THE CELTIC REVIEW

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

CONSULTING EDITOR: PROFESSOR MACKINNON

EDITOR: MRS. W. J. WATSON
(MISS E. C. CARMICHAEL)

VOLUME VIII

MAY 1912 TO MAY 1913

EDINBURGH: WILLIAM HODGE & CO., 12 BANK STREET.
LONDON: DAVID NUTT, 17 GRAPE STREET, NEW OXFORD STREET.
DUBLIN: HODGES, FIGGIS & CO., LTD., 104 GRAFTON STREET.

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ALEXANDER CARMICHAEL, LL.D.

Alexander Carmichael was born in the island of Lismore, on 1st December 1832. His remote ancestors seem to have been connected with the Columban church established in Lismore by St. Moluag. Its cathedral, of which the nave still survives as the parish church, was built by Bishop Carmichael—*an t-Easbuig Ban*, the fair-haired Bishop—a remote relative of Alexander Carmichael. A college for the education of priests was maintained in the island until just before Dr. Carmichael's time, and one has heard him tell how warm a welcome he got in Uist from Father Macgregor who, as one of the last batch of students educated in Lismore, had been a frequent visitor at the house of Dr. Carmichael's parents.

The family also held some land in the island, and the head of the house was known as *Baran Tigh Sgurain*, the Baron of Sguran House. Dr. Carmichael used to tell very amusingly the story of how Black Donald Campbell of Airds, *Domhnull Dubh nan aird*, after paying great attention to the young baron, wiled his land from him in exchange for a sack of gold which was afterwards found to be the new copper coinage, judiciously mixed with a few pieces of gold. Thus cheated out of their inheritance, the family settled down to farming, in which occupation they continued till the time of our folklorist.

In his youth Alexander Carmichael had wished to enter the army, and having relationship with several of the Campbell houses, such as Dunstaffnage, Lochnell, Baleveolan and Barbreck, he had been promised a commission by the Duke of Argyll. The early death of his father changed the boy's career, however, and it being necessary for him to get settled in life, he was persuaded to accept a nomination for the Civil Service, obtained through the influence of his uncle, the minister of Durness.

The parish school was supplemented by the Greenock Academy, and by a collegiate school in Edinburgh, and in due time Alexander Carmichael satisfied the Civil Service Commissioners. Greenock, Dublin, Islay, Cornwall, Skye, Uist, Oban, Uist again, and lastly, for the sake of his children's education, Edinburgh—these were the scenes of his official life.

From his boyhood he had taken more than a passing interest in the lore and the landmarks of his race, and he early began to write systematically. It was in Uist, however, that he reached his full development and got to know, as few have ever known it, the inner life of the people. He was the friend of all. The pauper, the cottar, the crofter, the factor, the doctor, the priest, the minister—they all came to him sure of sympathy, whatever their cause of anxiety. The lorists opened their hearts to him. An idiot mother and daughter of North Uist would do for him and for those he brought with him the mystic dance of *Cailleach an Dudain*, which they were always chary of doing for any one else.

In the antiquities of the Outer Isles, Mr. Carmichael took a great interest, and discovered several objects, the existence of which had been previously unknown, such as the runic cross from St. Barr's in Barra, now in the Antiquarian Museum, Edinburgh. To the *Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* he contributed several papers on ancient buildings, underground houses, carved stones, and other subjects. Such contributions were always sent through his friends, Captain Thomas and Dr. W. F. Skene. These papers were illustrated with careful drawings done by Mrs. Carmichael, who from first to last helped her husband greatly in his work. The Society made Mr. Carmichael a corresponding member.

Campbell of Islay sought his help, and got numerous tales and poems from him, some of which are in the *West Highland Tales*, and in *Leabhar na Feinne*, but many of which are still unpublished. To Sheriff Nicolson Mr.

Carmichael sent a very large number of proverbs, many of which were crowded out of the first edition of the *Gaelic Proverbs*, but were afterwards sent to Dr. George Henderson for the new edition. To the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, Mr. Carmichael contributed valuable material, notably the Barra version of 'Deirdire,' afterwards published in book form, and translated into French and into German. He was also a frequent contributor to the *Gaidheal*, to the *Highlander*, to the *Inverness Courier*, and to other magazines and newspapers. After a time, however, he practically ceased contributing to periodic literature, finding that it took too much time from his more important writing. The *Celtic Review* contains nearly all his occasional papers of late years.

When Dr. Skene was preparing his *Celtic Scotland*, he asked Mr. Carmichael to write the chapter on old Highland land customs. This paper first turned the attention of Lord Napier and Ettrick to the condition of the crofters, and led to Mr. Carmichael being asked to write a more elaborate paper of a similar nature for the Crofter Royal Commission *Report*. Lord Napier used to say that those two papers had more to do with the passing of the Crofters Act than people knew. Years before, Mr. Carmichael had persuaded the Board of Inland Revenue to abolish the tax on carts and on dogs kept for purposes of herding.

It would take too long to mention all Dr. Carmichael's contributions to books written or prepared by his friends, but one might mention that he contributed to Lord Archibald Campbell's *Records of Argyll*, to Mr. W. B. Blaikie's *Itinerary of Prince Charlie*, and to the *Life of Marshal Macdonald, Duke of Tarentum*. He was often a good deal divided between his desire to help a friend and the feeling that he should be preparing his own material for the press, although he knew that what he had collected would not all be dealt with by himself. He always felt grateful that he had lived to see *Carmina Gadelica* through the press; others will

feel grateful that the greater part of the new volumes has been prepared by the same hand.

Dr. Carmichael was Honorary President and chief of many Highland and Celtic societies. No honour that came to him gave him greater pleasure than his Honorary Presidency of the Celtic Societies of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews Universities. He was deeply interested in the Edinburgh University one, which in turn was warmly devoted to its Honorary President. He was never happier than in the company of the Highland lads, and for many years his house was the Saturday evening resort of the Gaelic-speaking students. When he received the honorary degree of LL.D. from Edinburgh University, the Highland students took advantage of the occasion to set afoot a movement which resulted in the presentation to Dr. Carmichael of full robes, hood and cap, and to Mrs. Carmichael of a silver tea service. This compliment he valued at least as highly as the honour which gave rise to it.

Six years ago a Civil List pension was bestowed on Dr. and Mrs. Carmichael jointly, an honour which came as a great surprise to the Doctor, who had not known that friends had been interesting themselves in the matter. What pleased him most was the compliment to his wife—a graceful action apparently done on Mr. A. J. Balfour's own initiative.

Dr. Carmichael passed away at his home in Edinburgh, on Thursday, 6th June—St. Columba's Day—his 'changing,' as the Gaelic puts it, being peaceful and unexpected. On the following Monday he was buried, in the simple Highland manner, in St. Moluag's Churchyard, in the Island of Lismore. His fellow-islesmen carried the coffin, covered with his plaid of Carmichael tartan, on their shoulders from the landing-place, and the son of the minister who had baptized him conducted a simple Gaelic service.

OUR INTERPRETER

By Kenneth Macleod

Others will weigh and appraise Dr. Carmichael's literary and artistic work; this is but a simple tribute from one of the folk to him who loved and interpreted the folk as none other has ever done. In the years to come, when Gaeldom as some of us have known it will have passed away, literary students will assuredly ask, What manner of man was this who preserved and interpreted so much of the ancient thought and character of his race? The answer may partly be found in *Carmina Gadelica*, for into its pages the author breathed much of his own remarkable personality; but to be even fairly complete, the answer needs to be supplemented by such as knew and loved the author both in public and in private.

Mr. W. Skeoch Cumming has given us a portrait of the man which is both true and striking, and which has earned for the artist himself the gratitude of all readers of *Carmina Gadelica*, and will earn for him still greater gratitude from our children. If one may put into words what the artist has put so much more vividly on canvas, what one saw first and last in Dr. Carmichael's personal appearance was a fine stateliness touched with emotion. When he entered a room, every eye seemed to say: This is a great Celtic gentleman, one who has lived in statelier and courtlier days. But such as knew him could always see the tenderness glowing through the stateliness, though the one never really blotted out the other. In his most tender moments, he was the stately gentleman, in his stateliest moods he attracted through his tenderness. It is difficult to get an English word to describe him exactly, though in Gaelic one would naturally use the word *uasal*—high thoughts and high deeds transfiguring person and manner. Seeing him, one thought of his own beautiful words: 'It is the

Alexander Carmichael

product of far-away thinking, come down on the long stream of time. Who the thinkers and whence the stream, who can tell? Some of the hymns may have been composed within the cloistered cells of Derry and Iona, and some of the incantations among the cromlechs of Stonehenge and the standing-stones of Callarnis.' What Dr. Carmichael was and looked had its root, however, in the present as well as in the past. To save what he could of the folk-literature of Gaeldom, he had sacrificed not merely his prospects, but also to a large extent his means, and of what remained not all was spent on himself or on his family. In Uist, which forty or fifty years ago was even poorer than it is to-day, he paid the excise dues and filled the meal-chest of many a poor crofter and of many a poorer cottar, and the very day he left the island to take up his residence on the mainland, he was suddenly called on to pay an account amounting to within a few shillings of one hundred pounds for stores ordered on behalf of people whose own orders would have been dishonoured by the merchants. Nor did he ever allow himself to be far away from the wood financially; again and again he would return to it to help some fellow-Gael in distress. Especially was this the case during his residence in Edinburgh. Some man of good, perhaps of famous, Hebridean blood was unfortunate in his business or broke down in health —Dr. Carmichael sacrificed part of his very moderate capital to keep the man afloat. A university student was unable to finish his session, and was practically starving himself to eke out what little money he had —Dr. Carmichael always found a gentleman's excuse to get such an one to become a member of his family. Seldom, indeed, was the stranger's place empty at the Doctor's table; only, the stranger was always as a son, and kept possession of his seat until the need was over, or until the situation was secured, or until some bad habit was got rid of. About such things he was proudly and tenderly silent himself; proudly and tenderly let such

things be told now, if only to remind ourselves that even fame must receive its crown at the hands of goodness.

To show the place given by the folk to Alexander Carmichael, one has to compare him with some of our other great ones. Through the *West Highland Tales* Campbell of Islay gained for our folklore a European reputation; but in spite of his patriotism and his charming manners, he was never quite one of us—he could never altogether hide the fact that he had learnt his art with other peoples and in other schools. And though he doubtless loved our tales and our beliefs for their own sake, yet: 'The following collection is intended to be a contribution to this new science of "Storyology." It is a museum of curious rubbish about to perish, given as it was gathered in the rough.' In another field, that of philology, Dr. Alexander MacBain was our greatest man. We were all proud of him; such of us as had been his pupils, or otherwise knew him intimately, loved him; and whether we knew him personally or not, we all accepted as gospel whatever he said *ex cathedra*. And yet one could never quite get rid of the feeling that in temperament he was Teutonic rather than Celtic, and that the scientist in him was always stronger than the Gael, as was really the case. Our feeling for Alexander Carmichael was both in kind and in degree different from our feeling for Campbell or for MacBain. He was essentially one of ourselves, only greater, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, soul of our soul. Thus we never thought of him as one merely collecting and dissecting our beliefs in the more or less sacred name of science; we thought of him rather as one who saw with our eyes, who felt with our heart, and who reproduced our past because he loved it himself and was proud of it. He, on his part, spoke of our cult, of our ways, of our beliefs; he seldom spoke of our 'superstitions'—never, indeed, in his later days. What our race thought as to the relations of man to man, and of man to the world and to the other-worlds, was all sacred in his eyes; the broken cry of the pagan as well

as the stately Praise of Iona, the unconscious worship of God through His sun and through His moon, as well as the conscious worship of God through Him who was born of the Virgin Mary. St. Columba, in our great days, grafted the vine on to the oak,—who are we, then, and what are we, that we should be wiser than our best ?

It is sometimes said that Dr. Carmichael idealised us ; not merely our past, which was allowable, being borne out by the beautiful material he had collected, but also our present, which itself contradicts his picture of it ; that he idealised, at any rate, such of us as had passed the three-score years, and more particularly such of them as had a tale to tell or a rune to chant. One does not care to deny so pleasant a charge. Every man makes his own world, to the extent, at any rate, of unconsciously reading himself into it ; and thus the worse the reality idealised, the better the man who idealises. It would be equally correct, however, to say that Dr. Carmichael had the prophet's eye to see beyond our faults and to find what of goodly thought and sentiment lay behind. In this he was of the same mould as St. Columba, whose two eyes, it is said, were so warm that they could always melt the shell which hid the kernel. Dr. Carmichael had just that same power—his sympathy and his tenderness never failed to get straight to the kernel. This was true of him both in his dealings with the folk and in his interpretation of the lore taken down from the folk. Campbell of Islay and his coadjutor, Hector Maclean, could get the heroic tales and ballads, the things which were recited in public at the ceilidh ; only Alexander Carmichael could have got the hymns and the incantations, the things which were said when the door was closed, and the lights were out. Even Father Allan MacDonald of Eriskay had his limits as a collector ; the very fact that he was the *anam-chara*, the soul-friend, of his people, closed certain doors against him. In matters of the heart and of the soul, the folk, as every collector knows, can be reticent and secretive to a baffling degree,

but in Dr. Carmichael's dealings with them, the tenderness which could get was delicate as the reticence which would hide. Even his great book, *Carmina Gadelica*, does not show the full extent of his intimacy with the folk and their childlike confidence in his sympathy. Not all of what he learned was written down, or if written down, has been preserved; many curious rites, embodied in unusual language, the outpourings of simple hearts in less conventional days, were revealed to him under a strict pledge of secrecy—a pledge which, needless to say, has been faithfully kept. A characteristic instance is within the writer's knowledge. One evening a venerable Islesman, carried out of himself for the time being, allowed Dr. Carmichael to take down from him a singularly beautiful 'going into sleep' rune; early next morning, the reciter travelled twenty-six miles to exact a pledge that his 'little prayer' should never be allowed to appear in print. 'Think ye,' said the old man, 'if I slept a wink last night for thinking of what I had given away. Proud, indeed, shall I be, if it give pleasure to yourself, but I should not like cold eyes to read it in a book.' In the writer's presence, the manuscript was handed over to the reciter, to be burnt there and then—but for days and nights after, the music of that rune haunted two men!

The glow of sympathy which made Dr. Carmichael great as a collector made him still greater as an interpreter of the material collected. Nothing seemed too elusive for him to grasp or too occult for him to pierce—the Columban eye hardly ever failed to melt the shell which concealed. Discussing this very point, Father Allan Macdonald, himself one of our great collectors, once remarked to the writer: 'I read the *Carmina* in Gaelic, but again and again I lay down the book, and say to myself, "This is a *dubh-fhacal*, a dark saying, who can understand it!" Then I look at Carmichael's translation, and I say at once, "Of course, it means that—it could mean nothing else."' An obvious explanation would be that Dr. Carmichael was specially

gifted for a special kind of work; which is true so far. But this special gift was really of a piece with the rest of his character. It has already been pointed out that the tenderhearted sympathy which made him the great collector and interpreter he was showed in his life as well as in his work. He had what can only be described as a beautiful mania for setting things right, and for unravelling the tangles in the lives as well as in the lore of the folk. Was there some one suffering from lack of appreciation? Dr. Carmichael wrote and spoke and laboured on his behalf. Was there some one in a worse position than his ability seemed to merit? The Doctor would try to move heaven and earth to get promotion for such an one. To many, indeed, it must have been a revelation to find how he would go out of his way to do things for others which neither his pride nor his modesty would allow him to do for himself or for his own. He never learned to be worldly-wise in such matters; his temperament rushed into quixotry, or what often goes by that name, as naturally as the plant grows towards the sun. And finer even than his loyalty to the living was his loyalty to the dead. It was always in his heart, for instance, to write an adequate appreciation of Sheriff Alexander Nicolson of the *Gaelic Proverbs*, feeling strongly that scant justice had been done to a great soul in Dr. Walter C. Smith's biography of him. The same loyalty prompted him to do justice to the memory of reciters whom he had never seen, but of whom he had heard, or whose lore he had taken down from the lips of others. Thus in his introduction to the 'Invocation of the Graces,' he describes, not only the man from whom he got the poem, but also the woman from whom the man had got it 'in the long ago.' But one need not dwell on this aspect of Dr. Carmichael's character further than to say that there are scores of people, some of them very humble, both on the mainland and in the Isles, who have good cause to know how dear to his heart was the memory of their lost ones. His very last letter, two days

before he passed away, was one of condolence with an old friend, and of tender chiding because he had not been given the opportunity of travelling from Edinburgh to the Isles to pay his last tribute to the departed. In the eyes of the folk the *fear-duthcha*, the good countryman, is he who is loyal both to the living and to the dead.

Heart-love for his people and intense sympathy with their ways and their thoughts made Dr. Carmichael our greatest collector and interpreter; but it was quite another quality which clinched his aim for him. It is doubtful if there can be found, in the whole literary history of the Gael, such another instance of gentle yet iron persistency in following out an aim, in realising a dream. What to others was a trip or at most a pilgrimage, was to Dr. Carmichael a life-long quest; his keenness, his determination, in pressing towards the mark can hardly be exaggerated. What he failed to get in Uist he searched for in Glengarry; what he lost in Kintyre he tracked in Sutherland. He might fail in the morning to get what he wanted, but there was still the evening to come, and another day, and another week, and another year; and sooner or later, he found, sure enough, the word or the line or the rite he sought. Had his motive been mere personal ambition or mere love of scientific research, he could never have so persevered, so toiled. The driving force must be sought elsewhere—in the blood, which alone can do such wonders—in the fealty, far-inherited, of a knight to a cause.

Year in year out, for nearly sixty years, Dr. Carmichael was on pilgrimage throughout Gaeldom. To many of us he seemed, both in temperament and in activity, as one of the Iona brethren re-born in the nineteenth century. His very appearance was suggestive of Iona: the stately and venerable figure undoubtedly was, while the Scots bonnet might easily be mistaken for a biretta, the shepherd's crook for a pastoral staff, and the long dark cloak, half-concealing the kilt, for a monk's habit. Even his travels by land and by sea carried one back in thought to the Iona

times and ways. In the Introduction to *Carmina Gadelica* we read: 'Three sacrifices have been made—the sacrifice of time, the sacrifice of toil, and the sacrifice of means, These I do not regret.' In the sacrifice of toil must be included astounding physical exertion. In the Outer Isles, Dr. Carmichael's adventures by ford and by ferry were proverbial, and were regarded with awe by a people who had oftentimes to risk, and who sometimes lost, their lives doing such things.[1] A few years ago, the writer had occasion to cross from the Carnach of North Uist to the Island of Balishare, and before venturing on to the strand, he took the precaution to ask if it was fordable. 'It is and it is not,' was the answer; 'it is but a Carmichael ford as yet!' The writer got across fairly wet about half an hour after! One of Dr. Carmichael's fording adventures deserves special mention. He was crossing, after nightfall, from South Uist to his home in Benbecula, by what is called the South Ford. The night was one of black mistiness, the ford what is known in Uist as 'the ford of the coming storm,' and as Mr. Carmichael, as he then was, waded nearly breast-high through one salt stream after another, all he was conscious of was the roll and the singing of waters, and the rhythm of a poem he had taken down a few hours before.

'Is suilean thu dha'n dall,
Is crann dha'n deorai thruagh.'

'Eyes art thou to the blind,
A staff to the pilgrim lone.'

This poem, rescued on shore and nearly lost at sea in one and the same evening, was none other than *Ora nam Buadh*, 'The Invocation of the Graces,' a composition said to be unique in the literature of Europe.

Travelling waves and fords was ease, however, compared with travelling the wilds in which the ancient lore had found its last refuge on the mainland. Dr. Carmichael

[1] Dr. Carmichael's successor was drowned in the North Ford.

was often seen on the king's highway; he might have been seen oftener, had there been people to see, on the sheep-track and on the bridle-path, and on the path which sheep had never marked and which bridle had never trod. Ostensibly his reason was, to shorten the distance and to save time; in reality he preferred the roads that had been, partly because of their natural beauty, but mostly because of their tendency to lead to an old ruin, or to some remote family in which the ancient ways and things were still cherished. Sometimes, however, he had the best of all reasons for his choice of the difficult path—the simple reason that there was none other! Only two years ago, Dr. Carmichael, then in his seventy-seventh year, went on a collecting pilgrimage throughout the northern counties, in the course of which he met with hardships which would have strained to the utmost the strength of a strong man in his prime. Once he had to spend the night, cold, wet, and tired, in the open air; more than once, after a long journey through peat-hags and corries, he had to pass the night as best he could on a hard chair by the fireside of some shepherd's hut. A painfully real one, this sacrifice of toil, physically as well as mentally; it meant oftener than one cares to think, hunger and cold, footsore days and sleepless nights. And yet one never felt this in listening to Dr. Carmichael's own account of his travels; he cast over them a glamour which made one long to seize the crook and to take to the road that same evening. The very names he mentioned made one's blood tingle. 'I have come from Gress, round by Tolasta to the south and Tolasta to the north, taking a look at the ruins of the church of St. Aula at Gress, and at the ruins of the fort of Dunothail, and then across the moorland.' Or, 'Passing through the great Ford of Uist, I had another look, for love of the old days, at St. Michael's Oratory in Grimsay, then went on to Carinish, and stood for a while in the Temple of the Trinity, and would have crossed over to the Temple of Christ in Balishare, had the tide per-

mitted.' Or, 'There are still dear good people in Moidart, who have not forgotten the ways and the thoughts of the fathers. Sailing up Loch Shiel, I saluted St. Finnan's Isle in the passing, and in due time got as far as Morar. I met an aged Knoydart woman there who has much lore. A beautiful woman.' And once more, 'These strands are dear to me, the Strand of St. Barr in Barra, the Strand of St. Michael in South Uist, the Strand of St. Mary in North Uist, and the Strand of St. Clement in Harris.' Our folk could always make poems out of names; dreams, too, when in exile; both in the one and in the other our interpreter followed the blood.

Of Sir Walter Scott Cardinal Newman said that he had set 'before them visions which, when once seen, were not easily forgotten.' Many of us can say the same of Dr. Alexander Carmichael. He has filled our heart with dreams, and our ear with a strangely familiar music. We ask ourselves:—

'Who is she, the melodious lady-lord,
At the base of the knoll,
At the mouth of the wave?'

And the folk-heart in us says:—

'From Erin she travelled,
For Lochlann is bound,
May the Trinity travel with her
Whithersoever she goes—
Whithersoever she goes.'

Again and again, too, we get vivid glimpses of people whose faces we recognise, even though it be what is called in Gaelic *aithne gun chuimhne*, recognition without remembrance. These, for instance, 'But Mary Macrae heeded not, and went on in her own way, singing her songs and ballads, intoning her hymns and incantations, and chanting her own "port-a-bial," mouth-music, and dancing to her own shadow, when nothing better was available.'—'Being then but a child he could not follow the meaning of this lore, but he thought many times since that much of it must

have been about the wild beliefs and practices of his people of the long, long ago, and perhaps not so long ago either. Many of the poems and stories were long and weird, and he could only remember fragments, which came up to him as he lay awake, thinking of the present and the past, and of the contrast between the two, even in his own time.'— 'Birds and beasts, reptiles and insects, whales and fishes, talked and acted through her in the most amusing manner, and in the most idiomatic Gaelic. Her stories had a charm for children, and it was delightful to see a small cluster of little ones pressing round the narrator, all eyes, all ears, all mouth, and all attention, listening to what the bear said to the bee, the fox to the lamb, the harrier to the hen, the serpent to the pipit, the whale to the herring, and the brown otter of the stream to the silvery grilse of the current. Those fair young heads, now, alas! widely apart, probably remember some of the stories heard at Janet Campbell's knee better than those they afterwards heard in more formal schools.' Such pictures reveal to us, as in a flash, the men and women of old Gaeldom, with their humour and their pathos, their wistfulness and their tenderness. And hardly less human or interesting are the beasts and the birds of *Carmina Gadelica*—the swan, the teal, the grey crow, the fox, even the humble beetle. They are all of our race, and can talk and laugh, jest and moralise, with the best of us. For genuine Gaelic humour it would be difficult to get anything better than, for instance, the story of the oyster-catcher and the grey crow in the introduction to *The Genealogy of Bride*. How real, too, Dr. Carmichael makes the old Gaelic festivals to us—St. Michael's, St. Bride's, St. Columba's; here with a wealth of detail, there with a few deft touches. Fortunately for one's consistency, one does not need to choose between the secular and the sacred in *Carmina Gadelica*, for they are so intertwined as to be not really two but one. And what a world that is into which the master guide leads us! so intensely human, yet so frankly superhuman; so one-racial yet so

all-racial; so wildly primitive, yet so beautifully cultured and gentle; its head always on earth, its heart always in heaven. Who can set a limit to the influence of such a work? We know that by his writings Alexander Carmichael contributed largely to the passing of the Crofters Act, the *magna charta*, economically, of the modern Gael; reading those same writings, and others by that same man, our children will, perhaps, dream dreams and see visions in the croftland, and dreaming and seeing add another verse to the unfinished song.

We all in our measure appreciate the runes and the poems of *Carmina Gadelica*, but we can never love them or appreciate them as Dr. Carmichael himself did. They were part of his being—the very heart and soul of him. Some of us have spent memorable evenings in his study, and have seen the glow on his face, and have heard the break in his voice, as he intoned poem after poem, or the same poem time after time, utterly regardless of the world which eats and drinks and counts time. And if the fire went out, as it always did, or if the daylight faded, as it could not help doing, the doctor would throw a bundle of sticks into the grate, set them ablaze, and then, drawing on his marvellous memory, go on rolling out, in the fine baritone voice so much admired by musicians, haunting lines and verses from the poems, until, from sheer emotion, he had to stop, after which one heard soft quavers: 'The dear people! the dear people!' It was at such times one understood whence *Carmina Gadelica*, whence its dialect, whence its sumptuousness. He had thought of writing the poems in the recognised literary form; he so wrote out several, but to his sensitive ear the music had quite gone out of them. The explanation is a simple one. Many of the hymns were sung to a strangely beautiful kind of music which is now becoming known through the labours of Mrs. Kennedy Fraser, some were intoned, and some recited in a curiously rhythmic monotone, and as genuine singing must always be a compromise between the music

and the language, the folk often changed (not always unconsciously) the form and the sound of words, for the sake of beauty of utterance in singing or intoning. Thus many of the unusual forms in *Carmina Gadelica* are simply words worn and polished by the sea of music, and were reproduced by Dr. Carmichael, partly out of loyalty to the men and women who had so chanted and crooned them, but chiefly owing to the loss of musical sound when standard spelling and pronunciation were attempted. To the intensity of his admiration for the folk must also be credited the sumptuousness of *Carmina Gadelica*—the quality of the paper, the beauty of the lettering, the stateliness of the whole. The richness of the volumes was really his estimate of the folk whose ways and thoughts the volumes enshrined. A gem of the first water, come down as an heirloom from the fathers—such was his conviction; it must have a setting worthy of its value and of its associations—such was his determination. These considerations induced him to abandon his original intention of issuing the work at the price of a very few shillings. It was a characteristically beautiful thing to do, and we may well be grateful that he did it; none the less grateful though we express the hope that sooner rather than later, the treasures of the book may be brought within easy reach of all who love the beautiful and the good. Such was Dr. Carmichael's own wish and intention.

One would fain go on writing about the life and the work of the most fascinating character some of us have ever known—so stately in person and in manner, so tender in heart, so constant in purpose, so passionately devoted to a cause. For us he has done a great work, although his own verdict was, 'Say, rather, that the people have done a great work for Alexander Carmichael.' Let the two, however, live side by side—one in blood and in fame. He was happy in his life—surrounded by ones who helped to make even labour and sacrifice sweet for him throughout the years; he was peaceful in his end—his last act, too

sacred to mention, beautiful for tenderness and thoughtfulness. As we laid him in rest, we sang a psalm of thanksgiving,[1] not of affliction. And one who loved him said 'Never in my life have I felt so proud; he lived such a magnificently honourable life—the grave in Lismore is but an incident in it—something due to his ancestors and to his own island.' And yet, as we think of Gaeldom, another thought creeps in and makes us forget all else—the thought of the disciple who loved St. Columba: 'Cold and empty the church to-day—*he* is not at the altar.'

THE LITERATURE OF THE SCOTTISH GAEL

Rev. Donald Maclean (Edinburgh)

(*Continued from p.* 74, vol. viii.)

III

1830-1912

From 1830 there has issued from the printing houses in Scotland and Canada a steady stream of Gaelic literature which, though in comparison with the output of English literature it is as a mountain rivulet to a mighty river, varies in quality, expression and tone as much as the sounds of the rushing burn among the jagged rocks differs from its mellow plash upon the polished flags. In the intervening decades the output of Gaelic books, reprints and editions was approximately as follows:—from 1830 to 1840, 106 volumes; from 1840 to 1850, 164 volumes; 1850 to 1860, 115 volumes; 1860 to 1870, 142 volumes; 1870 to 1880, 169 volumes; 1880 to 1890, 98 volumes; 1890 to 1900, 111 volumes; 1900 to 1912, 80 volumes. This literature takes to some extent its colour from certain epochs in the life of the people, such as the Disruption of the Church of Scotland, the passing of the Education Act, the founding

[1] Ps. ciii., first four verses (in Gaelic) to the tune 'Coleshill.'