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B. NOTES ON COLLECTION AND RESEARCH

Goat-Keeping in the Old Highland Economy

Amid all the bitter memories of the "Forty-Five", the people of Moidart enjoyed a gleam of humour unexpectedly provided by a herd of domesticated goats. Still remembered long after goats have ceased to play any significant part in the Highland economy, the tale has a two-fold interest for us, as we shall see. Though the subject has been practically ignored hitherto, it seems likely that until the mid-eighteenth century goats may have had, for the majority of the population, the lesser tenants and cottars, an importance comparable in its way to that of cattle in the economy of the chiefs and tacksmen.

On May 3, 1746, after the return of Clanranald's men from Culloden, a naval engagement took place between two French and three English frigates at the entrance to Loch Ailort, which separates the districts of Moidart and Arisaig. Father Charles MacDonald, priest of Moidart in the 1880's, heard how

> The natives on each side of the Loch stationed themselves on knolls and on the slopes of the hills, whence they had a complete view of what was going on before them. During the hottest part of the fight, one of them, an old man belonging to Gaotal [on the Arisaig side], was heard to offer up the most fervent supplications to Heaven for the preservation, not of the French, less so of the English, but of some goats belonging to himself, and which were grazing on an island within close range of the combatants' guns (MacDonald 1889:184).

In 1959, Mr. Sandy Gillies, of Glenuig in Moidart, then 80 years of age, informed me that "Goat Island was a place grazed by goats in 1745",—indicating the grassy islet, crowned by a vitrified fort, which lies in the mouth of Loch Ailort (O.S. "Eilean nan Gobhar", NM/694794).[1] Like some other islets so named, this Eilean nan Gobhar was no doubt traditionally used in former times for summer pasturing, an alternative to the hill shieling, which simultaneously took advantage of the availability in such places of rich seasonal grazings and also protected the township's cereal crops from trespass (*cf.* Whitaker 1959:173-8).

The extreme agitation of the Gaotal tenant who owned the perilously insulated goats can now be more easily understood in the light of some hitherto unpublished references to the keeping of goats by the numerous "small tenants" of the southern parts of Ardnamurchan parish (of which Arisaig and Moidart formed the northern portion) prior to the Rising of 1745.

The barony of Ardnamurchan and Sunart was purchased from the Campbells of Lochnell in 1723, by a Peeblesshire laird, (Sir) Alexander Murray of Stanhope, his intention being to reap much-needed financial benefits from the development of lead-mines at Strontian, the woods of Sunart, and the fisheries of Loch Sunart and Loch Shiel. Unfortunately for him, Murray soon found himself in opposition to the various tenants already in possession of the lands. From the outset he tried to force the tenants to give up the keeping of goats, so as to conserve some still extensive natural woodlands for his own benefit. After a lively meeting of the principal tenants of Ardnamurchan, evidently at the "House of Mingary", on 25 September, 1723, Murray's factor, Donald Campbell, younger of Octomore, informed him that

> to oblige your whole Tennants to dispose of their Goats without the least Consideration . . . would very much irritate and provock the Country People,—

and advised him to defer the matter

> till you are better settled and fully master of your Bussiness (Murray of Stanhope Papers, I, fo. 76).

Two years later Murray tried again, this time with the various branches of the Locheil Camerons then settled in Sunart, where the principal woodlands lay. Murray maintained, among other points, that they must accept as legally binding

> That all the Goats shall be removed out of all and sundry the lands of Sunart at and betwixt [*sic*] the term of Whitsunday 1727 . . . Goat-keeping to be a nullity of tack (*ibid*, II, fo. 131-137).

In 1730, John McNivan, one of the principal tacksmen in Ardnamurchan, agreed, on behalf of himself and his subtenants in the five-pennyland of Girgadel,

> to keep no Goats upon the aforesaid lands for the better preservance of the growth of the woods in the Countrey (*Delvine Papers*, MS 1415, fo. 3-6),

on condition that they could in future maintain, in addition to their customary souming of 60 cattle, 100 sheep in place of the "60 sheep and goats" formerly permitted. This two-thirds increase in the second category implies that goats had previously made up a very substantial part of the 60 "sheep and goats", although the actual numbers are not distinguished; nor, because their value was reckoned to be equal, are they specified separately in contemporary inventories.

Other Ardnamurchan tenants accepted tacks on similar terms at this time, but in Sunart the struggle was still unresolved in 1741. John Richardson, then factor, wrote from Strontian to Murray of Stanhope's brother to urge that, with some named exceptions, the poor tenantry should be allowed by the landlord to have their goats in all other places in Ardnamurchan and Sunart, adding this revealing comment:

> I know its one of the greatest hardships that can be put upon poor tennentry to oblige them to Banish their Goats which are the principal support of their familys (*Murray of Stanhope Papers*, VI, fo. 143).

To be urged to sympathy on the further ground that "Ardslignish"—Campbell of Lochnell's fiery brother, Papist and Jacobite, who consistently opposed the Murrays, and successfully resisted all their efforts to oust him from their barony—allowed his tenants to keep their goats, despite the condition in his tack, must have had less effect with the Murrays than their own dire financial circumstances.

In the end the whole of Sunart was granted to Cameron of Dungallon (ratification of tack, 7 August, 1744), with the right to "cutt and use Birk Elder and Hasel Trees for the Houses and Buildings upon the said Lands". Subject to payment, Charles Murray retained the right to cut, sell and "manufacture" the timber and bark growing upon the estate on condition that he

> fence and inclose the said Woods with a Stake and Rice [= wattled] Hedge of Oak, or a Stone Dyke, for the space of four years after the cutting (*Delvine Papers*, MS. 1415, fo. 18-23).

The subject of the goats was not directly mentioned, but the provision for protective fencing of the woods during regeneration—at Murray's expense—doubtless marked their total victory.

Half a century later the parish of Ardnamurchan evidently retained more goats than any other in Scotland. Admittedly

it was one of the largest in the country, but even without the extensive districts of Sunart and Ardnamurchan proper, for which no figures were given, the goat population was estimated at 2,300 of which Moidart had 800, and Arisaig and South Morar 1,500 (*O.S.A.* 1798:294). Elsewhere on the mainland goats were by then "much on the decrease", though to a lesser extent in Wester Ross and Sutherland. In Perthshire goats were "entirely banished" from Clunie, "almost gone" in Blair Atholl and Strowan, while they were expressly "proscribed" in Aberfoyle, "on account of the injury they do to the woods" (*O.S.A.* 1794:124). In his summary of the statistical accounts Sir John Sinclair observed: "In the Highlands of Scotland, there were formerly more goats than sheep" (Sinclair 1826: I, 271).

The natural suitability of the goat to the Highland terrain, and some of its qualified advantages even at this period, were remarked upon by the observant Dr. John Walker, whose studies of Highland agriculture particularly covered the years 1760 to 1786, when goats were giving way to sheep in all the progressive areas.

The goat is no doubt a very ancient inhabitant of the Highlands, being naturally adapted for a mountanous and rocky country. Till of late years, when the fox came to be hunted, and a price even set on his head, the sheep were few in number, and none could be kept in safety, but what were housed at night; but the goat being a much stronger and bolder animal, and having his lodging at night in precipices and inaccessible retreats, was secure from the ravages of the fox. Large and numerous flocks of goats were, therefore, every where kept.

Though the goat is accounted an unprofitable article of stock, compared to the sheep, he is not without his advantages in a mountanous country. No quadruped better endures the extremities of heat and cold. On the most stormy hill, he needs no housing, no shelter, no smearing, nor any artificial provender. His tallow is equal to that of the sheep; his skin gives a better price, and is still more valuable, when dressed with the hair, for the purposes of knapsacks and holster. Even the hair, though neglected in the Highlands, was it shorn in due time, and properly sorted, would sell to different artists, for more than the fleece of a sheep on the same pasture. The value of his carcass in the Highlands, is but little, if at all inferior to that of the sheep, nor is he so subject to diseases and mortality. He cannot, however, bring so good a price, when exported out of the country, and must, therefore, in general, give way to the sheep (Walker 1808:II, 168-9).

On the relationship of goats to woodlands, Walker's view was that maintained from the outset by Murray of Stanhope:

> The goat is not, on any account, to be permitted, wherever he has access, either to young plantations or natural coppice. He is rather a browsing, than a grasing animal, and crops severly the young shoots of every tree and shrub. A good dry stone dyke, which is the best fence for a plantation or a coppice, is no fence against the goat, so that there is no security, but to expel him entirely from their neighbourhood (*ibid:* 2, 169).

In addition to those places where goat's milk was in demand for medical purposes (e.g. O.S.A. 1793: VII, 361, "In Summer . . . for the benefit of goat's milk [Cabrach, in Banffshire] is much resorted to from the low country by many of weak constitution"), Walker believed, optimistically as it turned out, that the goat might maintain its importance in some restricted areas of the Highlands:

> On some rocky and abrupt mountains, or where the fox still prevails, it may be still also advisable to retain him. In these cases, the breed and culture of the animal are very deserving of notice (*ibid:*2, 270),

and he here recommended the introduction of exotic breeds, one advantage of which would be to extend "the season of goat milk" till the beginning of October "instead of ending about 1st August" (*ibid*:2, 170).

Perhaps the clearest impression of what their goats had really meant to the majority of Highland families emerges from descriptions given by Boswell and Johnson of a family of Frasers in Stratherrick. They occupied the first "Highland Hut" that Johnson had seen, near the shore of Loch Ness, probably—despite the inaccurate map of their tour—in the vicinity of Inverfarigaig. It was 30 August, 1773. "The woman spoke little English, but we had interpreters at hand; and she was willing enough to display her whole system of economy" (Johnson 1775:67). There was an open hearth in the middle of the room, and the woman

> had a pot upon it with a goat's flesh boiling. She had at one end, under the same roof but divided with a kind of partition made of wands, a pen or fold in which we saw a good many kids . . . The woman's name was Fraser. So was her husband's. Mr. Fraser of Balnain allows him to live in this hut and to keep sixty goats for taking care of his wood. He was [though 80 years old] then in the wood. They had five children, the oldest only thirteen. Two were gone to Inverness to buy meal. The rest [including the father],

were looking after the goats. She had four stacks of barley, twenty-four [Johnson says twelve] sheaves in each. They had a few fowls. They will live all the spring without meal upon milk and curd, etc., alone. What they get for their goats, kids, and hens maintains them (Boswell 1936:99-101).

Johnson amplified a few points:

Meal ['by which oatmeal is always meant'] she considers as expensive food, and told us, that in spring when the goats gave milk, the children could live without it . . . By the lake [Loch Ness] we saw a potatoe-garden, and a small plot of ground on which stood four shucks, containing each twelve sheaves of barley. She has all this from the labour of their own hands, and for what is necessary to be bought, her kids and her chickens are sent to market (Johnson 1775:68).

Since these accounts say nothing directly about the winter months, nor about the use of butter and cheese, they may be supplemented by the description of the poor sub-tenants of Lochaber in a report to government about 1750. Although these people seem to have owned a few cows, they certainly had goats as well, and their economy was clearly very similar:

Their Food all Summer is Milk and Whey mixed together without any Bread, the Little Butter or Cheese they are able to make is Reserved for Winter provision, they sleep away the Greatest part of the Summer and when the little Barley they sow becomes Ripe, the women pull it as they do Flax and dry it on a Large Wicker Machine over the Fire, then Burn the Straw and Grind the Corn upon Quearns or Handmills.

In the End of Harvest and during the Winter, they have some Flesh, Butter and Cheese, with great Scarcity of Bread. All their Business is to take Care of the few Cattle they have. In Spring which is their only Season in which they work, their whole Food is Bread and Gruel without so much as Salt to Season it (*Highlands of Scotland*, c.1750:94).

Just fourteen months before Boswell and Johnson visited Stratherrick, Pennant, the naturalist and antiquary, noted in his diary the shieling habits of some people of Jura in the Inner Hebrides. Although the passage is relatively well known, attention may be drawn to the distinction between the "peasants" attending the cows, and the quite separate group of goat-herds.

July 1 1772. Jura, Sound of Islay . . . take boat at the ferry, and go a mile more [northward] by water: see on the Jura side some

sheelins or summer huts for goatherds, who keep a flock of eighty for the sake of milk and cheeses. The last are made without salt, which they receive afterwards from the ashes of sea tang, and the tang itself which the natives lap it in.

Land on a bank covered with sheelins, the habitations of some peasants who attend the herds of milch cows . . . (Pennant 1774:II, 216).

Both groups, it seems, were accustomed to take advantage of the seasonal grazing afforded by the broad shelf of the "raised beach" between the foothills of the Paps of Jura and the Sound of Islay. There is more than a hint of kelp-making also (*cf.* Crawford 1962:106), in the description of the goat-herds, but otherwise the practice is akin to that of the mountain shielings, and to the summer use of offshore islands in Moidart and elsewhere—though without the advantage, and balancing disadvantage, of the encompassing sea.

In view of the ancient prestige of cattle in Highland tradition, a conscious social distinction between the cattle-owners and the goat-keepers would seem inevitable, though this is implied rather than stated in the sources gathered here. Since the regular development of droving in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the cattle-owner had a further, financial advantage; though the effects of this varied widely, and on the whole money was notoriously scarce. This scarcity of money, as compared to stock, affected many of the principal families and, all the more, their branches. Lady Dungallon, a daughter of the great Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel, had to remind Murray of Stanhope how unlike Lowland conditions were the economic circumstances facing herself and her relations in Sunart. Writing from her home in Glenheurich, at New Year, 1728, she advised Murray, in a revealing passage,

lickwise to consider that its not Land-rents that maintaine me and my ffamily but the real product of Cattle and land Labouring (Murray of Stanhope Papers, III, 106).

Goats she does not mention. In the circumstances that would have been impolitic and (one suspects) undignified—therein, perhaps, lies much of the difficulty of the whole subject—but in her own case their contribution was doubtless indirect. Her relatives' defence of the Sunart goats was clearly on behalf of the "subject" population, who from time immemorial must have depended much upon the real product of goat-raising. Here it must be said that the dearth of references to

goats in Scottish archaeological literature is highly misleading, and due to the difficulty of distinguishing sheep from goats—archaeologically as well as scripturally (Cornwall 1956:35). In fact, goats are known to have been among the earliest animals domesticated in antiquity.

From the mid-eighteenth century onward, first wood preservation, then the new emphasis on sheep, and finally the clearances, all combined to eliminate the goat from the Highland economy, and if it is still remembered anywhere to-day it is likely to be thought of, as in Ireland, as a badge of poverty. We may well ask to what extent did the banishment of the goat contribute, in the mid-nineteenth century, to the plight of the unromantic, servile, but hitherto basic, population of the Highlands, whose most obvious feature was by then their fatally inadequate means of support (Gray 1957:201)?

NOTE

[1] There are at least another eight instances of this name on the Scottish one-inch sheets of the Ordnance Survey, one of them being in Ross-shire, Eilean nan Gobhar Mor (Lochalsh), the others in Argyllshire: Eilean nan Gobhar in the parishes of Kilchoman and Tiree, and Eilean nan Gabhar in the parishes of Jura, Kilfinan, Kilmartin and Morvern (2).

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B. R. S. MEGAW

A Uist Legend

I recorded the following variants of a local legend (S.S.S. R.L. 1959 A. 10-11) in March 1963, from Archie MacAulay and James Robertson, both of Baile Sear, North Uist.

Loch Bì in South Uist is one of the largest fresh-water lochs in the Hebrides. The present road crosses it at a point where, according to to one of my informants, there has been a causeway from time immemorial.[1]

Curiously enough, I have so far been unable to discover any versions of the story in South Uist, where one would really expect it to survive.[2]

The motif of supernatural help in accomplishing difficult tasks in a very short time is common enough in tales and legends, and a captive animal ransoming itself is listed as No. 158 in the Aarne-Thompson classification of Folk-Tale types. Thus the first variant could be classified quite satisfactorily as a version of Aa.Th.158. The second variant, which is more detailed, is rather different. Here, the unidentified companions or "relatives" of the captive bird perform certain tasks as a condition of its release.

While these texts are interesting enough in themselves it is their provenance which suggested their publication in that it illustrates remarkably well the divergences which can occur in a comparatively short period of oral transmission: James

Robertson learned the story from his father, Malcolm Robertson,[3] and Archie MacAulay learned it from Malcolm's brother, Neil Robertson. Both variants were taped in the same recording session, both informants being present throughout. Yet the result is two texts differing quite considerably in detail.

Archie MacAulay: Tha mi cinnteach gur h-ann aig Seumas as fhearr tha brath air Clachan Loch Bì na agamsa.

Bha bial-aithris a' cantail, agus tha e colach g'eil e fìor cuideachd, gad a dh'fhoighneachdadh tu dh'an a chuile duine th'aig Tuath 's a Deas ciamar a chaidh Clachan Loch Bì suas, nach' eil e furasda dhaibh innse idir. Oir chaidh a chur suas ann an dòigh a tha uamhasach neònach, a réir beul-aithris co-dhiù. Agus chan' eil duine sheallas air an àite nach fhaic gun do rinn e feum ann an iomadach dòigh.

Agus as an am a bh'ann a shiod, bha bodach air Sliabh an Iochdair, agus mar tha fhios agu uileag an diugh, dh'fheumadh ad cuairt mhór a ghabhail timcheall a' mhachaire ma faigheadh ad tarsainn oir neo cuairt mhór eile mach taobh na mòintich. Agus am bodach a bh'ann a sheo, bha e air Sliabh an Iochdair, agus aig am cadail, dé thanaig a staigh ach ian beag dh'an taigh. Agus rug ad air an ian agus gu dé thanaig chon an ian ach bridhinn. Agus dh'iarr e ligeil as.

"Cha lig," as am bodach, "mi as idir thu."

"Lig as mi," as esan.

"Cha lig mi as idir thu," as am bodach.

"Lig as mi," as an t-ian, "agus cuiridh mi clachan air Loch Bì dhut."

"Ma gheallas tu sen a dhianu," as esan, "ligidh mi as thu."

"Ma thà, ma ghabhas tu air m'fhacal mi," as an t-ian, "nì mi sen."

"Gabhaidh mi," as esan, "air d'fhacal thu, ma thà, agus ligidh mi as thu ma chuireas tu clachan air Loch Bì."

'S 'nuair a dh'éirich ad 'sa mhaduinn bha clachan air Loch Bì mar a tha e chon a' latha 'n diugh.

D. A. MacDonald: Well, well. 'S co aige bha i sen. Co aige chuala sibh i?

A.McA.: Chuala aig Niall . . . Niall brathar-athar an fhir sen, 's ann aige chuala mis' i 'n toiseach. 'N cual' thus' i, 'Sheumais?

James Robertson: Chuala.

A.McA.: 'N ann mar siod a bha i?

Archie MacAulay: I am sure that James knows (the story of) Clachan Loch Bì better than I do.

Tradition said, and it seems likely to be true too, that though you were to ask everyone in North and South (Uist) how Clachan Loch Bì was built, that it is not easy for them to explain. For it was built in a very strange way, at least according to tradition. And no one can look at the place without realising that it was useful in many ways.

And at that time, there was an old man in the Sliabh of Iochdar, and as you all know to-day, they would have to take a great circuit round the machar before they could get across, or another great circuit out by the way of the moor. And this old man was in the Sliabh of Iochdar, and at bedtime, what should come into the house but a little bird. And they caught the bird, and what should happen but that speech came to the bird. And he asked to be let go.

"I will not" said the old man, "let you go at all."

"Let me go," said he.

"I will not let you go at all," said the old man.

"Let me go," said the bird, "and I shall build a causeway across Loch Bì for you."

"If you promise to do that," said he, "I shall let you go."

"Well, then, if you take me at my word," said the bird, "I shall do that."

"I shall," said he, "take you at your word then, and I shall let you go, if you build a causeway across Loch Bì."

And when they rose in the morning there was a causeway across Loch Bì as there is to this day."

D. A. MacDonald: Well, well. And who had that one? From whom did you hear it?

A.McA.: I heard it from Neil—Neil the brother of this man's father. It was from him I first heard it. Did you hear it, James?

James Robertson: Yes.

A.McA.: Was that how it was?

J.R.: O, gu deimhin, Eairdsi, chan urra mi bhi cinnteach . . . aig a' cheart mhionaid tha seo-ach, ach chuala mi 'stòiri, 's tha mi 'smaointeachadh gur h-ann mar sen a bha i ceart gu leòr.
D.A.McD.: 'S chan 'eil fhios agu c'uin a chaidh clachan a chuir air Loch Bì an toiseach?
A.McA.: Chan 'eil. Chan urrainn duine 'sam bith . . . as na linntean tha seo sen innse.
D.A.McD.: Ach bha e ann mas deach a' rathad ann?

A.McA.: Bha. O bha gu dearbha. . . .
D.A.McD.: Fad a' rothaid a' null far a bheil a' rathad an dràsda?
A.McA.: Sheadh. 'Sann. Tarsuinn Loch Bì ann a shiod. . .
J.R.: . . . Chan 'eil mi cinnteach as idir. . . . *Well*, bha tuathanach shuas ann a . . . ris an canadh ad MacCureich[4] agus bha e feasgar a bha seo a' taiteadh agus, 'nar a thog e suidheachan, dh'fhalbh ian ionghantach a mach 'na ruith fo'n t-suidheachan, agus 's ann a dh'fhalbh esan agus rug e air, 's thug e dhachaigh e. Agus . . . chuir e 'n t-ian ann an cliabh a staigh agus, air an oidhche, thanaig . . . 'n deaghaidh dha dhol a chadal, thanaig guth chon na h-uinneig a' ràitinn:

"Mhic Cureich, lig a mach an t-isein."

Agus bha . . . 'n t-isein a' cuir ionghnadh air: cha robh e colach ri ian a chunnaig e riamh reimhe idir, agus 's ann a thubhairt e air ais:

"Cha lig," as esan, "mi mach an t-isein," as esan, "go'n tog siu," as esan, "bàthach dhomh—bàthach cheithir cheanghail dhiag."

Co-dhiù, chaidh e air sàilliu cadail agus . . . cha robh e 'faighinn mórand heth agus bha e 'cluinnteil an fhuam a muigh, agus fad an t-siubhail, fad na h-oidhche, bha e 'cluinnteil:

"Nuas sgrath nasgolb 's nach eil 'sa' choill ach fiodhagaich[5] . . . Chan fhaigh mi mar a . . . chuireas mi 's cha ghearr siu mar a sgrathas mi."

Agus 'nuair a dh'éirich e 'sa' mhaduinn, bha bhàthach air a togail—bàthach cheithir cheanghail dhiag deiseil aige gun sian ach na beothaichean a chuir innte.

Bha e feadh a dhleasdanais fad a' latha mar a bha dleasdanach dha, agus 'nar a chaidh e chadal air an oidnche rithist, chual e:

"Mhic Cureich, lig a mach an t-isein."

J.R.: O, indeed, Archie, I cannot be sure at the moment, but I heard the story and I think it was like that right enough.

D.A.McD.: And you don't know when a causeway was first built across Loch Bì?
A.McA.: No. No one in this age can tell that.

D.A.McD.: But it was there before the (present) road was built?
A.McA.: Yes. O, yes, indeed . . .
D.A.McD.: All the way across where the road is now?

A.McA.: Yes. Across Loch Bì there . . .
J.R.: . . . I am not sure of it (i.e. the story) at all . . . Well, there was a farmer up . . . whom they called MacCureich[4] and he was making corn ricks one evening and when he lifted a stook a strange bird ran out from under the stook and he went and caught it and took it home. And he put the bird in a creel in the house, and when night came after he had gone to sleep, a voice came to the window saying:

"MacCureich, let the little bird out."

And the little bird was a cause of wonder to him: it was not like any bird he had ever seen before; and the reply he gave was this:

"I shall not," said he, "let the little bird out," said he, "until you build," said he, "a byre for me—a byre of fourteen fastenings."

Anyway, he went and tried to sleep, and he was not getting much of it, and he was hearing the noise outside, and constantly, all night long, he was hearing:

"Send up a turf or a pin since there is nothing in the wood but *fiodhagaich*.[5] I cannot get enough to keep up with what I place, and you cannot cut enough to keep up with my turfing."

And when he rose in the morning the byre was built—a byre of fourteen fastenings ready for him, with nothing to do but to put the beasts in it. He went about his duties all day as befitted him and when he went to sleep at night again he heard:

"MacCureich let the little bird out."

Agus:

"Cha lig," as esan, "mi mach an t-isein gos an cuir sibh clachan tarsuinn Loch Bì dhomh."

Agus 'n uair a dh'éirich Mac Cureich maduinn a' la 'irne mhàireach bha 'n clachan o thaobh go taobh do Loch Bì.

D.A.McD.: 'S an cual' e dad an oidhche bha sen feadh na h-oidhcheadh?

J.R.: Chan 'eil mi cinnteach. Chan 'eil cuimhn' agam ma chuala mi sian ma dheaghainn sen aig a' cheart mhionaid . . . ach tha fiosam gu bheil a' stòiridh, na sgialachd, aig m' athair.

D.A.McD: 'S chan 'eil fhios agaibh có bh'ann a Mac Cureich a bha seo, a bheil?

J.R.: Cha chuala mise riamh ach dìreach gur e Mac Cureich a bh'air an tuathanach a bha seo-ach, co-dhiù.

NOTES

[1] This is improbable. Another informant has told me that there was no causeway till the road was built, and there is no sign of a causeway on the 1805 estate map (Register House plan 1040).

[2] I have since recorded a version in South Uist which refers to a different area (and which links the legend specifically to the MacMhuirich bards of Stadhlaigearraidh).

[3] Malcolm Robertson is still alive and I hope to be able to record from him during my next field trip in the Uists.

[4] MacCureich [max'kurɛç]. Variants of this form (sometimes anglicised as Currie) occur in the Uists for the name which is historically Mac-Mhuirich. Its most notable bearers were the famous family of professional bards and historians who held lands in South Uist in virtue of their duties of *seanchaidh* to the Clan Ranald family. Donald MacMhuirich, the last trained bard in either Scotland or Ireland died some time after 1722 (see Watson 1959:XVIII).

In local oral tradition the Mac Mhuirichs are remembered as magicians and warriors rather than learned men.

[5] For *fiodhag/fiodhagaich* Dwelly's dictionary gives *bird-cherry*, *wild fig*, *hard-berry*. There was apparently a taboo relating to the use of this wood as building material. In an interview with the late Dr. Calum MacLean, the late Mr. John MacDonald, Spean Bridge, one of our best informants, while describing techniques of wattle building, says that for certain cross timbers any wood could be used ". . . except the *fiodhagaich*. It is prohibited. They were full of superstitions. Any timber in the wood except *fiodhagaich*". (S.S.S. R.L.372, A.1).

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And:

"I shall not" said he, "let the little bird out until you build a causeway across Loch Bì for me."

And when MacCureich rose next day in the morning the causeway was there from one side of Loch Bì to the other.

D.A.McD.: And did he hear anything that night during the night?

J.R.: I'm not sure. I can't remember whether I heard anything about that at the moment—but I know that my father has the story—or the tale.

D.A.McD.: And you don't know who this MacCureich was, do you?

J.R.: I never heard anything—except that this farmer was called MacCureich at any rate.

D. A. MACDONALD

Birds of Life and Birds of Death

The early Celtic peoples did not draw fine distinctions between the natural and the supernatural, the animal and the human worlds. The iconography and the literatures of the pagan Celtic world are the repository of a rich bestiary in which birds are perhaps given a greater prominence than animals. The surviving fragments of what must once have been a substantial corpus of birdlore are sufficiently extensive to suggest the importance of ornithomancy and ornithomorphic concepts in the pre-Christian Celtic period. Gods and goddesses are frequently portrayed in company with birds in Gallo-Roman and Romano-British iconography, and the early Celtic literatures, reflecting as they do an essentially pagan background, provide some details as to the role played by birds in popular belief and superstitious practice. The mother-goddess who is portrayed in Celtic iconography with a bird on either shoulder[1] is reminiscent of such insular goddesses as Riannon,[2] Clídna[3] and Medb[4] who are described in the vernacular literatures as possessing magic sickness-healing, sorrow-repelling birds. The descriptions of the birds of the Welsh Riannon are particularly impressive and convey a convincing idea of the type of legend which must have circulated about the birds of the happy otherworld. In the

mabinogi of *Branwen* (Williams 1930:45) they are referred to as follows, "and you will be a long time on the road. In Harddlech you will be feasting seven years and the birds of Riannon singing to you", and (Williams 1930:46) "then they went on to Harddlech, and they sat them down and began to regale themselves with meat and drink, and even as they began to eat and drink there came three birds and began to sing them a certain song and of all the songs they had ever heard each one was unlovely compared with that. And far they must look to see them out over the deep yet it was as clear to them as if they were close to them". Again, in the *mabinogi* of *Culhwch and Olwen* the giant Ysbadadden expresses a desire for "the birds of Riannon, *they that wake the dead and lull the living to sleep*" (Jones 1949:115). Moreover, the relief from Senlis (Esperandieu no. 3850) portraying a youthful god apparently giving instructions to the geese and ravens which surround him cannot stem from concepts fundamentally different from those which gave rise to the legend of the Welsh Owein with his raven followers (Richards 1948:12f.), or the bird father of the Irish Conaire the Red with his company of great birds which, when occasion demanded, became fully-armed fighting men (Knott 1936:5). These examples could be multiplied indefinitely and are merely cited to give some indication of the wealth of birdlore in the Celtic mythological tradition.

With the coming of Christianity and the replacing of the shape-shifting, wonder-working gods by the local saints, the emphasis changes, and the bird attributes of the pagan deities are now appropriated by the clerics. The sacred swans perch on the shoulders of a servant of the Church or join in Mass with a man of God.[5] The intimate association of birds with the pagan concept of the happy otherworld and the frequent adoption of bird-form by otherworld beings made it inevitable that the concept of the bird-soul and of the singing otherworld birds, bestowers of joy and forgetfulness, and healers of pain, should be transferred with ease and with little modification into a Christian milieu, itself rich in bird symbolism drawn from many traditions and mythologies. The drawing of omens from the flight and cries of birds, however, practised by the druids, was not regarded favourably by the Church, and the early literature contains references to ecclesiastic disapproval of this custom. The following *lorica* is attributed to Columcille. "I do not adore the voices of birds, nor sneezing, nor lots in this world, nor a boy, nor omens, nor women. My druid is

Christ the son of God" (Best 1916:120).[6] And again, "the honouring of sneezes and omens, choice of weather, lucky times, the (heeding) of the voices of birds . . ." (obscure) (Todd 1848: 144).[7]

Throughout the wealth of Celtic bird mythology, the drawing of omens from birds, and the sacrifice of sacred species, a certain pattern is discernible, and it is clear that birds could have a dual significance, having both good and evil associations. Not only do certain species invariably represent good or ill, but there is a distinct repertoire of birds, often belonging to no recognisable species, which we may classify as birds of life and birds of death. Birds of life protect the living against evil forces: birds of death announce the dreaded news, or help to bring about disaster. The early Irish tales contain numerous examples of birds of both types, and it is only necessary to draw attention to one or two of these for purposes of illustration. For example, in the life of Saint Moling (Stokes 1906: 264), it is recounted how the infant saint is saved from death by a supernatural dove which comes and protects it with his wings while the mother tries in vain to murder the baby. Another tradition tells of the approaching murder of Saint Cellach when all the ominous birds joined in giving warning of the crime:—"the raven cried and the hooded crow and the wren and all the other birds then; the raven of the yew tree of Cluain Eo came" (O'Grady 1892:II, 58-9).[8] Again, in the story of *Cronan mac Imilit* (O'Ceochain 1930:33), Goll is described as fighting with the eldest daughter of Cronan. He is being worsted in the fight when a little bird speaks to him and encourages him. He overcomes his opponent. The early pagan tradition likewise contains many examples of destructive birds which bring evil and death to mankind, often in the service of some malevolent deity. The sacred feast of *samhuin* (November 1st) is a favourite time for these birds to manifest themselves and indulge in hostile activity.[9]

Traditions of "death birds" are still current in the modern Celtic world, as are stories about "birds of life" or helpful birds whose intervention benefits a particular person or family. There are many examples from Welsh popular tradition about the coming of the birds of death. Jones (Welsh Folklore 1930:200) describes an event connected with the bird soul motif, which reputedly took place in Cardiganshire in comparatively recent years, and which is typical of Celtic traditions of this kind. Two men from Cardigan, both deacons of one of

the Free Churches[10] were going to sit up with a neighbour who was very ill. It was a moonlit night and while they were going along a lane, one of the men drew the other's attention to a bird which was perching on a tree. Neither of them could identify it. One of them picked up a stone and threw it at the bird which flew away. They saw it again on another tree. A stone was again thrown and the bird disappeared. When the men got to the house and the door was opened, a bird flew in, up the stairs and out through the window. Next morning the invalid died. This death-bird seems to correspond to the Scottish Gaelic traditions of *an t-eun sìth*, a mysterious bird seen about the house in which a death is to take place, or near a person about to die. A similar bird is known as a *tamhusg* in parts of Skye, and is likewise of an indeterminate species. Other legends are known about strange, unnatural birds which herald evil. For example, there is a tradition, current at the present time in Barra, of a mysterious black bird with white in its feathers, which screams at night and is a sign of evil. This creature seems to correspond to the *sgreuchan-aitin* referred to by Martin Martin (1884:73) which he describes as being the size of a big man. The vague, although colourful way in which these inauspicious birds are described suggests perhaps that some of the mysterious malevolent otherworld birds of the early Celtic literary tradition derived from popular beliefs such as these, where birds are general rather than specific, but where they must have held a deeper religious significance than is the case to-day.

J. G. Campbell recorded several bird traditions of the above type. One, collected in Mull, concerns a tradition of the *helpful bird* (1900:99). A man in the Ross of Mull was apparently sowing his land from a sheet filled with seed oats. As he sowed, the sheet remained full. A neighbour, observing this said, "The face of your evil and iniquity on you, is the sheet never to be empty?" A little brown bird leapt from the sheet and the supply of seed ceased. The bird was the *Torc Sona* and was peculiarly attached to that particular family.

Seen against this rich background of bird lore, in which birds may symbolise both the powers of good and the forces of evil, it is interesting to consider two recently recorded anecdotes from contemporary Scottish Gaelic tradition which show the continuity and persistence of beliefs of this identical kind. Both were recorded from Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay, whose store of traditional information of every kind must be unique.

Fig. 1—Relief from Senlis (Espérandieu No. 3850).

Fig. 2—Cippus from Nevers (Espérandieu No. 2181).

The first tale deals with a "bird of life", in this case, a cock, whose presence preserves the household from evil, and whose removal causes their destruction. The following is a translation of the original Gaelic, which is given below.

"There's a story here about some people who were in an anchored vessel once upon a time in the Highlands—I don't know what part of the Highlands it was. But anyway, they were at anchor in a bay and they were there for a while and they were paying particular attention to a house which was opposite to them. Every single night about midnight a ball of fire would come and it used to go round about the house. And as soon as it would come, the cock started to crow and it would disappear when the cock crew. But anyway, they were observing this for a long time and they said to themselves that they would go and ask if they could buy the cock to see what would happen. This is what happened anyway, they went ashore on this particular day and they approached the house and they asked the woman if she would sell the cock. She said she certainly would sell it—she didn't care if someone would take it away—every night round about midnight it was waking them up crowing, and it didn't seem natural. Anyway, they got the cock and they took it away with them. And they themselves were now keeping an eye open to see what they would see, and what would happen on this night when the cock wouldn't be there to crow. But anyway they saw the fire coming as usual and going round about the house. And the next day, when day dawned, there was no trace of stone or stick of the house—it had disappeared entirely."

"Tha naidheachd ann a seo a bh' aig feodhainn a bha air acair ann a soitheach uaireiginn an t-saoghal a's a' Ghàidhealtachd—chan 'eil fhiosam dé 'm pìos 'n a' Ghàidhealtachd a bh' ann. Ach co-dhiù bha àsan air acaire 'sa' bhàgh 's bha iad greis ann agus bha iad a' gabhail beachd air aon tigh a bha 'san coinniu. A chuile uidhche riamh riamh ma dha 'r 'eug bha cnap tighinn 's bha e dol ma 'n cuairt air an tigh. Agus cho luath 's bha e tighinn bha 'n coileach a' tòiseachdainn air gairm agus bha e falbh 'nuair a ghairmeadh an coileach. Ach co-dhiù bha iad a gabhail beachd air a seo greis mhór agus thuirt iad riutha fhéin a seo gur h-ann a rachadh iad a dh'iarraidh a' choilich ri cheannach ach dé thachradh. Seo mar a bh' ann co-dhiù chaidh iad air tìr a' latha bha seo agus chaidh iad a dh'ionnsaigh an taighe agus dh' fhoighneach iad na

bhoireannach an creiceadh i 'n coileach riutha. Thuirt i gun creiceadh gu dearbh—gu robh ise coma gad a bheireadh cuideiginn air falbh e—a chuile h-uidhche ma dhà 'r 'eug gu robh e 'gan dùsgadh a' gairm 's gu feumaidh nach robh e nàdarra. Co-dhiù fhuair iad an coileach 's thug iad leo e. Agus bha iad fhéin a nisde cumail sùil a mach ach a faiceadh iad dé a thachradh an uidhche-sa nuair nach biodh an coileach ann gu gairm. Ach co-dhiù chunnaig iad an teine tighinn mar a b' athaisd 's e dol ma 'n cuairt an taighe. Agus a làirne mhàireach nuair a shoilleirich a' latha cha robh sgeul air clach na crann dhe 'n tigh—bha e air a sguabadh air falbh." (RL.1200. Recorded 2/11/58 by James Ross).

Here the cock protects the household by crowing at an unnatural hour, and they, unaware of the danger, and irritated by the noise each night, are prepared to get rid of the bird which protects them. When they part with it they are utterly destroyed. The role of the men in the boat is interesting—they nominally buy the bird out of curiosity, desiring to see what will happen with the ball of fire when the cock, which clearly has the power of repelling it, is no longer there. One can also assume that, having witnessed its apotropaic qualities, they will use it for their own protection. The cock plays a well-known role in a wide number of folk contexts as a bird which averts evil, but even here a dichotomy of character is evident. Certain cocks were reputed to have the power of keeping danger of a supernatural kind at bay, while others were themselves of evil nature. The cock was venerated in Europe as early as the Urnfield period at least, and certain cult objects from Urnfield and Hallstatt contexts are decorated with the bird which seems to have symbolised the sun (e.g. Kossack 1954: pl. 17, pl. 11, pl. 7), while it also figures on certain Gaulish coins (Roes 1938:180). Caesar testifies to its sanctity in Britain (Bell. Gall. V. 12) where he groups it with the goose and the hare. Many fragments of insular folklore illustrate its dual force. For example, when a cock was hatched in March its crow was believed to have more effect against evil spirits than that of a bird hatched in the autumn (Banks 1939: 178). On Bride's eve if, after the ashes were *smoored*, there was no trace of Bridget's wand, it was necessary to propitiate her and a sacrifice was offered to her. A cock or a pullet was usually buried alive near a place where three streams meet, and then burnt on the hearth (Banks 1939:151). A cock crowing

before midnight was believed to be a sign of approaching news. The legs of the bird were felt when this happened. If they were cold to the touch the news was death, if hot, the news would be good (Campbell 1900:257). Scandinavian mythology contains traditions of fierce otherworld cocks. In the *Voluspar* there is a bright red cock in the bird wood and a dark red cock in the halls of Hel. One may compare with this the fierce red birds which emerged from the Cave of Cruachan in Ireland, a traditional entrance to the otherworld, every *samhuin* to lay waste to the whole countryside (Stokes 1892:15; 448).

The second story recorded from Nan MacKinnon, is concerned with birds of death, and again has wide parallels in the lore of the Celtic world. The following is a translation of the original Gaelic which is given below:

"Death, death, take the only son!": "It is said that an old woman said this. She had only one son. She used always to say that should death come to claim her son she would wish to go in his stead. Anyway, the young lads who were in the township at this time went off. They used to hear her say this so often and they didn't believe her. But on this occasion they hatched a plot, they went and got a hen and plucked it alive. They put the hen into her house and the old woman was sitting beside the fire and one of them said they should stay in the corner while they put the hen inside. 'Here now is death coming for you.' But when the old woman saw *death* coming she said to herself that it *was* death, she shouted 'Death, death,' she said, 'take the only son'.

Q. Did they sometimes believe that death came in the shape of a bird? Have you heard any other stories of this kind?

A. Yes I have, and it's not long ago that they did believe this. There was a thing they called *an t-eun bàis* (the death-bird). I myself heard my own sister, the one who is dead, saying that. She heard another old woman telling her that, and she took her out one night and they were listening to it. Well she was saying that they used to hear it when someone was to be taken from the township [die]—it screamed terribly. But anyway, they believed if they saw a bird, you know, any unusual one at all, especially if it was grey, they thought it was death. There was an old man in our own place and it isn't more than twenty years since it happened, he went out one day to the byre and he saw a little grey bird in the byre and he immediately

thought that it was death coming to summon him for he was old. And he said when he got home "the messenger's come at last" he said, "the messenger's come". Well he was alive for years and years after that!"

"Aoig, aoig, taobh an aona mhac!": "Tha e air a ghradha gur e seann bhoireannach a thuirt sin. Cha robh aic' ach an aona mhac. Bhiodh i a' gràdh daonnan gad a thigeadh am bàs a dh' iarraidh a mic gum b' fheàrr leath' i fhéin a dh' fhalbh 'na àite. Cha robh ach dh' fhalbh gillean òga a bha 'sa' bhaile an turus a bha seo. Bhiodh iad 'ga cluinntinn cho tric 'ga radh 's cha robh iad 'ga creidsinn. Ach an turus a bha seo rinn iad dòigh orra, dh' fhalbh iad agus rug iad air circ agus spìon iad i agus i beò. Agus chuir iad a' chearc a stigh dha'n tigh aice agus bha a' chailleach 'na suidhe ri taobh an teine 's thuirt cuideiginn aca fuireach ann an cùl 's iad a' cur na circeadh a stigh. 'Seo a nisd an t-Aog air tighinn 'gar 'n iarraidh.' Ach nuair a' chunnaic a' chailleach an t-Aog a' tighinn, thar leatha fhéin gur e 'n t-Aog a bh' ann dh' eubh i, 'Aoig, Aoig,' ors ise, taobh an aona mhac'. . . .

Q. Robh iad a creidsinn uaireigineach gum biodh am bàs a' tigh'nn ann a' riochd eòin? An cuala sibh naidheachd 'sam bith eile air a leithid sin?

A. Chuala, chuala, 's chan 'eil an ùine cho fìor fada bhuaithe o' n a bha iad 'ga chreidsinn. Chan 'eil. Bha rud ann ris an canadh iad *an t-eun bàis*. Chuala mi fhìn mo phiuthar fhéin a' gradh sin, an té nach eil beò. Chual' i seann bhoireannach eile 'ga innse dhi 's thug i mach i uidhche 's bha iad ag éisdeachd ris. Wel, bha i 'g radh gum biodh iad 'ga chluinntinn nuair a bhiodh duine go falbh as a' bhaile—gu robh sgread air leth aige. Ach co-dhiù bha iad a' creidsinn na faiceadh iad eun, 'eil fhios agu, fear aicheanna 'sam bith, gu h-àraid nam biodh e glas, bha iad a smaointinn gur e 'm bàs a bh' ann. Bha bodach 's an àit' againn fhìn 's chan 'eil ann ach-wel, chan 'eil fichead bliadhna bhuaithe o'n a thachair e—chaidh e latha mach 'na' bhàthaich agus chunnaig e peata glas as a' bhàthaich agus shaoil e dìreach gur h-e 'm bàs a bh 'ann a' tigh'nn 'ga iarraidh, bh' e sean. 'S thuirt e nuair a thàinig e dhachaidh, 'thàinig an teachdaire ma dheireadh', os e fhéin, 'tha 'n teachdair air tigh'nn'. Wel bh' e bliadhnachan is bliadhnachan beò a deodhaidh sin." (RL 587B. Recorded by James Ross).

This explanation for a proverbial saying with the attendant information about bird beliefs of this kind demonstrates the widespread tradition of the ominous significance of certain birds, belonging to no known species, but consisting of birds of some indeterminate kind. One Welsh tradition comes very close to that contained in the first part of the above anecdote. Any bird beating against the window at night was supposedly the *ederyn corff* (corpse bird), and this supernatural bird was traditionally believed to have neither feathers nor wings (Jones, 205). This accords well with Nan's story because by plucking the hen the lads were clearly fashioning a *death bird* according to the traditional way in which it was supposed to appear. This is substantiated by the fact that when it was let loose in the house, the old woman immediately recognised it to be a *death bird.*

In these two Vatersay stories, current at the present time, we see the continuity of fragments of bird beliefs of a kind which must have circulated in Celtic areas, as elsewhere, from time immemorial. The sacred or ominous animal could be favourably disposed towards mankind, or, like other forces of the ever-present Celtic otherworld, active in opposing him. Birds of life, protectors and helpers, are matched by birds of death, bringers of evil tidings and symbolising the powers of destruction and darkness. Nan MacKinnon's two short anecdotes provide us with twentieth-century examples of these beliefs which still find some expression in the oral repertoire of the Gaelic-speaking Highlands.

NOTES

[1] Some examples from the Gallo-Roman tradition are illustrated by Espérandieu, nos. 326, 2181, 4256, 4264, 4282, etc.

[2] The birds of Riannon are described in the mabinogi of *Branwen* (Williams 1930:45 and 46); in the mabinogi of *Culhwch and Olwen* (Jones 1949: 115).

[3] For Clídna's birds see O'Grady 1892: I, 342f.

[4] For the bird Medb wore on her shoulder see Dunn 1914:88.

[5] For example, Saint Cainnech was reputedly walking by Killarney Lake in Munster when he was attacked by twelve armed men who still adhered to their pagan faith. They told him that unless he could bring it about that two swans on the lake should come immediately and perch, one on the saint's shoulder and the other on that of the leader of the armed band, he would be killed. The saint caused this to happen and the men were converted to Christianity (Plummer 1910: I, 165-6). In the story of the children of Lir, Saint Mochaomhog

takes care of the children who are transformed into swans, and they live with him and join in Mass with him. (O'Curry 1863: 113 f.). The teal was especially sacred to Saint Colman (Giraldus Cambrensis, trans. O'Meara 1951: 61). Saint Bridget was associated with the swan ("the fairy swan of Bride of the flocks" Carmichael 1928:312, from Angus MacIntosh, crofter, Dungaineacha, Benbecula), and Mary with the duck ("the fairy duck of Mary of peace", Carmichael loc. cit.). Columba likewise is frequently described as being in possession of, or turning people into, cranes (e.g. see Atkinson and Bernard 1898:187, I, 12 f; O'Kelleher 1913:260; Carmichael 1940:196).

[6] "Ní adraim do gothaib én/Na sreód na sén for bith che/
Ná mac ná mana ná mnai/Is é mo draí Críst mac Dé."

[7] "Moradh sredh is mana/Raga sin, am sona,/
Gotha én do faire/Cairi gach ceol cona."

[8] "do ghair in fhiach ocus in fhennóc ocus in dreán ocus na heoin archena ann sin . . . tánaic diu seirrfhiach ibair chluana eo."

[9] Cu Chulainn destroys the mysterious malevolent raven flock (Rennes Dindshenchas, Stokes 1894:450; Metrical Dindshenchas, Gwynn, Todd Lecture Series 10:256 f.); the man-eating birds of Gwendoleu (Bromwich 1961:17, 68); flock of destructive otherworld birds (Van Hamel 1933:3); malevolent cranes owned by the god Midir (*Book of Leinster* 117*a-b*).

[10] It may be noted that frequently in the Highlands individuals experiencing extra-normal phenomena are members of one of the stricter religious sects.

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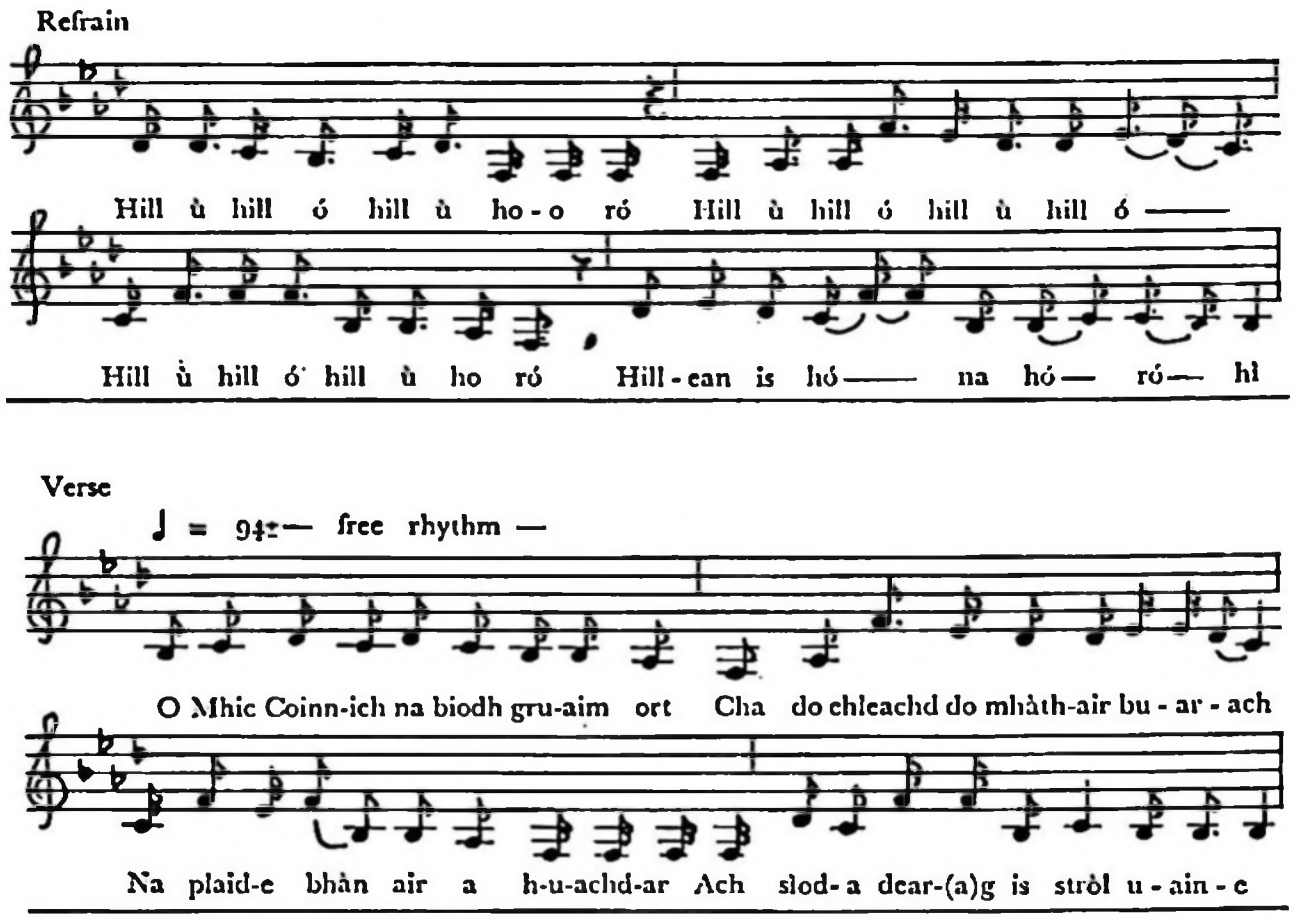
ANNE ROSS

Tàladh Choinnich Oig



O Mhic Coinnich na stròl farsuinn
Mac an t-seòid nach fhuiligeadh masladh
Feireadh tu fìon dha d' chuid eachaibh
Cruidhean de'n òr chuir o'n casan

Hill ù hill ó hill ù ho-o ró
Hill ù hill ó hill ù ho ró-o
Hill ù hill ó hill ù ho ró
Hillean is hó na hó ró hì

O Mhic Coinnich na biodh gruaim ort
Cha do chleachd do mhàthair buarach
Na plaide bhàn air a h-uachdar
Ach sìoda dearg is stròl uaine

O Mhic Coinnich fhuair thu'n t-urram
Théid thu mach gu làidir ullamh
Dh'òladh leat fìon Baile Lunnain
Mach go *Loudie* le d' chuid giullan

'S ann air Coinneach tha ghruag àlainn
'S e Righ nan Dùl a chuir blàth oirr'
Ceannachadair[1] nan each a b' àirde
Gillean 'na ruith chon a' stàpaill

Chan 'eil Coinneach ach 'na leanabh
Cha d' ràinig e aois a sheanar
Sealgair an fhéidh a's na gleannaibh
Choilich dhuibh air bharr o' mheangain

Young Kenneth's Lullaby

O MacKenzie of broad banners
Son of the hero who would suffer nothing disgraceful
You would give your horses wine
You would shoe them with gold.

O MacKenzie, do not be disconsolate
Your mother was not accustomed to handle a cow-fetter
Nor did she wear a white plaid
But red silk and green satin.

O MacKenzie, you have gained precedence
You will move out strong and well-equipped
You have drunk the wine of London Town
You go out to Lothian with your young men.

Kenneth has a beautiful head of hair
The King of the Elements has given it its sheen.
The purchaser of the tallest steeds
Youths running to the stable.

Kenneth is but a child
He has not reached his grandfather's years
Hunter of the deer in the glens
The black cock on the top of the branch.

The above is a fragment of a song recorded from Mr. Duncan Grant, Broadford, Skye in 1953. Three texts of this song have already been published, but as a melody is given with only one of these it may be of interest to compare this variant from the Isle of Skye.

The text first appeared in 1878, in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 7:118-19, where it is attributed to the nurse of Kenneth MacKenzie, Lord of Kintail ("Triath Chinntàile"). No source is given for the text, which no doubt, like the attribution, came to the contributor, William MacKenzie, from oral tradition. It is headed, like the other two printed versions, *Tàladh Choinnich Oig*.

In the Transactions of the same society for 1951-2 (41: 318-20), the late Professor Angus Matheson contributed a variant from the Dornie MSS., a nineteenth century collection of oral poetry from the west of Ross-shire. Matheson suggests that Coinneach Og is Kenneth, first Lord Kintail, and not, as William MacKenzie appears to imply, Kenneth, Earl of Seaforth, who raised the Seaforth Highlanders in 1778. This would date the composition as late sixteenth century.

However, Professor Matheson also considers that "a possibility might be Kenneth, fourth Earl of Seaforth, who succeeded in 1678 and was called *Coinneach Og*". (*ibid*). That Kenneth, the fourth Earl, is indeed the subject of the song may receive some support from a heading in a recently discovered copy of some of the Dornie MSS., made in 1909 by A. R. Forbes of New Register House, and given to the late Calum MacFarlane, Elderslie. This copy, which is now in the MS. Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, appears to contain some of the material which Professor Matheson feared was irretrievably lost. The version of *Tàladh Choinnich Oig* given in Forbes' transcript is headed:

Luinneag do Choinneach Og Triath Chinntàile leis a bhanaltrum a thog e 's a thug baine dha—4 Iarla Shiphort 1618. "A song to Young Kenneth, Lord of Kintail, by his nurse, who reared him and suckled him—4 Earl of Seaforth 1618."

Unfortunately we have no means of telling what the ultimate source of this information is. Is it a mere conjecture on the part of Captain Matheson of Dornie, the compiler of the manuscript, or did it come to him from oral tradition? If the former, its value as evidence is nil. On the other hand, if Captain Matheson is drawing here on genuine oral tradition, the actual date is unlikely to have been part of whatever information he received. Nor does Gaelic oral tradition take so much account of alien styles and titles. The Earl's Gaelic style would be simply *MacCoinnich* (Mackenzie); and although the epithet *Iarla Shìophort* might well be current among illiterate bards and singers, the fact that MacCoinnich was the *fourth* earl would not be regarded by the same people as noteworthy. At any rate the date 1618 cannot possibly refer to the fourth Earl of Seaforth, who was not born until around 1660 (Douglas: *The Scots Peerage*, Vol. 7: pp. 509-10. Edinburgh 1910). I therefore suggest that if Coinneach Og, the fourth Earl, is in fact the subject of *Tàladh Choinnich Oig*, 1618 is simply a

miscopying of 1678, the year of his succession to the peerage. On this view, the song was not composed in the late sixteenth century, as Professor Matheson thought, but in the second half of the seventeenth. But without corroborative evidence the question remains open.

A refrain and three quatrains (2, 12, 16) not in Matheson's version appear in Forbes' copy of the Dornie MSS. Of these, verse 2 is identical with MacKenzie's verse 1, verse 16 is paralleled only in the Skye variant, while verse 12 is known from no other source. I have retained the manuscript spelling.

Refrain

Hill iu, ho ro, hill iu ho ro
Hill iu hill eo hillin o
Hill iu hill o, hillin ho ro
Haoi 's na ho, he eo ho.

Verse 2

Nam biodh Brathainn mar bu choir dhi
'S fhad a chluinte sgal piob mhoir ann
'S dh'òilte fion a cornaibh òir ann
'S chluichte disnean bharr chuig meoir ann.

Verse 12

Sgeul gun fear, gun mhac, gun bhrathair
Gun leanabh beag a ni gaire
Gun coisge laoigh oidhche chaisge
Air a mnaoidh leis nach linn le m' abhachd.[2]

Verse 16

'S ann air Coinneach tha cul aluinn
Bho chul do chinn gu do shailtean
Maighstir nan each 's nan Aigeach
'S do ghillean da cuir 's na stabuill.

If Brahan were as it ought to be
Long would the blast of the great pipe be heard in it
Wine would be drunk from golden horns there
Dice would be played off five fingers

May this be told of any woman—
That she be husbandless, sonless, brotherless
With no little laughing child
Without . . . calves on Easter night—
Who does not [?] share to the full in my joy.

Kenneth has beautiful hair—
Beautiful from the crown of your head to your heels—
Master of horses and of stallions
And your young men stabling them.

Professor Matheson mentions in his introductory note that "The air to this song was recovered recently from a MacRae in South Uist by Mr. J. L. Campbell of Canna." This is presumably the air that appears in Miss Margaret Fay Shaw's *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (London 1955) 152-3, where four verses and a refrain are given.

For ease of identification, I have used the title *Tàladh Choinnich Oig* for the Skye variant, though Mr. Grant did not himself know the song as such. To him, it was a "song composed to MacKenzie of Gairloch."

I am indebted to my colleague, Miss Gillian Johnstone, for transcribing the melody. Verse 2 exhibits its characteristics and has been selected for printing here.

NOTES

[1] But see A. MacDonald, *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay* (Dublin 1958) s.v. *ceannachadair.*

[2] Lines 3 and 4 are possibly corrupt. *Coisge* may stand for *coisg*, another form of *casg*, check, restrain, etc. One of its meanings is "to wean", but this hardly makes sense in the context. A possibility is *cosguirt* slaying, butchering. Whatever the exact sense may be, the ill-wish seems to imply that there may be no increase in cattle, that is, that the woman may be reduced to poverty. *Linn le m'abhachd* I have translated very tentatively, taking *linn* to stand for *lion*, fill.

JOHN MACINNES

C. OTHER NOTES

Auchindrain: A multiple-tenancy farm in Mid Argyll

That the social and agrarian organisation of traditional Highland life was based upon the "township" group, the clustered homesteads of multiple-tenancy farms, is now generally recognised. Ruins of these steadings are a familiar feature in many areas of the north and west of Scotland, but particular importance attaches to that at Auchindrain near Inveraray, which, because it remained in joint occupation until comparatively recent years, has virtually survived intact.

On the initiative of members of the Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Mid Argyll, and with the personal interest and support of the Duke of Argyll on whose estate the township lies, a trust has recently been formed with a view to its preservation as an open-air museum of a type that would be unique in Scotland. (Indeed the only parallel in the British Isles would be the village of Cregneash in the Isle of Man, part of which, with the associated fields and enclosures,

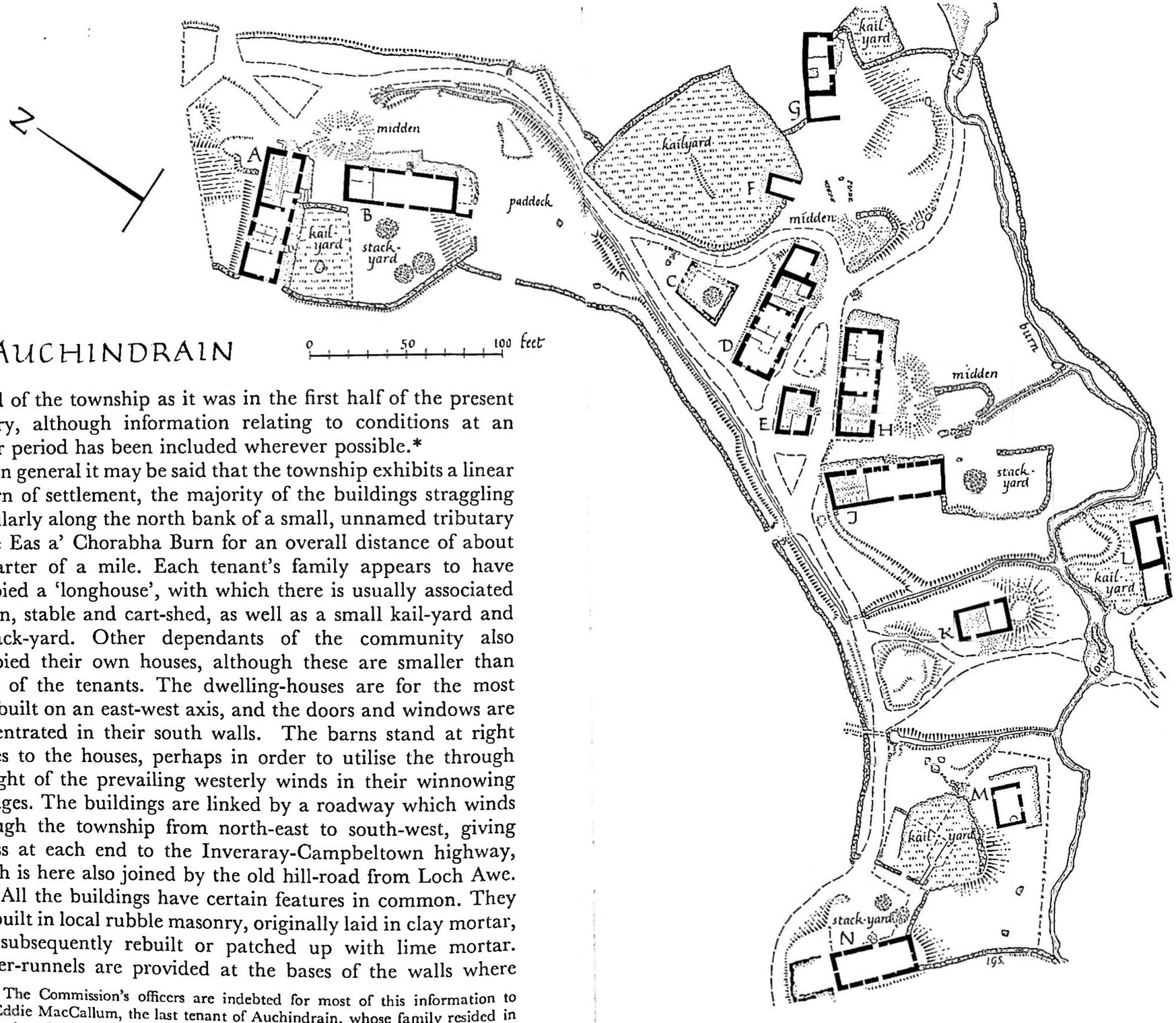
is preserved as an open-air crofting museum by the Manx Museum and National Trust.) The fine natural setting of Auchindrain is enhanced by the system of old dykes and tracks, and remains of rig cultivation including some groups of rigs that follow instead of cutting across the hilly contours. Such features could never be removed to a central open-air museum, and it is much to be hoped that the Auchindrain project will receive all necessary support.

A detailed survey of the township buildings at Auchindrain has recently been carried out by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, to whom we are greatly indebted for permission to reproduce the accompanying plan, together with the following particulars from the Commission's preliminary report.

. . .

"The township of Auchindrain, situated on the south side of the Inveraray-Campbeltown trunk road (A83) about 5½ miles south-west of Inveraray, is of considerable interest as an example of a multiple-tenancy farm that remained in joint occupation until within comparatively recent years. The continuity of occupation has ensured that Auchindrain, unlike the great majority of comparable clachans in the county, survives in a relatively good state of preservation, and the relationship of the dwelling-houses to their ancillary buildings and enclosures, and the disposition of the associated roadways and field systems, illuminates many aspects of the life of the small West Highland farming communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

"The buildings evidently varied both in numbers and in usage from generation to generation in response to the developing needs of the community. Thus, in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the township accommodated 76 inhabitants, there was presumably an appropriate number of dwelling-houses, each with its associated outbuildings. As the community gradually declined in numbers, however, many buildings became ruinous, or were demolished or altered, while others again were reconstructed as standards of housing slowly improved. As the buildings stand to-day they illustrate the closing decades of the clachan's existence, and there is not always enough evidence to show the extent to which a particular structure has been altered or rebuilt. The following description and the accompanying plan are thus primarily a



AUCHINDRAIN

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record of the township as it was in the first half of the present century, although information relating to conditions at an earlier period has been included wherever possible.*

"In general it may be said that the township exhibits a linear pattern of settlement, the majority of the buildings straggling irregularly along the north bank of a small, unnamed tributary of the Eas a' Chorabha Burn for an overall distance of about a quarter of a mile. Each tenant's family appears to have occupied a 'longhouse', with which there is usually associated a barn, stable and cart-shed, as well as a small kail-yard and a stack-yard. Other dependants of the community also occupied their own houses, although these are smaller than those of the tenants. The dwelling-houses are for the most part built on an east-west axis, and the doors and windows are concentrated in their south walls. The barns stand at right angles to the houses, perhaps in order to utilise the through draught of the prevailing westerly winds in their winnowing passages. The buildings are linked by a roadway which winds through the township from north-east to south-west, giving access at each end to the Inveraray-Campbeltown highway, which is here also joined by the old hill-road from Loch Awe.

"All the buildings have certain features in common. They are built in local rubble masonry, originally laid in clay mortar, but subsequently rebuilt or patched up with lime mortar. Water-runnels are provided at the bases of the walls where

* The Commission's officers are indebted for most of this information to Mr. Eddie MacCallum, the last tenant of Auchindrain, whose family resided in the clachan from about 1829 to 1963.

necessary, and many of the buildings are fronted by raised, cobbled areas. All comprise a single, main storey which may incorporate a loft or half-loft, but some of the dwelling-houses have been provided with attic floors within comparatively recent times. Most of the buildings are cruck-framed, all the surviving couples, except one, being of two members, scarf-jointed and pegged at wall-head level. Most of the crucks were sawn off at wall-head level when the original thatched roofs were replaced by coverings of corrugated iron during the first half of the present century, but in surviving examples the blades are joined immediately below the apex by short, horizontal members which support the ridge poles; some also incorporate intermediate collars. Some of the barns and other subsidiary buildings were originally hip-roofed at one or both ends and incorporated crucks placed centrally in the end walls. The most recent of the longhouses, on the other hand, are gable-ended, but one at least of the older ones was originally hip-roofed at the byre end, but gable-ended at the house end.

"The typical longhouse plan comprises a 'room', closet, kitchen and byre, all disposed lineally under the same roof, with separate entrance doorways to the house and byre, but with inter-communication between this latter apartment and the kitchen. One house (H), however, seems to retain evidence of an older arrangement in which a single entrance-doorway, placed at the lower end of the kitchen, originally provided the only access to both house and byre. The 'rooms' seem always to have been equipped with stone fireplaces, set into the gable walls, but the kitchens originally had open hearths, presumably with canopied chimneys, and one of these is said to have survived until about 1850. Initially the kitchens were probably separated from the byres by wooden partitions, but with the removal of the open hearths, the wooden partitions were replaced by substantial stone walls incorporating fireplaces in chimney flues. Sleeping accommodation was usually provided by one or more box-beds in the room or kitchen."

NOTE

It is expected that a more detailed, illustrated account will be published in the second volume of the journal *Folk Life*.

EDITOR

"The Boston Smuggler" in Scotland: A Note on the Diffusion of a Broadside Ballad

England and Scotland, it need hardly be said, have constituted one of the richest folksong communities in the world for centuries. Their common stock of ballads and folksongs has nourished the oral tradition of all the countries in which their influence has been felt, most notably in those countries such as the United States, which were all but created by settlers from Great Britain. English and Scottish folklore was caught up in the steady westward flow of British culture to the American colonies and, for a time, to the United States, and still constitutes the strongest single element in American folklore. Considering the dominance of British culture and the complete lack of a native American culture from the European point of view, it is natural that this should have been so. Thus, although the dynamics of folklore diffusion would lead us to expect at least some feedback to the parent country, each incidence of a North American song which underwent the reverse process and established itself in the oral tradition of England or Scotland must be of particular interest, the more so when it has attained a comparatively high degree of popularity.

Such a song is the American broadside ballad, "The Boston Burglar", which, though unknown in England, has been recorded no fewer than eleven times in Scotland as "The Boston Smuggler".[1] The fine rendition of Jean Elvin, recorded in Turriff, Aberdeenshire by Hamish Henderson for the School of Scottish Studies in April 1952, is presented here.

THE BOSTON SMUGGLER

I was brought up in Boston,
A town you all know well;
Brought up by honest parents,
The truth to you I'll tell,
Brought up by honest parents,
And reared most tenderly,
Till I became a roving boy
At the age of twenty-three.

I started out for smuggling—
I knew it was a crime;
All the time was well engaged,
Nearly caught for many's the time.

Till at last a bold exciseman
Took courage and ran me in;
For seven long years a convict
I'll be sent to Charlestown.

My photograph was taken,
And I was sent to jail;
My parents tried, but all in vain,
To get me out on bail.
The jury found me guilty,
The clerks they wrote it down:
For seven long years a convict
I'll be sent to Charlestown.

Oh, what did my poor father think
When he saw me in the dock?
And what did my poor mother think?
She was tearing down her locks.
She was tearing down her bonny grey locks,
The tears came trickling down,
Saying, "Son, dear son, what's this you've done?
You'll be sent to Charlestown."

They put me on an eastern train
On a cold November's day,
And every station that I passed
I could hear the people say:
"Here comes the Boston smuggler,
With chains he's well tied down,
And for some crime or other
He's been sent to Charlestown."

But I've a girl in Boston,
A girl that I know well,
And when my time is ended,
Along wi' her I'll dwell.
I'll give up all bad company,
And likewise drinkin' rum,
For that has been the cause of me
Being sent to Charlestown.

All eleven texts and tunes resemble each other so closely as to be variants of a single version of the ballad. Before we consider the possible circumstances surrounding the entry of this version into Scotland, however, some background information will be useful.

The American "Boston Burglar" was not a completely American product. It was common practice among American dealers in broadsides to copy and reprint English broadsides,

sometimes verbatim, often with alterations to correspond with local conditions. "The Boston Burglar" is an adaptation of the early nineteenth century English broadside, "Botany Bay", in which place-names and circumstantial details have been changed. It is thought that a broadside printer known variously as Michael G. Fitzpatrick and M. J. Fitzgerald, was the author of the changes, probably in the 1870's.[2] The alterations are apparent when texts of the respective songs are juxtaposed. For the sake of comparison, a typical English broadside text is reproduced below, from John Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads* (London 1888) 358 f.:

BOTANY BAY

Come all you men of learning;
And a warning take by me,
I would have you quit night walking,
And shun bad company.

I would have you quit night walking,
Or else you'll rue the day,
You'll rue your transportation, lads,
When you're bound for Botany Bay.

I was brought up in London town
And a place I know full well,
Brought up by honest parents
For the truth to you, I'll tell.
Brought up by honest parents,
And rear'd most tenderly,
Till I became a roving blade,
Which proved my destiny.

My character soon taken was,
And I was sent to jail,
My friends they tried to clear me,
But nothing could prevail.
At the Old Bailey Sessions,
The Judge to me did say,
"The Jury's found you guilty, lad,
So you must go to Botany Bay."

To see my aged father dear,
As he stood near the bar,
Likewise my tender mother,
Her old grey locks to tear;

In tearing of her old grey locks,
These words to me did say,
"O, Son! O, Son! what have you done,
That you're going to Botany Bay?"

It was on the 28th of May,
From England we did steer,
And, all things being safe on board,
We sail'd down the river, clear.
And every ship that we pass'd by,
We heard the sailors say,
"There goes a ship of clever hands,
And they're bound for Botany Bay."

There is a girl in Manchester,
A girl I know full well,
And if ever I get my liberty,
Along with her I'll dwell.
O, then I mean to marry her,
And no more to go astray;
I'll shun all evil company,
Bid adieu to Botany Bay.

"Botany Bay" itself is known in American tradition[3] (not in Scottish), but its offshoot, "The Boston Burglar", has become by far the best known criminal ballad in North America. G. Malcolm Laws has written that, " 'The Boston Burglar' . . . seem[s] familiar in all ballad singing communities",[4] and Charles J. Finger "heard it from Canada to Cape Horn".[5] Nor, as we have seen, is the song confined to the Western Hemisphere.

The Scottish version of the ballad has remained remarkably close to its American original. Indeed, there is no doubt in the singers' minds that it is in fact an American song.[6] Place-names in folk-song have a marked tendency to vary as a song migrates, and the fact that all the Scottish texts preserve the Boston-Charlestown combination makes it likely that the song came to Scotland fairly directly from New England or the Canadian Maritimes, where these names would have remained familiar. This likelihood is reinforced by the fact that it was precisely these areas which maintained the closest contact with the British Isles.

There seem to be two logical routes which the song could have followed between North America and Scotland. One possibility is that it came directly, perhaps in the repertoire of a returning emigrant, or more probably, as the smuggler-

exciseman features seem to suggest, in that of a seaman. Another, less obvious, possibility is that the ballad came to Scotland via Ireland, where, due to the extremely strong ties between Ireland and New England, it has also achieved a fair degree of popularity, both in its original form and in localised versions.[7] Irish labourers came to Scotland in great numbers during the last half of the nineteenth century, for the same reasons that so many of their brethern emigrated to America. The farm servant from whom Annie Shirer, one of Greig's informants, heard the song as "a little girl"[8] may well have been one of these. Her text, going back to the early 'eighties, is the earliest Scottish version to which an approximate date can be assigned. Mr. Hamish Henderson informs me that he has heard the song from Irish singers in Glasgow, even in the present day.

Still, the Scottish version of the ballad remains unique in its distinguishing features, most notably the smuggler and exciseman, which are contained in no other versions known to the author. Pending more extensive comparison and/or the discovery of new versions, the question of the exact connection between the Scottish "Boston Smuggler" and the other versions of "The Boston Burglar" must remain open. Nevertheless, even the rough outline of the song's diffusion and transformation provides us with an insight into two important aspects of the field of folk-song—the relation of print to oral tradition, and the eclectic, shifting nature of the Anglo-American folk-song.

NOTES

[1] There are eight variants in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, and three in the Gavin Greig collection, King's College Library, Aberdeen. I hereby acknowledge with gratitude the assistance accorded me by the King's College Library in the course of my investigation.

[2] See Sigmund Spaeth, *A History of Popular Music in America* (London 1960) 244, and Vance Randolph, *Ozark Folksongs* II (Columbia, Mo., 1948) 37.

[3] For references, see G. Malcolm Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides* (Philadelphia 1957) 174f.

[4] Laws 1957:50.

[5] *Frontier Ballads* (New York 1927) 88.

[6] The word "penitentiary", for example, immediately stamps it as such.

[7] Cf. the version numbered 202 in the Sam Henry Collection, Public Library, Belfast, with the one published by Colm O Lochlainn in *Irish Street Ballads* (London 1939) 88f.

[8] Gavin Greig Collection, vol. XLIX, p. 58. Greig's published version, in *Folk-Song of the North-East* (Peterhead 1909) vol. 2, no. CXXXII, is a composite text, constructed from two of his collected versions.

RICHARD BAUMAN