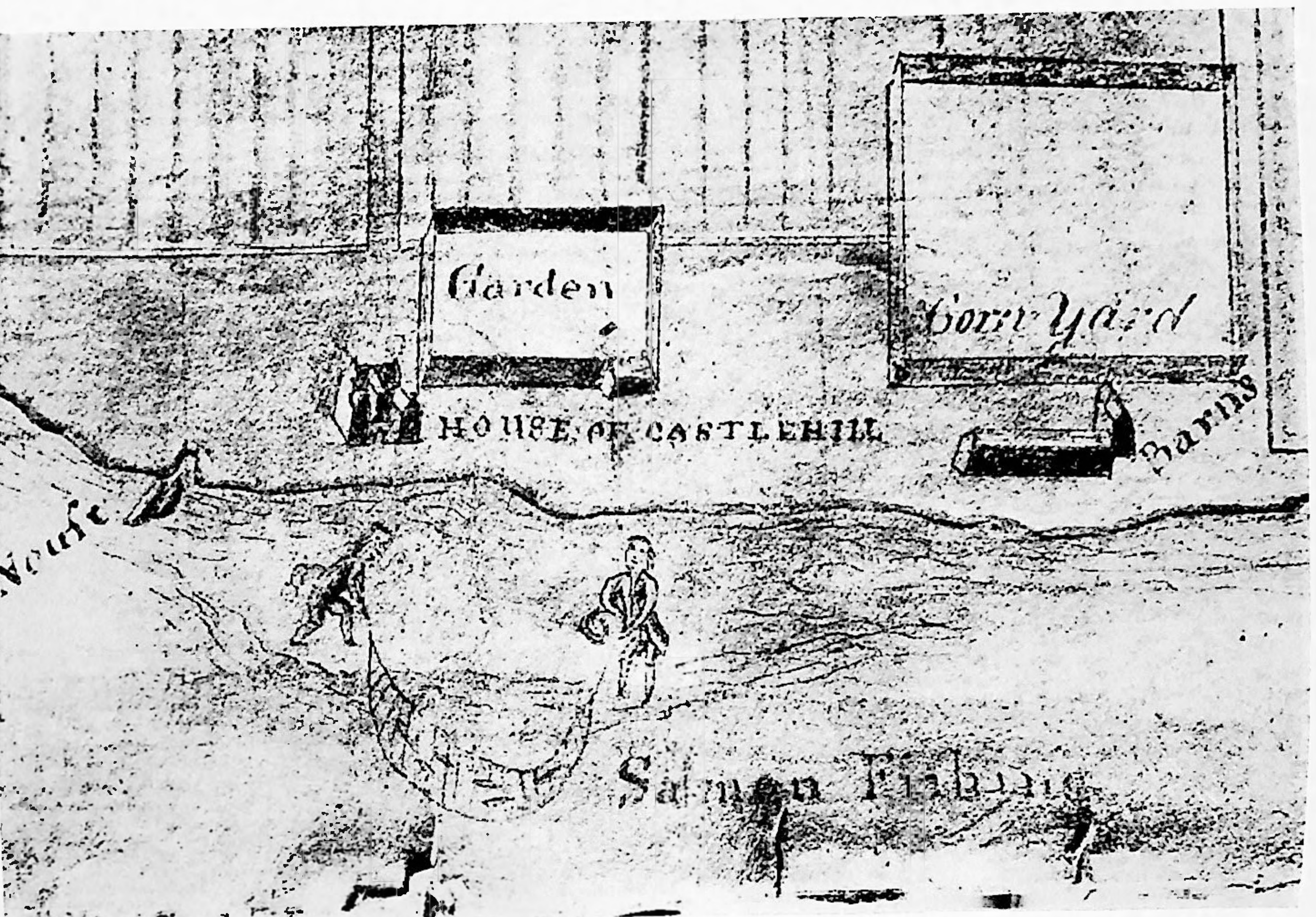
Plough-team, with four horses in pairs, Caithness 1772 (see p. 219).

PLATE XI



Plough-team of four oxen abreast, Caithness 1772 (see p. 219).

PLATE XII



Netting salmon, Dunnet Bay, Caithness 1772 (see p. 219).

when ploughed damp it was usual to have the team yoked two by two. The great antiquity of plough-oxen in Europe and (less certainly) in the British Isles is well known, but horses too were widely employed for ploughing in Scotland, especially in the Highlands in the eighteenth century. In his pioneer article on the plough-team in Scotland, Professor J. A. Scott Watson perhaps went too far in suggesting that plough-oxen were never employed in the westernmost parts of the country (Watson 1932:144), but he raised an interesting problem. Neither the time when horses were first used for ploughing in the British Isles, nor the reasons for it, seem to have been established or even seriously investigated yet. In Caithness both horses and oxen were used for ploughing at least as far back as the middle of the seventeenth century (Donaldson 1938: 85), and it is probably relevant to recall the explanation given by the Orkneymen in 1700 for the extreme lightness of their ploughs (Brand 1883:28):

> . . . although some of their ground be strong, yet their beasts are weak and unable to go through with a plough of any considerable weight.

Most of the Caithness tenants at this period, at any rate on the estate of Mey with which Donaldson was concerned, were "required to possess horses [i.e. garrons] in order to assist at haying time, harvest, leading peats and carrying victual [grain] . . . for shipment" (Donaldson 1938:86). Given a suitably light plough, there would thus have been a natural tendency in such areas to use these small horses for ploughing, rather than the less versatile oxen (see also, for Lothian, Buchan-Hepburn 1795:97, 114, 138-9, 140). The distribution of ploughing with horses only, before the close of the eighteenth century, could therefore be related to the former distribution of very light kinds of plough. Horses were used traditionally in this way in many parts of Ireland and the Isle of Man down to the early nineteenth century, as well as in Northern Scotland, the Highlands and Isles. Though mixed teams of oxen and horses were, apparently, also common in most of these regions, Mr. Fenton considers that in Scotland teams of up to four horses were normally employed in areas of peaty or sandy soil with rocky surrounding terrain, where the need was to break up rather than turn over the soil, and where the versatility of horses was required for transport. To what extent this represents an

inheritance deriving from the Viking colonies of the ninth century A.D., or even from prehistoric times, remains to be investigated.

The alternative methods of harnessing the plough-teams have a very long history, as Mr. Ffransis Payne has shown (Payne 1948:84-7). Ploughs drawn both by "long teams" of oxen (i.e. harnessed in couples, each under a short yoke) and in line abreast (i.e. under a long yoke) are represented in Bronze Age engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps, and both arrangements are mentioned in medieval Welsh records. Our drawing of the Caithness ox-team in line abreast is a splendid record of this usage in eighteenth-century Scotland, and shows particularly well the "driver", who walks backwards before his team. This feature of the driver walking backwards before his team is even to be seen in the Bronze Age engravings (*ibid.*: Pl. v); while he is clearly mentioned in the description by Geraldus Cambrensis of the Welsh plough-oxen of the twelfth century A.D., "sometimes, it is true, in pairs, but most frequently in fours; with the man with the goad walking before them, but backwards". The driver of the Welsh team, the "caller", sang encouragingly to his ox-team. His latter-day Perthshire successor, the "gadsman", was the subject of what Mr. Payne aptly describes as a somewhat grudging defence, which appeared in 1794:

> the old Scotch plough, drawn by three or four horses, is still in use; and in some cases the barbarous custom is not exploded, of yoking four horses abreast, and driving them by a man going backward. This practice appears very awkward; yet they contend in their own defence, that the horses act with greater power, when yoked abreast, than long; that the ground is in many places so full of large stones, as not to admit the long plough; that the driver, by having his eyes at once on the horses and plough, can stop the draught more instantaneously; and save the *graith* better than in any other position (Robertson 1794:50).

The driver's whip, not a goad, was the encouragement meted out to the ox-team of our Caithness drawing; and the oxen were harnessed from their collars instead of by means of a long yoke. By contrast, the horse-team was guided by the plaided driver leading the near-side horse by the bridle.

To conclude this note, here is Birt's lively impression of the

drivers of the plough-teams he had seen in the Highland townships near Inverness, about 1725-30:

> "The people sometimes plough with eight small Beasts, part Oxen and part Cows. They do not drive them with a Goad as in *England*, but beat them with a long Stick, making a hideous *Irish* Noise, in calling to them, as they move along" (Burt 1754:300-1).

Who knows but that these hideous "Irish" (i.e. Gaelic) noises, which so offended Burt's ears, may have been an echo from the prehistoric world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Plates IX-XII are reproduced by kind permission of Mr. John Imrie, Curator of Historical Records, H.M. Register House, Edinburgh, who kindly drew our attention to the Castlehill plan (Register House plan no. 1220). The photographic enlargements are by Mr. Tom Scott, of Edinburgh.

I am especially grateful to Mr. Alexander Fenton, Assistant Keeper, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, for reading this note in draft, and for allowing me to include a number of his valuable comments, and to see the manuscript of his forthcoming paper, " Plough and Spade in Scotland".

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B. R. S. MEGAW

An Aberdeen "White Paternoster"

In 1957, during an Aberdeenshire field trip, I asked Jeannie Robertson to list as many children's rhymes—especially skipping and stotting songs—as she could remember. Here is one of these rhymes as recorded from Jeannie and her daughter Lizzie a few months later:

Ding dong the Catholic bells—
Fare you well, my mother.
Bury me in the old churchyard
Beside my oldest brother.

My coffin shall be black,
Six little angels at my back:
Two to preach and two to pray,
And two to carry my soul away.

Ding dong the Catholic bells—
Fare you well, my mother.
Bury me in the old churchyard
Beside my oldest brother.

♩ = 52 Slow swinging rhythm—

Ding dong the Cath'-lic bells Fare you well my mo — ther
Bu - ry me in the old church yard Be - side my old - est bro — ther
My co - ffin shall be black Six lit - tle ang - els at my back
Two to preach and two to pray And two to ca - rry my soul a - way
Ding dong the Cath'-lic bells Fare ye well my mo — ther
Bu - ry me in the old church yard Be - side my old - est bro — ther

Versions of this song, bearing close textual resemblance to the above, have been reported from other parts of Britain. Here is one from Cornwall, as preserved by the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould:

Ding, dong, the parson's bell,
  Very well my mother.
I shall be buried in the old churchyard
  By the side of my dear brother.
My coffin shall be black,
  Two little angels at my back,
Two to watch, and two to pray,
  And two to carry my soul away.
When I am dead and in my grave,
  And all my bones are rotten,
Jesus Christ will come again
  When I am quite forgotten.

According to Baring-Gould, this form of the rhyme was used on the Cornish moors, and was repeated by a boy at Alterton who had learned it from his aunt (Baring-Gould 1928: 32 Notes).

Jeannie and Lizzie chant their version with impressive solemnity, but in Edinburgh and London what is virtually the same rhyme does duty as a skipping song. Norman Douglas, in his *London Street Games*, supplies the following text:

I am a little beggar-girl,
  My mother she is dead,
My father is a drunkard
  And won't give me no bread.
I look out of the window
  To hear the organ play—
God bless my dear mother,
  She's gone far away.
Ding-dong the castle bells
  Bless my poor mother—
Her coffin shall be black,
  Six white angels at her back—
Two to watch and two to pray,
  And two to carry her soul away.

Douglas adds: "Not a very cheerful rope-song, you'll say; but our girls love it; you can't think how it makes them laugh" (Douglas 1916:71).

An almost identical version—"I am a little orphan girl"—which is also used as a skipping song and is rattled through at high speed, was recorded in 1950 by James Ritchie from children in the Norton Park School, Edinburgh. Alan Lomax included it on the *Scotland* L.P. (Vol. VI) of the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music. The only textual difference worth noting is that in place of lines 11 and 12 in Douglas's version, the Edinburgh children sing:

My coffin shall be white,
Six little angels by my side.

In the Journal of the Folk-Song Society, No. 22, Annie G. Gilchrist has a note on "The Lady Drest in Green", and other fragments of tragic ballads and folk-tales preserved amongst children. She prints a "White Paternoster" offshoot, recorded from a little girl at Saunders Street Orphanage, Southport, in 1915, prefacing it with the statement that the verse was associated with a prose form of the ballad of Sir Hugh of Lincoln (Sir Hugh, or The Jews Daughter, Child 155). The final quatrain blends in curious fashion the funeral motif shared by all the foregoing, and a carefree bairnsang formula—

Blue bells, cockle-shells,
Bury me against my mother,
Bury me in the old churchyard
Against my dear mother.
(Gilchrist 1919:86)

All these rhymes are descendants of the medieval "White Paternoster" referred to by Chaucer in *The Miller's Tale*—

Jhesu Crist, and seinte Benedight
Blesse this hous from every wikked wight
For nyghtes verye, the White Paternoster . . .

One of the most familiar English variants is printed by Halliwell in his *Nursery Rhymes*—

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Guard the bed that I lay on.
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
One to watch, one to pray
And two to bear my soul away.
(Halliwell 1843:CCXXIII)

Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco, who included a chapter on the White Paternoster in her *Essays in the Study of Folksongs* (1886), states that the charm "in the form of 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John' was, till lately, a not uncommon evening prayer in the agricultural parts of Kent . . . prayers that partake of the nature of charms have always been popular, and people have ever indulged in odd, little roundabout devices to increase the efficacy of even the most sacred words".

Jeannie's mother Maria, who kept a little shop in the Gallowgate of Aberdeen, was the person from whom Jeannie first heard *Ding dong the Catholic bells*. Maria also had a version of the "parent" charm, and she often used to repeat it when putting the children to bed, or when going to bed herself. Here it is:

As I lie down this night to sleep
I give my soul to Christ to keep.
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
They are four corners in my bed
Holy angels laid and spread.
There's Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
God bless the bed that I lie on.

According to Jeannie, her mother always added: "Good night, sound sleep, and a surprise waukenin".

The White Paternoster is a widely diffused international charm. Versions in French, Provençal, German, Spanish and in various Italians dialects are on record. According to Seán Ó Súilleabháin, it is common throughout the Irish Gaeltacht (1952:193, and note 296). The formula is referred to in the magical treatise *Enchiridion Papæ Leonis*, published in Latin at Rome in 1502. If recited three times in the evening and three times in the morning, it was supposed to ensure Paradise for the reciter. The Church of the Counter-Reformation, on the other hand, regarded the White Paternoster as superstitious, and proscribed it.

From the frequency with which it has been reported, it would seem that the charm was once universally known in Christendom; by virtue of the fact that it invokes the protection of angels and evangelist-saints for the sleeper, it is "white"—as opposed to "black"—magic. Evidence is not lacking, however, that its Christian dress is not the first that it has worn. There is on record a Lincolnshire ague-charm, which was

supposed to be repeated after three old horse-shoes had been nailed to the foot of the patient's bed, and a hammer placed cross-ways upon them; a local woman described it thus—

> "I teks the mell (hammer) in my left 'and, and I taps them shoes, and I ses—
>
> Feyther—Son—And Holy Ghost,
> Nail the davil to the post;
> Throice I stroikes with holy crook,
> One for God, and one for Wod, and one for Lok."
>
> (Gilchrist 1919:88)

Annie Gilchrist subjoins the following note to the above: "This curious blend of Christian superstition and Northern mythology—Wod and Lok being (apparently) Wodin and Loki, and the hammer symbolic of Thor—suggests that the invocation of the four evangelists to guard each corner of the bed (their heads were sometimes carved as terminals to the posts) was only the successor of an older pre-Christian charm against the perils of the night, by the performance of which the bed-posts became the warder of the occupant".

It is not hard to see why a comforting little charm which promises a direct "safe-conduct" to Heaven if the reciter dies when asleep has become a sort of dance-dirge on the lips of skipping children. The association of sleep with death is made fearless and explicit in the White Paternoster, and the angels clustering around the bed-posts become in folk-imagination the "white watch" convoying the sleeper beyond the grave to St. Peter's gate. For children, who in their own way are coming to terms with the knowledge that death is a reality

> ("Water, water wall-flower
> Growing up so high,
> We are all ladies,
> And we must all die")

this elemental folk-poetry is more than a "cry in the street"—it is a joyful assertion of youth and life which names the bogey and (with vigorous thwack of the rope on the pavement) jumps over him, and lays him. The laughter of Norman Douglas's school children is like the Mexican *fiesta* of the dead; it is the exultation of a momentary triumph over "the auld enemy".

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HAMISH HENDERSON

Note on Votive Pottery Associated with Wells

An interesting aspect of the history of the cult of wells in Britain is the nature and variety of the votive offerings. Individual wells in various localities demand different offerings and, although varied, the nature of these propitiatory gifts is essentially limited. The psychology underlying the choice of offerings is not always immediately obvious. In general, the fundamental idea seems to consist in the belief that whatever is taken from the well (healing of various kinds, powers of cursing, fertility, etc.) must be replaced by an offering of some kind. Any examination of the nature of these gifts, however, reveals that it is not the actual value of the offering which is of importance, but the ritual which accompanies the act of giving. *How* it is offered is more significant than *what* is offered. Wells excavated in archæological contexts have much information to give as to the nature of the deposits, while details of actual ritual, now rapidly dying out in the British Isles, can be abstracted from published sources, and may yet be collected in the field in some areas.

An analysis of the nature of the objects recovered from Romano-British wells shows a marked similarity to those dating from more recent times. Pins, coins, shrine bells and white pebbles are amongst these, and pottery of all kinds, intact or broken into fragments. For example, the well dedicated to the goddess Coventina at Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall yielded

PLATE VIII

Fig. 1—Face pot from Coventina's Well.

Fig. 2—Vase from Coventina's Well.

(see p. 229)

(Both photographed by kind permission of the Trustees of Chesters Museum, Northumberland.)

up, amongst a wealth of other objects, pottery of many types including Samian ware, vases, face urns (see Pl. VIII, figs. 1 and 2), and glass bottles (Clayton 1880). The extraordinary votive wells or pits found in Belgic territory likewise provide evidence for the association of wells with pottery. A well at Ashill, Norfolk, excavated to a depth of 40 feet, was found to contain amongst other things Samian ware and other potsherds. About 19 feet down the deposits changed and, of singular interest from the Celtic viewpoint, more or less perfect urns were found, arranged symmetrically, placed in layers and embedded in leaves of hazel and nuts. The nuts in the upper layers were apparently more mature than those lower down. This discovery gains significance in the light of the frequent association of the sacred well with the venerated hazel tree in early Irish traditions. Here the nuts of the hazel are described as falling into the pool where they were consumed by the sacred salmon which obtained their wisdom by this means. *Connla's Well*, situated near the sea, where the hazels of wisdom were reputed to grow and the magic nuts of which were devoured by the fish in the pool is but one example of this traditional association of the hazel tree with the sacred well (Stokes 1894:457). It may also be noted in this context that a well near Elgol in Skye, *Tobar an Deididh*, "The Tooth-ache Well" had twigs of hazel cast into it while a rhyme was chanted by those seeking relief from tooth-ache.[1] Clear traces of paths leading to the Ashill well were apparent, indicating that there had been considerable traffic here at some stage (Haverfield 1901: 295 ff.). Another well, at Wolfhamcote, Sawbridge, Warwick, was found to contain a large square stone with a hole in it on which urns of grey ware were standing. Twelve of these were taken out intact, while twelve others were broken by a fall of stone from above. The well was sounded to a depth of 40 feet but no bottom was reached (Haverfield 1904:249). The most dramatic well or pit of this kind is that at Dunstable which was packed with objects to a depth of 116 feet. This was filled with pottery, coins and human bones (Watkin 1882:286-7). Similar shafts were found at Biddenham and Maiden Bower, Bedfordshire. In the Biddenham well a human skeleton, part of an altar slab decorated with a crane and about 50 urns were found (Watkin 1882:284). Other wells containing urns, symmetrically arranged, are mentioned by Haverfield (1900: 296), one at Bakesbourn Hill near Canterbury having the urns placed carefully between layers of flint. The pool in the

River Axe, Wookey Hole, Somerset, in which Romano-British pottery of the first or second centuries A.D. was found together with human skulls is also of relevance here (Mason 1951:238-43). These examples could be multiplied indefinitely, and the regular appearance of pottery, frequently broken into small pieces, side by side with objects of a manifestly votive nature strongly suggests that it is in itself of ritual significance. These deposits are not to be confused with rubbish pits which are universal, and identifiable archæologically. The fact that much of the pottery is broken into fragments may also have some superstitious implications. The deliberate and undoubtedly ritual breaking of vessels and other objects dedicated to other-world beings is a well-known and widespread phenomenon. Two examples which may be cited here are the Celtic cauldrons found at Gundestrup and Brå, Denmark. The Gundestrup cauldron (Klindt-Jensen 1961) was dismantled and laid on a peat bog. That from Brå (Klindt-Jensen 1953) had been broken up and placed in a pit dug in the ground. Both of these vessels were clearly intended as offerings to some deity. Worn-out objects were likewise thought to be suitable gifts to the supernatural, as the cauldrons and tools, originally deposited in water, from sites at Carlingwark, Kirkcudbrightshire, Blackburn Mill, Berwickshire, and Eckford, Roxburghshire, suggest. These probably date from the first or second centuries A.D. (Piggott 1953). These examples strengthen the supposition that the act of offering rather than the economic or functional value of the objects offered was the significant factor.

In Ireland the cult of wells is closely associated with the Catholic Church which has adopted rather than opposed the earlier cult, and it has thus continued actively to the present day, the holy well being associated with the veneration of the local saint. In this country there is a great variety of votive deposits, and these include rags, crutches and other invalid aids, pins, buttons, coins, butter, bread and cheese. Pottery is also much in evidence. St. Senan's Well at Dunass, Co. Clare, provides perhaps the most impressive evidence for the dedication of pottery and other domestic vessels at wells. A healing well and one much resorted to at least as recently as the last century, it is distinguished by the great quantity of domestic crockery which covered the altar-like stone on top of the well. This included broken tea-cups, pots of all kinds and wooden bowls (Wood-Martin 1902:II, 97).[2] Although the quantity of crockery and pottery constituting offerings to St. Senan at this

well is singular, such gifts are also known from other wells in Ireland. For example, the votive offerings at one well in Aran, to which men seemingly resorted for fertility, included pottery (Wood-Martin 1902:II, 99), while pieces of broken crockery are still placed on the little "altar" above St. Brendan's Well on Valentia Island.

This traditional association in Celtic contexts of votive pottery with venerated wells makes the presence of pottery of

St. Senan's Well, Co. Clare (from Wood-Martin II, 97, fig. 37)

particular interest when it occurs in wells in Scotland, and worthy of careful consideration. Recent field-work in Scotland has revealed that several wells do in fact contain large numbers of pieces of broken china and pottery which cannot be explained as being due to accidental breakages while getting drinking water from the well. In each case the well is a natural spring, not a dug well and thus the likelihood of accidental breakage is small. Moreover, in areas where wells are respected, they are carefully and indeed lovingly tended and any rubbish or inadvertently broken cups or bowls would be immediately removed. In the Gaelic-speaking areas, wells which are held in esteem are most carefully cared for and cleaned out. The fact that the pottery is usually in fairly small pieces and that the fragments are often clearly pieces of plate rather than bowls

suggests the deliberate bringing of broken china to the well as an offering, just as in some cases the gift required is a small white river pebble.[3] Preliminary probings into these springs, all of which are situated on moorland away from townships and houses, have shown that the type of pottery and china changes, nineteenth century blue and white china, as well as fragments of coarse earthenware replacing the more modern white china and pottery of the surface level. Where the spring flows strongly, the pieces are sometimes carried down a considerable way. In considering the reasons for the presence of this broken pottery in certain Scottish wells, the Irish and the Romano-British evidence is thus of first importance.

The fact that heads and pottery together are frequently associated with Celtic wells (e.g. Coventina's Well, Wookey Hole, Heywood; Ross 1962) may find a rationalised echo in the Barra tradition which tells how the son of a murdered man breaks a cup at a certain well and then decapitates the murderer and leaves his head in the well, subsequently known as the Well of the Head (Ross 1962).

At St. Connall's Well, Kirkconnell, Dumfriesshire, fragments of smashed cups were found in quantities in and about the spring, in March 1961. Their presence there is difficult to explain away, for the spring flows from the foot of a hill, a considerable distance from habitation. The local farmers disclaimed any knowledge of the well, and shepherds would hardly carry white china cups there for drinking purposes. The evidence thus suggests that the pieces of china were deliberately taken to the well for some superstitious purpose.

In Skye, several springs were found to contain smashed pottery. *Tobar Mòinneach nan Steall* in Glendale, Duirinish, yielded up numerous pieces of coarse buff-coloured glazed pottery of a type common in the Highlands down to the present century, in the form of butter crocks, jelly jars, etc. Some of these may be accounted for by the fact that the spring has a considerable reputation over a wide area as a healing spring, and the cress in which it abounds was also used for medicinal purposes. People used to come from many miles to get the water and carry vessels of it away. Consequently a certain number of breakages must have been inevitable, although these would normally be cleaned out in the spring. Moreover, this would not account for the presence of fragments of blue and white plate, etc. of which the spring contained numerous pieces. Similar pottery was found in *Tobar Glaic Athall* in Sleet,

and small pieces were also recovered from *Tobar nam Maor* in Duirinish, both of these springs in isolated positions away from immediate habitation. A certain amount of excavation in and about these wells would no doubt bring more pottery to light.

It is not without interest to have been able to record two wells in Bracadale, Skye, whose names and local traditions associate them with pottery. *Tobar nan Cuach* "the Well of the Bowls" at Harlosh is locally believed to have been so-called because "a long time ago" bowls were found there, but no one now knows what happened to them. This tradition is comparatively widespread in the Bracadale area. The spring is strong-flowing, and held in high repute in the district. It has lost sanctity however and was, until last year used as the domestic water supply by the crofter on whose land it rises. The present occupier made a concrete tank for the spring, but showed me the remains of older masonry which the new structure replaced when I visited the site in April of this year.

The second spring, again in Bracadale, is *Tobar Cailleach ann Cnagain*, "the well of the Hag of the Pots". According to tradition, large quantities of small earthenware pots were found at and near to the well. Nearby are the foundations of a structure known as *Tobhta Cailleach nan Cnagain*, "the Hag of the Pots' Ruin". I was unable to visit this site as the well and the ruin are in an extremely isolated position, on the moor beside Loch Duagraich south of the Struan-Portree moorland road. Once again, the fate of the pots is not known, but some excavation at this site might be rewarding. These traditions serve to strengthen the association of pottery with venerated or respected wells. These are wells which have come to my notice, but there are doubtless others in Scotland which will show similar deposits.

The various features of the well cult, while universal, have marked regional characteristics. Thus the association of pottery with wells, where it appears to have been placed there as part of a deliberate ritual, although occurring over a large area, and clearly having a long ancestry in the British Isles, is by no means commonplace. Comparable with the placing of cheese in the various cheese wells, coins in wishing wells, bent pins in fertility wells, rags at certain healing wells, etc., it must be regarded as yet another manifestation of the ritual of giving to the well in return for benefits secured.

NOTES

[1] Information from Mr. Alex. Stoddart, Kilbride, Strath, Skye.

[2] Wood Martin is not an altogether reliable source for custom and belief, but his section on wells, which is descriptive rather than interpretive, is on the whole sound.

[3] At Biddenham, for example, a cartload of pebbles was removed from the well. These had been scattered throughout the pit. Pebbles were left at St. Bethog's Well in the island of Gigha.

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ANNE ROSS

Oran Mór Sgorabreac

"Ceud soraidh bhuam fhìn gu m'eòlas
Go Sgorabreac am bi a' chòisir
Chan ionnann sin 's mar dh'éirich dhomhsa
Mi'm bothan beag air dhroch còmhdhail
Bidh siod aig Calum mac Dhòmhaill
Ciste nan iuchraichean bòidheach
Dhe'n umha dhe'n airgead dhe'n òr ann
Far an dèan am marcraich tòirleum
An talla farsaing chlann Dòmhaill
An taigh mór an ùrlair chòmhnaird
Le sheuraichean 'gan cuir an òrdagh
Far a faighte fìon ri òl ann
A cupan donna 'bheòil bhòidhich
Miosairean is truinnsearan feòdair
'S amar bruthaidh an eòrna
Deoch cho làidir 's thig o'n Olaind.

'S b' aithne dhomh fhìn beus bu dual dut
'S beus dhe d' bheus bhith suirghe ghruagach
'S a' cur nan geall, 's ann leat bu bhuadhar
'S gheibhte sud an taigh an uasail
Bhith 'g òl fìon a pìosan fuara
'N taigh mór farsaing 's ùrlar sguabte
Ruighleadh ubhal sìos is suas air.

'S gheibhte siod an taigh mo leannain
Muc 'ga sgrìobadh 's mart 'ga feannadh
'S coinnleir òir air bhòrdaibh geala.

Doilleir dhorch air oidhche reòta
Chaidh do bhàt thar Rubha Rònaigh
Dol troimh na caoil a null a Bhròchaill
Dh' amharc air maighdeann an òr-fhuilt
'S fhuair thu 'chéile 's cha b' i 'n òinid
Cha b' i 'n aimid, cha b' i 'n òinseach
Nighean Fir a Caisteal Bhròchaill
A Ratharsair mhór na Leòdach
Tìr nan gaisgeach air an òirlich
Iain Mór is Iain Og dhiubh
Bu dhiubh Sìleas agus Seònaid
'S Alasdair a' mac a b'òige
De Shìol Torcuill thig a Leòdhas.

Maighistir Iain's Maighistir Dòmhall."

The Great Song of Scorrybreck

"A hundred greetings to the place I know—
To Scorrybreck and its cheerful gatherings
Very different from this are things with me
Who am in a little hut, in evil straits.
This is to be the share of Calum the son of Donald—
The chest with beautiful keys:
Brass, silver, and gold—
Where the horsemen make their leap
In the wide hall of the children of Donald
In the great house with the level floor
With its chairs being ranged in order
Where wine is to be had for drinking
From the fair mouths of brown cups
And measures and vessels of pewter
And the vat where the barley is pounded
Strongest drink that comes from Holland.

I knew well in you the virtue of your people
And that virtue of them all to be courting the young girls
And laying wagers and always winning.
This was to be had in the house of the noble—
Drinking wine from cold stoups
In the great wide house with its swept floor—
An apple would roll up and down on it.

This was to be had in the house of my lover
Scraping of pigs, the flaying of cattle
And a golden candlestick on white boards.

In a dark gloom on a night of frost
Your boat went past the Point of Rona
Going through the kyles across to Brochel
To visit the girl with golden hair.
And you won a wife—she was no fool—
The daughter of a Laird of Brochel Castle
From great Raasay of the MacLeods
The land of heroes, every inch of them,
Iain Mór and Iain Og,
Of their stock were Sileas and Seònaid
And Alasdair the youngest son
Of the line of Torquil who come from Lewis.

The Rev. John and the Rev. Donald."

Gaelic songs, those that are anonymous as well as those of known authorship, make frequent reference to personal names. Sometimes only the bare name is used; sometimes it is accompanied by a descriptive epithet or a patronymic, e.g. *Uisdean Mhic Gilleasbui(g) Chléirich* (Hugh son of Gilleasbuig the Clerk or Cleric). The patronymic can be used instead of the personal name, as in *A Mhic Iain mhic Sheumais* (Son of John, son of James)—the head of a clan is normally referred to in this way. The person concerned may be addressed directly, as above, or the reference may be little more than a passing allusion.

Where a poet is already known from independent or derivative sources to have lived in a particular area or to have been associated with a particular household (that of a chief, for instance), it is usually not difficult to establish more or less conclusively the identity of the people mentioned in his poetry. But when the song has been transmitted orally for many generations and is itself anonymous, and particularly when we possess neither a traditional account of the circumstances of its composition not internal evidence by which to date it, the task of identifying the names can be a formidable one. For in addition to the difficulties already outlined, we have to face the very reasonable possibility that many of the names are those of humble folk whose obscure actions are not documented anywhere. Naturally, of course, it is not always so. The names cited above, for example, are those of two well-known members of the Clan Donald, both of whom are on record elsewhere.[1] Indeed, one version of the song to the "Son of John son of James" alludes to an incident otherwise recorded, so far as I know, only in the Register of the Privy Council.[2] In the same song tradition, on the other hand, personal names frequently appear in contexts that prompt one to question seriously whether they refer to historical characters at all. Probably the answer is that in their original context they did, but that as compositional elements of this kind of verse they participate in the involved interchanges that the creation of new songs in the tradition entails. All in all, it is clear that large-scale identification would not only enhance the value of these songs as sources for historical study but would also help to clarify the problem of their early social milieu. The text published here has been selected at random in order to illustrate the inherent difficulty of recognising the people named and to indicate some of the sources that the researcher can draw upon. Some I

have identified with, I think, tolerable certainty; others remain obscure.

The song has not been especially well preserved in Hebridean oral tradition, for only three versions are known to me. I first heard it sung in the island of Raasay by Mr. John Maclean, Rector of Oban High School, a native of the island. The version given above is practically identical with the Raasay one, but has a slightly fuller text, while the third is a mere fragment incorporated in a song published in a collection made in South Uist (Craig 1949:66). Mr. Maclean informs me (in a letter of 2/6/62) that he heard the song from his grandmother, Mary Matheson (1837-1923) and never from anyone else.[3] He adds:

> "She was born in Staffin [Skye] and had a great deal of the lore of that area—many of her fairy stories being placed in the Taobh Sear. She married my grandfather, Malcolm Maclean [Raasay], about 1867.
>
> "Where my grandmother got the song I don't know. It may have been from her husband who was probably interested in these things as he was both a good singer and a bit of a bard. On the other hand I never heard it in Raasay tradition. . . . Indeed, when I think of it, we never heard even the Iain Garbh songs in Raasay outside our own house.
>
> "There was however a close connection always between Raasay and Staffin and I am definitely of the opinion that my grandmother got the songs in Skye. If she did not get them in Staffin she could well have got them in Braes where there were some good sources of traditional stuff in these days, better I should imagine than there were in Raasay. Raasay had been terribly badly cleared before my grandmother went there, and the native Raasay people were either abroad or sent to the north end of the island where they were out of the reach of people in Balachurn where my grandmother lived.
>
> "Finally, I have no recollection of her giving the song a title or indicating to what class it belonged."

The text printed above was taken down in the autumn of 1955 from the late Mrs. Kate Beaton, Woodend, Portree. Mrs. Beaton knew the song from her childhood days, having heard it from a number of people in the Portree area. She was at this time well advanced in years but though her powers of memory were impressive she was quite certain that she could not remember the complete text of this song. The line *Maighistir Iain 's Maighistir Domhnall* was all she could quote of the

remainder. Mrs. Beaton knew the song as *Oran Mór Sgorabreac* (The Great Song of Scorrybreck),[4] a term which may indicate that it was traditionally regarded as possessing unusual dignity. An Ossianic ballad recorded in Skye was also called a "Great Song" by my informant.

Assuming that the text constitutes a unity, *Oran Mór Sgorabreac* appears to be a panegyric addressed to someone who lived in, or was connected with, a "big house"—the residence of a chief or a tacksman—and who married a daughter of a MacLeod of Raasay. Although this is not explicit, we shall see that the person addressed is probably the Calum son of Donald mentioned in line 5. The description of the "wide hall" is a conventional one, but there is no reason to doubt that it reflects in a general way the customs of a "big house". We know that the "extraordinair drinking of strong wynis and acquavitie" in the Hebrides was a source of grave disquiet to the Scottish central authorities.[5] As late as 1782, one of the items in an inventory of wickednesses listed against a member of my family in Skye is that "there is not a year but he smugles eight or nine hundred Casks of Brandy, and Rum from the on end to the other of the year. . . ."[6]

Now Scorrybreck was the clan territory of the Nicolsons in Skye and possessed in the chief's residence just the kind of house required by the description in the song. Moreover, the genealogy of the Nicolsons contains the names of two men whose style might be Calum the son of Donald. One is Malcolm, the tenth[7] chief of Scorrybreck, who is said to have died about 1675 (MacKinnon 1956:42); the other, Malcolm, the twelfth chief, who died at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[8] *Talla farsaing chlann Domhnaill* would thus be either the house of the family of Donald, the ninth chief, or that of the family of the Rev. Donald Nicolson, minister of Kilmuir from *c.* 1663-97 (*Fasti* 1928:171), and eleventh chief of Scorrybreck. If "Rev. Donald" of the last line is the Rev. Donald of Kilmuir, the obvious inference is that it is to his household that the description applies. But the issues are not quite so clear-cut as this would imply.

The section of the text that deals with Raasay provides a terminus ad quem in the reference to Brochel Castle. Writing of the castle in his contribution to the Old Statistical Account, Alexander Campbell, schoolmaster at Portree, says that "John Garbh is said to be the last who dwelled in it" (*O.S.A.* 1795: 144). Iain Garbh, 6th chief of the MacLeods of Raasay, was

drowned in Easter of 1671 (Watson 1934:30 Fraser 1905: 499). If we accept Campbell as a reliable witness, the marriage spoken of in line 31 must therefore have taken place before or shortly after Iain Garbh's death in 1671. Moreover, the two women who are mentioned, Sìleas and Seònaid (Giles and Janet in official documents), are clearly Iain Garbh's sisters,[9] and Iain Mór may be Iain Garbh himself. Can we then accept that these names furnish a terminus a quo? A possible objection, which must be discussed, turns on the interpretation of the line *Bu dhiubh Sìleas agus Seònaid.* If the use of the past tense *bu* is a slip for the present *is* or *is ann* there is no difficulty. But if it implies that they are no longer alive, we must consider whether the reference is not a later addition. That the entire song is an "antiquarian" composition is most unlikely, not only from the tone of the address, which makes it appear contemporaneous with its subject, but also from what we know of normal practice in Gaelic. Yet if this line has been interpolated why should not the reference to "Rev. Donald" have been added at a later date too? Such a view might find some support in the fact that the Rev. Donald Nicolson had a grandson, the Rev. John Nicolson, who was minister of Portree from 1756 to 1799 (*Fasti* 1928:173b). For if he is the Maighister Iain of the song we shall be justified, on internal evidence alone, in claiming no more than that a certain Calum mac Dhomhnaill, probably from Scorrybreck, married one of the MacLeods from Brochel Castle, and this could quite easily be Malcolm, the tenth chief of the Nicolsons, or someone else of the same family, at an even earlier date.

At this point, however, we can draw on family genealogy. There is, or was, current in Skye a tradition that Malcolm Nicolson, son of the Rev. Donald of Scorrybreck, married one of the sisters of Iain Garbh.[10] Now there is no record of Iain Garbh's having had any sisters other than the two mentioned in this song. Seònaid we know was married to Duncan MacRae of Inverinate (Donnchadh nam Pìos) (MacRae 1899:93). Was Sìleas then married to Malcolm Nicolson? Before attempting to answer this, another question must be decided. It is stated by the Rev. Donald MacKinnon that "Malcolm studied for the ministry, but like his father, refused to conform to the re-established Presbyterianism . . ." (MacKinnon 1956:43); a Nicolson genealogy (cited below) calls him the "Rev. Malcolm"; and, finally in the Services of Heirs he is Magister [11] —a term normally reserved for a Master of Arts. In 1689 a

Malcolumbus Nicolson graduated M.A. at Edinburgh University,[12] and since no other person of that name is recorded, in the seventeenth century, in the annals of Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen—those of St. Andrews are not available—it is almost conclusive that this is Malcolm of Scorrybreck. The probability is heightened still more by the record of a Donaldus Nicolsonus who graduated in 1649, also at Edinburgh.[12] But if this is so, the chances of his having married Sìleas are negligible, unless, of course, he entered university at an unusually late age.

On the other hand, the tradition cannot simply be dismissed, particularly as a distorted reflection of it is perhaps to be found in an entry in a fragmentary genealogy of the Nicolsons, dated October 1876, and compiled by William Nicolson, Portsmouth, a descendant of John, another son of the Rev. Donald of Scorrybreck. Here it is said that "the Rev. Malcolm married the justly celebrated poetess Mary MacLeod. She died in 1693 aged 105 years". This highly improbable statement, which refers to Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, finds no corroboration anywhere, but the point is that Sìleas of Raasay was a poetess too. To her are traditionally ascribed the "Iain Garbh" songs mentioned above by Mr. John Maclean. Since both she and Mary composed laments for Iain Garbh, it is at least possible that the name of the famous poetess displaced that of her more obscure contemporary, particularly in an *émigré* tradition. We may also observe in passing that both Mary and Sìleas have, in different sources, been named as the composers of one song, viz. *Och nan och 's mi fo léireadh* (Watson 1934:115).

The remaining names are puzzling. According to Mary MacLeod's elegy (Watson 1934:30), Iain Garbh was succeeded by his only brother. Is this the Alasdair whom the song lists as the younger or youngest son (the Gaelic can mean either) and, apparently, the brother of Sìleas and Seònaid? Or is it Iain Og? Unfortunately a definite answer to these questions is impossible since no other source, so far as I am aware, states that Iain Garbh had any brothers. We might hazard a guess that Alasdair was an illegitimate son of Malcolm the fifth chief of Raasay, but we must not overlook the fact that an Alexander and two Johns are listed as sons of the Rev. Donald Nicolson of Scorrybreck (MacKinnon 1956:42). But Iain Mór may be Iain Garbh: Sìleas calls him Iain Mór in one of her songs.[13] I am unable to identify the Rev. John unless he is the

Rev. John Nicolson, minister of Portree, as I have already suggested.

In such a complicated maze of genealogical and other traditions, it is plainly impossible to offer more than the most tentative conclusions. I have tried to list these below in a rough order of probability:

1. At some date before the evacuation of Brochel Castle (*c.* 1671) a panegyric was composed to the contemporary Nicolson of Scorrybreck, mentioning *inter alia* his marriage to one of the women of the MacLeods of Raasay.
2. With the passage of time, certain genealogical traditions distorted the memory of this marriage.
3. With the passage of time also, some fresh names connected with the families concerned were added to the song.
4. The initial confusion arose because of the existence of two men called Calum mac Dhomhnaill in the Nicolson genealogy.
5. The elder Calum mac Dhomhnaill is the original subject of the panegyric.

Beyond that we cannot go without more evidence. But even from such a brief study of one text two points of a general nature can be made. (1) Sufficient documentary sources exist to warrant a more ambitious attempt to identify personal names in obscure and anonymous songs; (2) although the song selected is representative of a genre that lies outside the mainstream of Gaelic poetry, the identifiable names are not those of members of the lowest stratum of society but those of the aristocracy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Mr. John Maclean, Oban, for supplying the information about the Raasay version of this song, and to the Rev. Dr. Donald MacKinnon, Kennoway, for supplying genealogical information.

NOTES

[1] For Hugh see A. & A. MacDonald, *The Clan Donald,* 3 Vols. (Inverness 1896-1904). He is said (Vol. 3:469) to have been a grandson of Domhnall Gruamach, the 4th chief of Sleat. But see also Vol. 3:29, where another lineage is proposed for him. He was put to death in the early years of the seventeenth century, *ibid.* pp. 46-8.

For Donald (Son of John son of James) see *Clan Donald* vol. 3: 500-3. He was a grandson of James MacDonald of Castle Cammus in Sleat.

[2] The incident referred to is the incarceration of "Johnne McConill sone and apperand air to James McConill of Castell Cammis" by Colin Earl of Argyll. The document is dated 8th Nov. 1577 in the *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* Vol. 2 (1569-78) 649-50. Cf. SSS RL 592A2.

[3] For the text and melody of this version see *Gairm*, No. 8:335-7. It was recorded for the School of Scottish Studies by Mr. Maclean:RL 473A4.

[4] Mrs. Beaton informed me that *Oran Mór Sgorabreac* was traditionally ascribed to a native of Scorrybreck who was banished from Skye for smuggling. This is no doubt a rationalisation based upon the references to different kinds of liquor.

[5] A prohibition on the sale of liquor to the islanders is one of the points in the *Statutes of Icolmkil* drawn up in 1609. See *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* Vol. 9:26-31.

[6] National Library MS 3784.

[7] These numbers are taken from genealogical notes kindly supplied by Dr. MacKinnon: they are used here merely to distinguish the different chiefs.

[8] Services of Heirs: 23rd May 1723. H.M. Register House, Edinburgh.

[9] MS Genealogy of the MacLeods of Raasay.

[10] I am indebted to Dr. MacKinnon for this information the source of which was the late A. R. MacDonald, Esq., of Waternish, a descendant of the Rev. Donald Nicolson of Scorrybreck.

[11] Services of Heirs: 12th July 1702 and 23rd May 1723. H.M. Register House, Edinburgh.

[12] *A Catalogue of the Graduates . . . of the University of Edinburgh since its foundation.* Edinburgh 1858.

[13] Versions recorded for the School of Scottish Studies: RL 205B7 and 472A2.

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JOHN MACINNES

Feannagan Taomaidh (Lazy Beds)

The most striking physical feature that the agrarian economy of the Highland area has left on the landscape of that region is the distinctive corrugation that indicates lazy bed cultivation. Whilst this system is still in use it is essential to record evidence of the details of current and recent practices; the system being at once a significant factor in Highland agriculture, especially on marginal lands, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a relic of much earlier cultivation technique. There is the danger that what appears physically as strip cultivation may be confused with apparently similar modes of cultivation in the Lowlands and England, rigs, baulks and field divisions described arbitrarily and for convenience of management or allocation.

Feannagan Taomaidh is equivalent in English to "the poured out flaying", a synonymous expression also used being *Talamh Taomaidh* or "poured out ground". How these terms have come to be rendered by the meaningless expression "lazy beds" seems obscure. Distributed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through marginal lands in West Sutherland, Ross, Inverness, N. Argyll and the Hebrides this form of strip cultivation was essentially a response to environment. The disadvantages of shallow soil and poor drainage had been combated perhaps from very early times by the simple process of excavating parallel ditches some 2-3 yards apart and mounding the resulting soil between the same. By this means an intensive cultivation, for which the *cas chrom* and other spade forms were essential, was practised. Stevenson (1960:3-4) has commented on rigs in the Lothians and Borders, of perhaps medieval date, representing a similar response to the drainage problem but it must be remembered that plough rigs are related primarily to the use of that implement with economy of effort rather than to other factors. The *Feannag* then represents virtually a form of horticulture in areas where both soil and climate rendered agriculture a barely viable economic proposition. Writing of the arable land of his parish in the mid-nineteenth century, the parish minister of Portree stated "Compared to that of pasture or moorland (it is) so very inconsiderable that it appears a matter of little or no importance" (*N.S.A.* 1845:226).

It would be interesting to know the statistical relationship of ploughed land to *feannagan* in the North West in the seventeenth century. It seems very likely that the population

increases of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, producing as they did a high population in relation to arable ground, dictated an extension of *feannagan* to every available scrap of arable land. It is to this relatively recent period that the bulk of lazy bed remains may well date—especially some of the more isolated and physically remote examples.

The purpose of this note, which is not intended to be definitive, is to show that ethnological field work is beginning to produce data which amplifies our detailed knowledge of this form of agriculture and may correct current misconceptions that this is purely potato growing technique. The photograph (Pl. VII, fig. 2) shows young oats on *feannagan* near Tarbert, Harris, in June 1961, illustrating the persistence of cereal growing by this means. It has been stated that whilst the yield of lazy bed cultivation in relation to ground was and is high this was not so in relation to labour expended. Certainly the yield was high. An informant in Coigeach, Wester Ross, states that three crops were taken per annum last century—early potatoes, barley and late cabbage. Whether the labour expenditure was proportionately so great is questionable. The Rev. Angus Duncan (1957) writing of his native island of Scarp, Harris, indicates that lazy beds were not completely remade annually but rather the ditches were dredged. Intensive fertilisation played an important role certainly by the nineteenth century; in addition to seaweed and manure, peat soot and thatch were "utilised by the crofter as manure . . . the custom of unroofing annually is still practised in the 1880's" (Ross 1885-6:39). Restricted economically by climate and environment and by the superimposed burdens of rising population and varying degrees of landlord exploitation the West Highlander was forced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to expand a sound horticultural technique, certainly in existence already, to its utmost physical limits and thereon was based much of the cultivation aspect of crofting. It should be an important task for the future to gather precise details of the *feannagan* system in each area and its relative contribution to the local economy.

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FIG. 1—Auchnangoul, Inveraray par., Argyll.

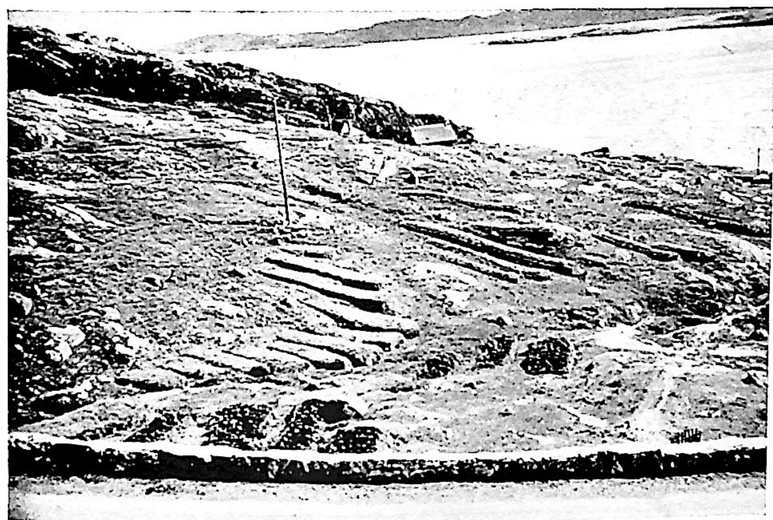

FIG. 2—*Feannagan* near Tarbert, Harris.
(see p. 245)

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IAIN A. CRAWFORD

An Unrecorded Type of Belted Plaid?

The MacGregor Féileadh Mór of 1822

It has recently been said of Highland Dress that it is "a subject which has occasioned more heat than light, and which still cries aloud for scholarly study, with very little response. . . . Much would be gained by an enquiry into the dress in its decline, or rather its resurrection, after the raising of the Proscription Act of 1782" (Maxwell and Hutchison 1958:154).

The "1822" exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in September 1961, provided an opportunity to study a belted-plaid (Gaelic, *féileadh mór*), with associated jacket and waistcoat, which is thought to have been made for Sir Evan Murray MacGregor, Chief of the Clan, for the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822.[1]

When worn, this plaid would look like an unsewn *féileadh mór* of the style in use in the Highlands before the Act of 1746, the accepted precursor of the *féileadh beag* or little kilt. It is believed that the *féileadh mór* consisted of a rectangular piece of material, not necessarily of what we would now call "tartan" (Gaelic *breacan*), of varying length and about 50 to 60 inches wide. The width could be achieved by joining lengthwise two or more narrow loom-widths; the length was often from 5 to 7 yards though very different figures are given by some works.

This garment, we are told, was laid on the ground on top of a belt and pleated. The wearer would then lie down and belt the material round him so that the lower part formed a skirt and the upper part became a kind of outer garment, covering his head, shoulders or arms as he pleased (McClintock 1949:19).

Assuming that such a primitive stage of the pleated belted-plaid really was used in everyday life, then the MacGregor *féileadh mór* represents a more sophisticated version. It measures 4 feet in width by 17 feet in length and is of rather hard woollen tartan with setts corresponding to the nineteenth century

MacGregor tartan. The most interesting feature of the garment is that, in order to avoid having to lie down on the pleated material each time before belting it on, the tailor has sewn a series of loops of coarse tape at intervals along the seam, in the centre of each sett, as shown in Figs. 2 and 3. A belt (the original was not available for the Exhibition) could then be slipped through the loops, pleating the material as it was tightened.

Fig. 1

There is some evidence to suggest that such a convenient arrangement of the belted-plaid was a recognised feature of the garb of Highland gentlemen before the Proscription Act of 1746. A list of the complete equipment of a Highland gentleman with instructions for donning the belted plaid is given by Charles Grant, Vicomte de Vaux in his *Mémoires de la Maison de Grant* published in 1796. An attendant note on Scottish Military Tactics in 1745 describing the belted plaid in wear suggests that the instructions and list are of the same period (Grant 1796:3).

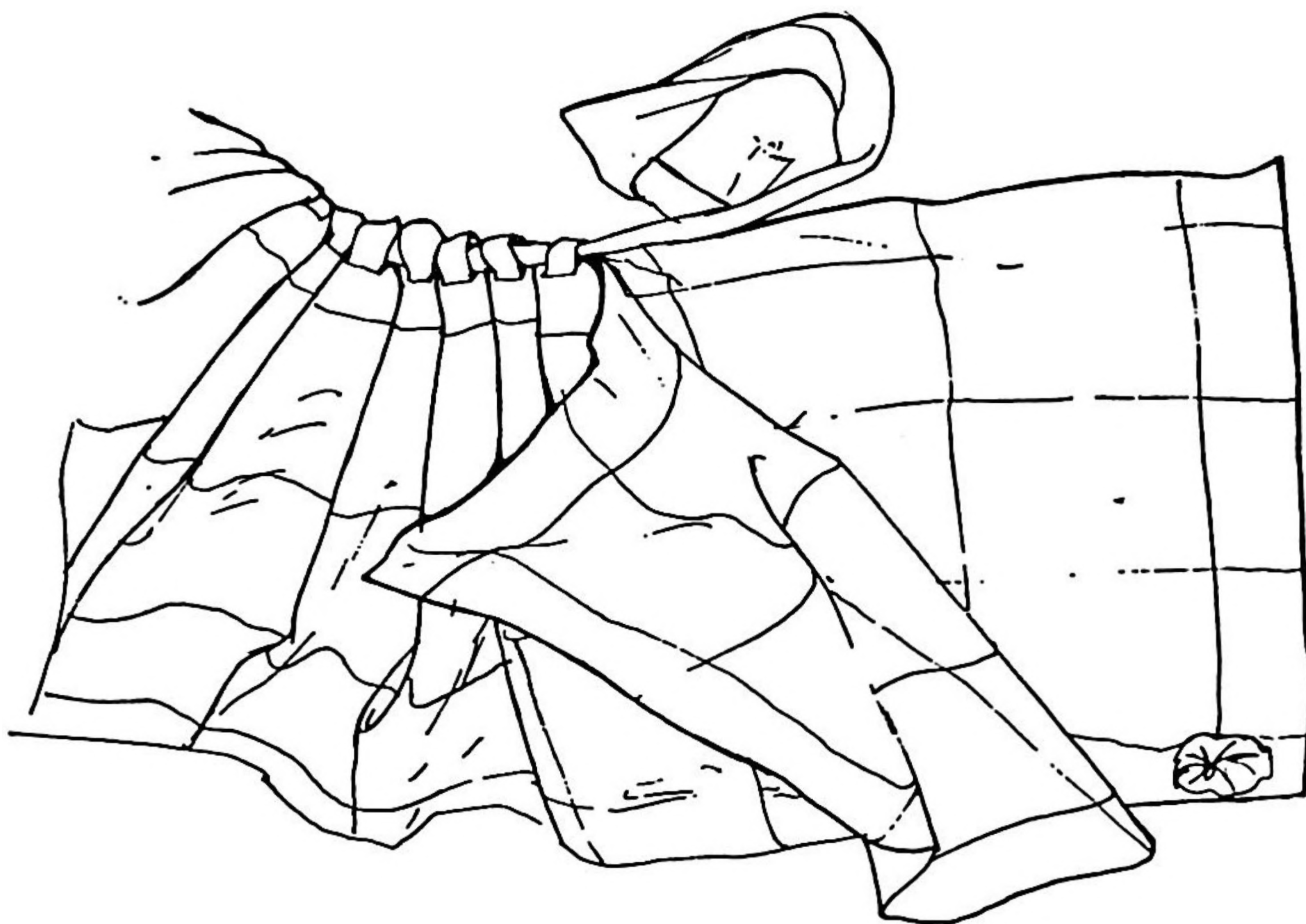

Fig. 2

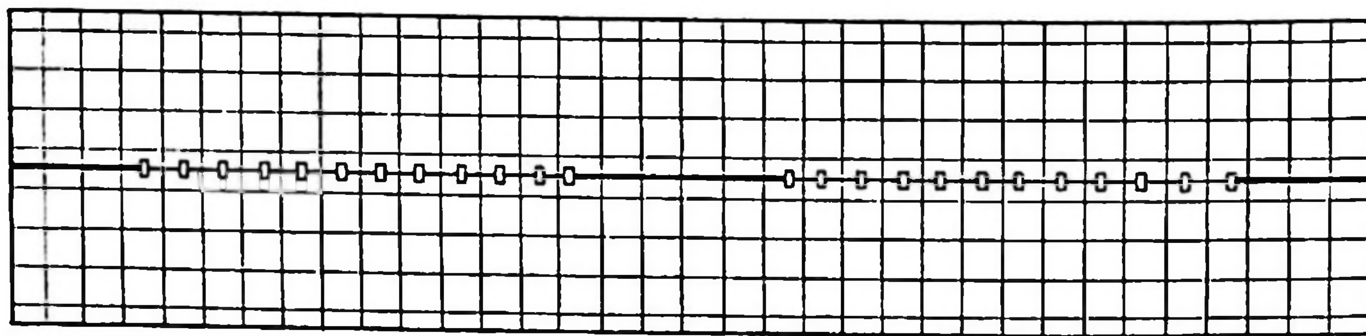

Fig. 3

The list includes both kilt (*féileadh beag*?) and tartan belted plaid. The "Method of belting the plaid" is given in English and translated into French but its origin is not stated. It begins as follows:

"Being sewed, and the broad belt within the keepers, the gentleman stands with nothing on but his shirt; when the servant gets the plaid and belt round, he must hold both ends of the belt until the gentleman adjusts and puts across in a proper manner the two folds or flaps before; that done, he

tightens the belt to the degree wanted; then the purse and purse-belt is put on loosely; afterwards, the coat and waistcoat is put on and the great low part hanging down behind, where a loop is fixed is to be pinned up to the right [*sic*; cf. Fig. 4] shoulder, immediately under the shoulder strap" (Grant 1796:7). It continues by describing the arrangement of the various free hanging parts and ends with the following note:

"N.B.—No kilt ought ever to hang lower than the hough or knee—scarcely that far down."

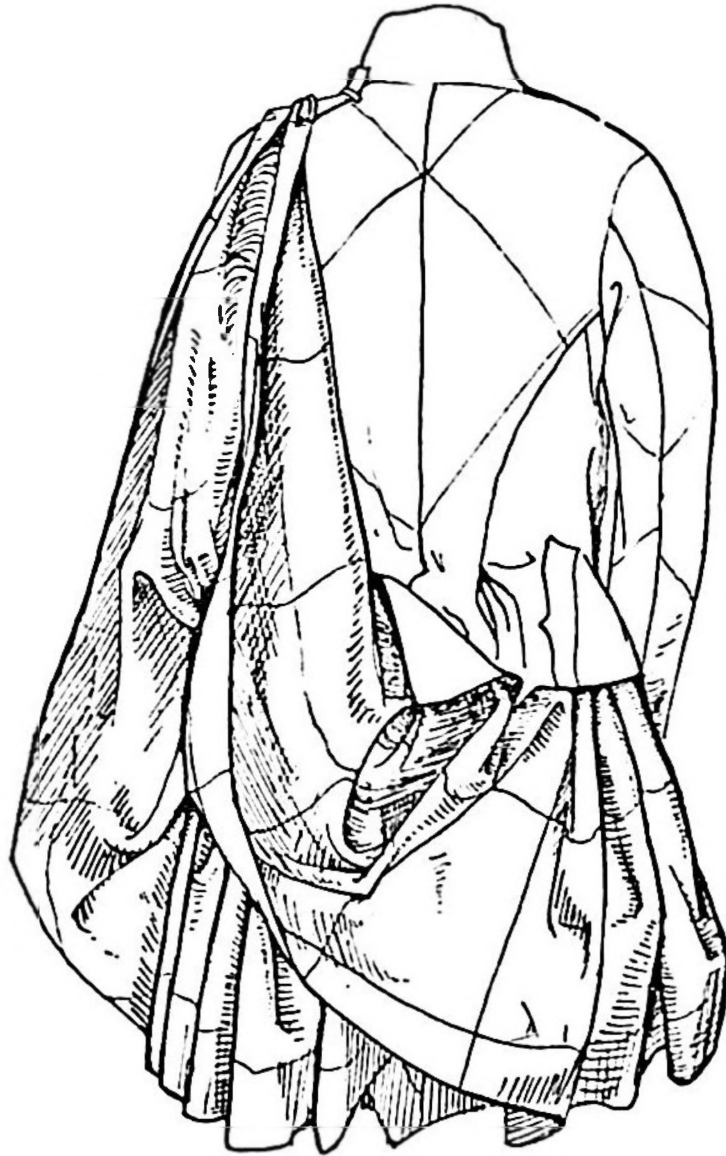

Fig. 4

The use of "kilt" in this context suggests the lower, pleated part of the *féileadh mór*.

". . . the two folds or flaps before" in the MacGregor *féileadh mór* are made by leaving unsewn about 17 inches at each end of the plaid (Fig. 3). At first it was thought that the 33 inches in the middle, also unsewn, had parted through wear but since the ends of the seams were neatly finished off and the loops off-set, it is more likely that this was left open to take the tails of the tartan coat.

The drawings represent the costume as arranged for the exhibition, and there may be a false relationship of jacket to *féileadh mór* at the waist. It can be seen (Fig. 1) how the tails of the coat curled up when the pleats were arranged ignoring the centre opening. The lower flaps were folded across the front, as with a modern kilt, but of the upper flaps one was taken to the *left* shoulder to fasten through the tab made for it on the jacket. The other was tucked into the belt to make a kind of pocket. Both upper flaps could be worn as "pockets" as in the portrait of an unknown Highland Chief by Michael Wright (1660) in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Most writers on Scottish costume agree that the *féileadh mór* was the usual garment for the less wealthy. Whether or not it was the only form of plaid is subject to controversy. McClintock dates the arrival of the *féileadh mór* to about 1600 and the *féileadh beag* to about 1725 or 1730 (McClintock 1949:12-13). Although trews seem to be most mentioned by chroniclers and observers before 1600 it is strange that so natural a garment as the *féileadh mór* should have been entirely neglected. The concensus of opinion is that the plaid, when worn unbelted and unpleated was usually over shirt, perhaps wth doublet, and trews. Certainly in 1618 an Englishman, John Taylor, visited Braemar and wrote that the local people wore no breeches, but jerkin and hose of the same stuff, "with a plaid about their shoulders, which is a mantle of divers colours" (Hume Brown 1891:121).

Robert Gordon of Straloch, writing after 1600 but describing Highlanders as they were before that date, notes that winter wear was "Trowses" but also describes a belted plaid. The advantages of the garment can be seen when he adds "when they compose themselves to Rest and Sleep, they loose the Belt and roll themselves in the Plaid" (McClintock 1949: 10).

Thomas Morer in 1689 noted that these garments "not only served them for cloaths by day in case of necessity, but were pallats or beds in the night . . . and for that reason in campaigns were not unuseful". His suspicions that they would be inconvenient are borne out later by Mareshal Keith, who in his *Memoirs of Sheriffmuir* in 1715 remembered that the men tended to lose their clothes altogether in battle (McClintock 1949: 11, 30).

That both forms of plaid were in use before 1600 seems certain from Bishop Lesley's statement of 1578 that "all . . .

wore mantles of one sort (except that nobles preferred those of several colours). These were long and flowing but capable of being neatly gathered up at pleasure into folds" (McClintock 1949:7).

Variations of the belted plaid can be seen in a German engraving of Scottish soldiers, printed about 1641; in Michael Wright's portrait of 1660; in the portraits by Richard Waitt, about 1714, of Alastair Mor Grant at Castle Grant and Lord Duffus at the Portrait Gallery. The Van der Gucht engravings of 1743 and Burt's drawings of between 1726 and 1737 show most clearly the styles of wearing the *féileadh mór* and the fact that it could be worn over trews.[2]

It cannot be decided whether or not the method of belting the garment through loops was ever general unless more examples from other areas come to light or some more literary references can be discovered. It could be supposed that this one was made in an attempt to recreate more simply, for the fancy of the MacGregor and the delectation of George IV a fashion then dying if not dead.

MacIan and Logan in *The Clans of the Scottish Highlanders* and the Sobieski Stolberg-Stuart work *The Costume of the Clans* both published in 1845 do show the belted plaid but with jackets, shirts and hairstyles of the eighteenth century which suggests that they were copying earlier sources.

Therefore, though it is reasonable to suppose that both *féileadh mór* and *féileadh beag* were in use concurrently, the evidence of literary sources and portraits points to the former being an archaic garment for general wear by any class in 1822.

The importance of the MacGregor *Féileadh mór* is that it shows so clearly how the original garment could have been worn and it seems to be the only certain extant example of its kind so far noticed. It is to be hoped that investigation will bring to light more information.

NOTES

[1] The jacket is of a type fashionable at this period (Fig. 1); it is of the same tartan, cut on the cross at the back, collared and cuffed with green velvet which is heavily embroidered with gold and silver thistles. The waistcoat is of matching velvet, also embroidered.

[2] For illustrations, see McClintock 1949.

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MARTA HOLMES

C. OTHER NOTES

Book Reviews

The Castle of Bergen and the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall. By W. Douglas Simpson, O.B.E. Aberdeen University Studies No. 142. Published for the University by Oliver and Boyd. 1961. 13s. 6d.

On 20th April 1944 a German ammunition ship anchored near Bergen castle blew up, severely damaging the Great Hall of King Haakon Haakonsson and the Rosenkranz Tower, both of which stand on the quayside. Restoration was completed last year and Dr. Simpson's latest study has therefore a certain topical interest since more than half the text is devoted to an analysis of these two buildings, including hitherto unrecorded features revealed by the explosion. In addition he considers the problems associated with the dating of early stone buildings in Scotland and re-examines the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall which he believes incorporates a substantial fragment of the building in which King Haakon died.

The book is described as a "study in early Norse architecture" and although primarily intended for the specialist has much to offer the general reader, for the author is an architectural historian who is equally interested in architecture and history. He recalls that King Haakon, whose fleet was defeated at the well-remembered battle of Largs, was no uncouth Viking raider but one of the most enlightened and civilised monarchs of his age. He sees the Haakonshalle both as a building and as a symbol of imperialism corresponding to, probably inspired by,