THE ISLE OF LEWIS AND HARRIS
A STUDY IN BRITISH COMMUNITY
by ARTHUR GEDDES

The Isle of Lewis and Harris (1955) by Arthur Geddes, the son of the great planner and pioneering human ecologist Patrick Geddes, is long out of print from EUP and hard to procure. Chapters VII and VIII on the spiritual and religious life of the community remain of very great importance, and this PDF of them has been produced for my students' use and not for any commercial purpose. Also, below is Geddes' remarkable map of the Hebrides from p. 3, and at the back the contents pages. Alastair McIntosh, Honorary Fellow, University of Edinburgh.

CHAPTER I
ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE

(a) THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING:
THE BRITISH ISLES, SCOTLAND AND THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLES

I. A 'Heart' of the 'North and West' of Britain

In the 'Outer' Hebrides, commonly regarded as the most 'outlying' inhabited lands of the British Isles, are revealed not only the most ancient of British rocks, the Archaean, but probably the oldest form of communal life in Britain. This life, in present and past, will interest
CHAPTER VII
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

As in every form of religion rooted in communal life, the sacraments and prayers of the Gael were linked to labour and to the phases of life's cycle. While some of the 'runes' or prayers were essentially personal and others were breathed only in the closest intimacy, many were shared by a group of families: the tried team of the men or women of a joint farm, the people of a neighbourhood and township or wider group. The communities being so small and isolated, their members depended greatly upon themselves and upon one another. As in worship in common, so in healing of body or spirit and in the invocation of grace upon youth, now one, now another might lead in praise and prayer. So, too, the leader of a little team would lead in the dedication of their work, and, when it was completed, be 'the consecrator' of its fruit.

Where no clergy were at hand, neighbours, perforce, practised the saying of one they called their 'foster-brother': that if no more than 'two of you agree on earth about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three have gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Matt. xviii. 19-20). The worldly wise might think that the spiritual fare of these poor folk must have been lean indeed; while others, having heard much of the Highlanders' 'pagan' superstitions, may think even worse! The evidence from which to judge is found in survivals from a rich lore, and for most readers seen but 'darkly' through prose translations from the poetry of a tongue now known to few.

The richest collection is Alexander Carmichael's Carmina Gadelica (Ortha nan Gaidheal). Others were made by the Rev. Fr. Allan Macdonald of Eriskay, and by the Rev. Kenneth Macleod with Mrs. M. Kennedy-Fraser in the Songs of the Hebrides. Included here are unpublished verses given by crofter-friends in the Isles and others from Fr. Allan Macdonald's collection, hitherto untranslated. What still remains has come down to us only by narrow escapes. One is reminded of 'Father Allan's' early death, after nursing his parishioners through an epidemic; and Carmichael's escape from drowning as "on..."
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a night of black mistiness . . . he waded nearly breast-high” through the dangerous South Ford of Benbecula, “conscious only of the roll and the singing of waters and the rhythm of a poem he had taken down a few hours before”—“The Invocation of the Graces”, so nearly lost with him! Much that Carmichael learned was given him under a seal of confidence he never broke, although he mourned the loss this meant. The confidence he inspired—which even those who knew him only in their childhood remember for life—was a source of his quiet, unfailing power.

The following begins with the runes and rites of labour, throughout the day, week and year, on land and sea and at home. Turning to the day of rest and to congregational worship, one must enquire as to the presence of the clergy, and question closely how far the people had access to the Bible throughout the centuries: were they really cut off from its riches, from its essence, as the Reformers and the Evangelicals of last century asserted with such vehemence? One can then turn to the runes and rites which opened the phases of life, from birth to maturity, marriage and parenthood, leading at last to life’s close.

But no social inheritance is without its burden. Having told of the foundations of faith, something must be said in the next chapter of the negative or superstitious side of Island belief, of temptations and evils which the people could face, and of others to which they submitted in ignorance. From the evidence of faith and wisdom, or error, one must attempt some evaluation of attainment by single souls and by the community, and of the power and fullness of life in common.

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(A) SACRAMENTS AND RUNES OF LABOUR, IN FAMILY, TEAM AND TOWNSHIP

Labour given to the winning of food, shelter and clothing was begun and blessed by poetic, rhythmic prayers or ‘runes’. The words were usually reinforced by a symbolic gesture or simple rite. By help of the runes the people sought spiritual preparation for work, invoked aid and finally consecrated the thing made for use.

Wherever work was rhythmic it was carried on by working songs. Songs of hunting or herding recalled the hill and pasture, or praised the landscape with an exuberant flow unequalled in any tongue we know but old Irish, with which Scots Gaelic is so closely linked, or Welsh, of which the nature classics are linked to the epics of the sixth and seventh century thought to be composed in Strathclyde.¹

Yet it was not these but the rhythmic prayers or runes which initiated labour, stage by stage. They are paralleled among many peoples, but those of the Gael possess rare fullness of meaning and beauty of imagery, words and form. When labour was ended, the food won or the clothing made was consecrated for the use of family and friends, of the poor and the stranger-guest.

In the struggle for food, the sowing and reaping of corn ranked highest, followed by its parching and grinding (Carmina, Nos. 88-92). The preparation of seed for its sowing was accompanied by its consecration, an coisreageadh stoil. Similarly for reaping: “Laying his bonnet on the ground, the father of the family took up his sickle and,

¹ Examples of these nature poems are given in scholarly prose translation by Kenneth H. Jackson (1937 and 1956). Songs with their melodies will be found in Arthur Geddes (Ed.), The Songs of Craig and Ben, vol. i, 1951.
facing the sun, he cut a handful of corn. Putting the handful three times round his head, the man raised the ‘Iollach Buana’, reaping salutation,—and the whole family then took up the strain.” While these notes by Carmichael describe the custom after the abolition of the farm-team, he also tells of “all the people of the Townland going together to reap” (Carmina, No. 89, cf. Note to No. 90). In the days of close partnership this was no doubt a team blessing, said by the chief reaper among his neighbours in mutual aid.

Grace before meals survives in Presbyterian households; and ancient graces are recorded in Carmina, vol. iii. The unpublished examples given here are from Miss Annie Johnston (or Niclain), Barra, to whose knowledge Gaelic lore owes so much:

1. O God, bless our portion, and our people.
2. O God, be about the beginning of our life (or food) and about the end of our life (lit. of our world).
3. O God, let nothing enter our bodies that may harm our souls.

A Dhia, beannaich ar cuid 'us ar cuideachd.
A Dhia, bi mu thus ar bithe (or bidhe)
'us mu dheireadh ar saoghail.
A Dhia, na leig dad 'n ar coluinn a ni lochd do'r n'anam.¹

¹ The reader will note the meaning in translation; but he should also scan the Gaelic, and the assonance of the vowels. In the first and shortest there is a simple play upon sound and meaning: 'ar cuid 'us cuideachd—"our share (of things) and our (share of) people, friends and family". In the second, Miss Johnston thinks there may be a play upon the words 'life' and 'food' (of which the sound is almost the same), reminding one that food is the means of life and of all that life means. In the third the apposition of ideas is characteristically emphasised in the pattern of the accented vowels in the words "dad 'n ar coluinn a ni lochd do'r n'anam"; here again the form, by means of which it sank through the senses into the heart, marks its native origin. Contrast with these the translation into Gaelic of a common English Grace. As in the English original, its prose lacks poetic form: Tha sim a tort taing dhuit, A Thigearna, airson nan tiodhlaicean a tha Do mhathas o' buileachadh cùrin, tromh Isla Cruida ar Tighearna. Amen.

The care of cattle was accompanied by prayer. As an Eriskay housewife said to me, she would never leave her cow tethered without a murmured, “Saint Columba be herding you” (Buachaille a'Chaluim-cille ort). The curing of animal sickness, as of human ailments, was accompanied by prayers. And prayer was used to avert the evil eye, symbol of suspicions born of unreasoning fear which, psychologists tell us, beset the modern but little less than the ancient! The thought or act of prayer which links a man to his fellow-men links him to the dumb beasts. “The man who is merciful to a soul will not be merciless to a brute” (Am fear a bhiteas trocaireach ri anam, cha bhith e mithrocaireach ri bhruid). Throughout Christendom each task of the annual rhythm was marked, at its start and close, by a day of seasonal festival (La Feill). These Christian festivals replaced earlier celebrations and continued some of their features, often in play. Yet concerted seasonal activities could not be related to the supreme festival of the Christian Church, Easter, owing to its movable date. This is one reason for the great importance of other, fixed Festivals to rural community life. This point, not always appreciated by latter-day individualism, is made clear by M. M. Banks in describing British Calendar Customs, vol. i, Scotland (1937). Remembering that the Old Style Calendar dates were ten days later than the New Style (when officially adopted in Scotland in 1600), they may be compared with the annual rhythm of climate and labour (Fig. 9). Until 1600, the New Year began in spring on 25th March. After the Reformation and the abolition of Christmas or Noel, Nollaig, New Year’s Day on 1st January took its place as the day which, in the Protestant Highlands and Lowlands, still keeps alive some of the old friendly visiting and
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‘first-footing’. In the past the lads came in bands singing carols, and once admitted—refusal of hospitality being out of the question—any misunderstandings and quarrels of the past year had to be forgiven and forgotten. With individual visits this is no longer possible, for though these maintain friendship, they cannot easily and naturally heal a quarrel.

From Lewis three fine carols once sung by youths are recorded, of which the fidelity of Carmichael’s translation goes far to render both sense and feeling (Nos. 55-57).¹ In Ness I have sought in vain for the old melodies from the descendants of Angus Gunn. Born about 1800, Gunn had lived for many years as a shepherd on the islet of North Rona, unreached by the burning zeal of the Evangelists, so that his traditional piety survived. Could they be found, these melodies would enrich the remnant of authentic Christian lore in Britain, for even the well-known English carols are mostly of modern reconstruction.

The first Christmas Hail opens, “Ho Ri, Hail to the King, Blessed is He... Blessed be the house and all therein... Lasting... and healthy round the hearth be ye...”. It goes on, “This night is the eve of the great Nativity, the great Noel [Nochd òidhche Nollaige moire...]; Born is the Son...” It closes, “Shone the mountains... earth, and land, Heard was the wave upon the strand... Blessed be the King... to all ages, to all time.” A fragment from Tolsta, Lewis, sung by boys on New Year’s Eve as they begged for a Noel bannock from house to house, latterly began and ended with playful nonsense, yet it retained its traditional climax: “[On the first day of the New Year] I saw the Threesome [The Trinity] going to the shore. The land shone, the

¹ No. 59 is set to an Eriskay chant in Songs of the Hebrides, vol. i, p. 159.

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earth shone, The wave shone on the shore; The deer of the mountain steep shone...”

“The Christ Child’s Lullaby” is a lovely carol narrating the Christmas tale. Legend tells that it was sung by ‘Mary-Mother’ herself to an unwanted stepchild lost on the moors, where his stepmother found him in the arms of Mary, who sang as she lulled him. The stepmother cherished this song with the lost child, henceforth loved as her own.² The poetry of the Gael, like the odes of Greece and the Psalms of the Hebrews, is luminous with the vision of mountains, land and sea, reflecting a light within that of sun or moon, and sonorous with the rhythm of wave, tide and season which are “of all ages and to all time, gach linn gu brath”. Its adoration is full of nature and of humanity, yet it soars above mere nature worship or anthropomorphism.

While Christmas, more than any, was a festival of leisure, others were closely linked to labour. The festival dates of Candlemas or Lent, of Saint Bride’s, Saint Patrick’s or Lady Day, marked the stages of spring’s coming and the duties they brought. Summer came in at Beltane—held in May, though the word included other dates connected with spring fire; and on St. John’s Day

² A short version is published in the Songs of the Hebrides, vol. i. A translator may choose from its 29 stanzas—though all are true to the Gospel and worth translation. Of the simple choral variant of the air (as published) Fr. Allan Macdonald told Miss Amy Murray his grief that it had superseded the melodic variety given to the Lullaby when sung by one singer at a time (Celtic Review, 1905-6). From three variants noted from oral singing one can arrange a melodic sequence. ‘To pass from a major variant (set to stanzas on Jesus’s mother, the shepherds and the ‘ kings’) to minor variants (set to the tale of Herod’s evil deeds) restores much of the dramatic intensity of this noble carol. Only deep feeling for the Gospels could create and maintain, without written help, so full a version of the words and variety of associated melody: (The complete words, Taladh Chriosta, are in Fr. Allan Macdonald’s collection, p. 7.)
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At midsummer came joyous departure to the shielings. Michaelmas at the end of September was a festival of horsemanship, when the ponies, rested and well fed, could race madly along the machar. As long nights brought in the winter, Hallowe'en came on 31st October, and on the morrow the solemnity of All Hallows (Samhain). On 11th November came St. Martin's Day, and in December Christmas once again.

When the Islesmen put out to sea, prayers were chanted to Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to the Disciples, "the Fishers of Men". While some of these might be individual (Carmina, Nos. 117-120), others were chanted by the skipper at the helm, as celebrant, the crew giving the responses (No. 121). As self-sustained community life weakened and customs were endangered, this prayer was encouraged by a few clergy, Catholic and Protestant. At the start of the season's fishing in Eriskay, Fr. Allan Macdonald went out in the boats and chanted a rune taught to him by elders, the men responding. One of the 'Ocean Blessings' or prayers recorded by Carmichael (No. 119) is found in Bishop Carswell's Liturgy in Gaelic, of 1569, and is quoted by Martin as "a form of prayer used by many of the islanders at sea after the sails are set". Most of Carswell's Liturgy was translated from that of John Knox, but not this prayer, of which the earlier and later-recorded version are the same, except for one revealing difference.

As recorded by Carswell (and Martin), this prayer, after calling upon the Trinity, tells that the Three-in-One, ever living, guided Clan Israel through the Red Sea, brought Jonah to land from the belly of the great ocean beast, and led Paul and his companions from the torment of the sea; after these three stanzas it closes with a general supplication. As heard by Carmichael three centuries after Carswell, the first three stanzas are identical, but they are followed by the culmination. Recalling the hour "when the storm poured on the Sea of Galilee . . .", the poem goes on, "Be Thou, King of the elements, seated at our helm, And lead us in peace to our voyage's end. . . ." It is significant that the Reformation Liturgy includes the story of Clan Israel's flight from their enemy whose drowning forms the climax of the tale, and the absurd miracle of the whale—a late interpolation in the convincing original Hebrew poem on Jonah's voyage, but that it omits the Christian climax, of the storm allayed by Christ, the Helmsman of peace.

Another fishers' rune (No. 120) concludes, "To whom trembles the voice of the wind? To whom become tranquil strait and ocean? To Jesus Christ, Chief of each saint, Son of Mary, Root of Victory." These blessings, though they refer to the Old Testament, dwell lovingly on the New. Their thought is of the fishermen friends, Peter, Andrew and John, of the Baptist and of Christ's mother, of Saint Martin and later apostles to the Gael, and the Archangels, and of Christ, Rock of rocks (Carraig Ail), and the Trinity. These bring strength in danger, peace after strife with the elements, remembrance of the poor, and fellowship to the crews. Peace and strength pervade the "Dawn Prayer of
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Clanranald” 1 and echo in the opening benediction of Alexander Macdonald’s “Birlinn of Clanranald”, without which his ‘Galley’, for all the glory of its strife with storm, would never have won its place in the heart of the seafaring Gael.

As for journeys over sea, so for those over land, “Traversing corries, traversing forests, traversing valleys, long and wild . . .”, the traveller or pilgrim, the drover or emigrant, leaving home and his friends, would have their prayers. They would accompany him on the first steps of his way with cheer and laughter or with tears, as those have told me who remembered my grandfather’s leaving his home in Strath Spey more than a century ago. These journey-blessings were spoken by the traveller: “Life be in my speech, sense in what I say . . .”, or by those to whom he was dear. (Carmina, No. 116; Guidheachan Turais, Nos. 266-276.) In these prayers, bodily travel and spiritual quest are sustained on the mountain-track by the strength of home-ties and fellowship, and by the hospitality of Christians on the path ahead.

When family and neighbour-team were closely knit, their own harmony drew the stranger in. “The Rune of Hospitality”, threaded together from old fragments by the Rev. Kenneth MacLeod, breaks out into the refrain of the lark as she sings to the listening heart of the host: “Many, a many, a many a time, Comes the Christ in the stranger’s guise!” 2 Hospitality is truest when its sacrifice—so real in a land of poverty—is given as a duty but with a smile!

1 Songs of the Hebrides, vol. i, pp. ix-x.
2 “Gur minig, a minig, a minig . . .!” “Duan na h-aigheachd”. (An Gaidheal, Dec. 1942.)

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(a) SACRAMENTS OF THE HEARTH AND THE PLAIDING

For shelter and life by the hearth there are noble runes. The house with its household was blessed, when newly built by a bridegroom’s friends, yearly after its thatching, or regularly at nightfall. The blessing was said by the goodman in the presence of his family and helper-neighbours, or intimately by either of the parents as they went to rest (Carmina, Nos. 44, 45).

In the darkness of the ‘black house’ the fire was a centre of warmth and light, of life and union. “The Blessing of the Living” (the Fire) was said by the housewife as she rekindled or, rather, uncovered the sleeping embers when she rose. Those who, tired or in want, have ever lit a fire in darkness may best feel, in her words, how the glow without kindles the light within.

“ I will kindle my fire today in presence of the angels . . .
Without malice . . . or fear . . . of any one under the sun,
But the Holy Son of God to shield me.”

And then (as the dim glow lightens and warms): “God, kindle Thou in my heart within, A flame of love to my neighbour, To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all, To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall . . . From the lowliest thing that liveth To the name that is highest of all (Gu ruig an t-Ainm is airde).” In spirit this reaches universality; its verse-form is purest poetry (Carmina, No. 82).

For the covering, smothering or smoo’ring of the embers at night, the following was said to me not long ago
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(in Gaelic) by a housewife in a Catholic isle, as our friendship matured. It had been said nightly at her fire by her father-in-law until his death (not long before), which had come after that of his wife. "I smoo'r the fire tonight, As Mary's Son smoo'red. Be it well with house and fire; Be it well with all our household. Who are on this floor? Peter and Paul. Who are on watch tonight? Light-white Mary and her Son. Thus God's voice taught, And the Angel spoke: The Angel at my house door, Until the clear day come tomorrow. Amen." As this variant shows, memory still lives in the Isles.¹

In these runes, the key to the words "as Mary's Son and as Mary did, in their day" is the example of filial duty, of wifely and motherly care. In spite of lapses to ' Mario-latry ' during periods of decadence in the Roman Church, the virtual banishment of Christ's mother from Protestantism has led to a loss deeper than Presbyterian Scotland has yet realised. Her name was a daily reminder, both of a woman's part in the spiritual life of the home, and of a son's self-discipline and affection: in a word, of mutual love.

For wool, the sheep were blessed, as in the "Clipping Blessing". There were blessings of the loom and weaving; and after neighbourly fulling or ' waulking' of the finished web, came its consecration. As the work was solitary and communal in turn, so the prayer. Carmichael's own fine prose translations should be studied (Carmina, vol. i, Nos. 108–113; cf. vol. iv, pp. 88–99). Yet, those being available, we quote rhythmic versions to suggest the significant poetic form of the original.

"The Clipping Blessing", being addressed to creatures, is simple in thought and form, and its opening may be rendered:

O come back woolly, though now you're shorn,
     By May, may each a lamb have borne,
     May lovely Bride you endow,
     And Mary fair sustain you now!

It goes on to beg protection from wolf and bear, as well as fox, hoodie crow and eagle, and closes with the opening couplet.

From start to finish the work must be true. The wool is from the sheep they reared—it is not got by ' thigging ', as a landlord takes ' gifts ' from poor tenants; the yarn is sound with no odds of thread from worn-out cloth; the web is their very own, not the clergymans's due (Carmina, 110, 113, 109). Only so can the goodwife's web be beautiful, and blest. "Thrum nor odds of thread, my hand never kept nor shall keep. Every hue in the bow-of-the-shower has gone through my fingers beneath the cross." The weaver, with her household cares and her bairns about her, to be clear in mind must be calm in heart as, thread by thread, she prepares her warp. To start, she chooses Saint Columba's Day.

Thursday of blessings
For warping and waulking,
Thrice fifty strands
To number . . .

Ward away the evil eye!
Or evil will, or aught awry,
Consecrate, O Lord on High,
My Loom . . .

¹ Cf. Rev. Allan Macdonald, Comh-chruinneachadh, p. 107; Carmina (Nos. 84-87, 324-326) and M. Kennedy-Fraser, Songs of the Hebrides, vol. ii, p. 31. Sacred lore is not to be picked up lightly by a stranger. It was only upon the second of my prolonged stays under her hospitable roof that this good woman would admit and impart her knowledge, treasured in the secret places of her heart.

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Make smooth and even the warp of my loom
And grant thy blessing, God, on me,
On all who here find shelter and room
And dwelling . . .

Thine arm be round each woman here
Who waulks this web of mine,
O aid her in her hour of need . . .

Keep the flock that we may win
Sweet and nourishing milk to drink
And wool to give, to weans and kin,
For wear!

Even now in Harris or the Lews, a brief good wish
may be uttered—a “ Health and strength to the wearers! ”
as the perspiring women end the waulking; but in the past
the web was finally consecrated. Each of the family who
was to wear a portion of it was named by the weaver herself,
who led the consecration (Carmina, No. 113).

May the well-loved wearer of my web
Never be wounded . . .
May the sanctuary shield of the Lord be his . . .

The significance of this gift of hard-won cloth can now
be seen, first for the family but next for the neighbourly
team. We can understand how each ‘ set ’ or pattern of
tartan stood for the spirit of the family and the group of
kin and homeland, the clan. We conceive what it meant
to the Gael when the tartan, with “ the Highland dress . . .
or any part of it whatsoever ”, was forbidden “ to
any man or boy ” in the Highlands. Women were still
allowed to wear it, it was true, but the dress ceased to be
a symbol of community when its wear was confined to
one sex. As a single exception, the Highland dress was
retained for soldiers, but the militarisation of the tartan—
though it seized upon one strand of clanship, that of

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warfare—destroyed its intimate tie with the home, with
peace. The web the women had dyed, spun, woven and
waulked together ceased to be a sacrament when the tartan
was proscribed to men except when worn as a uniform with
“ England’s cruel red ”.

The framers of this law, which stood on the statute
book for over forty years, took full cognisance of what they
did. Appended to the Act of 1747 was an oath which
reversed every benediction said by the women at their
work: “ I . . . do swear, as I shall answer to God at
the great day of judgment, I have not, nor shall have, any
gun, sword, pistol or arm whatever, and never use tartan,
plaid or any part of the Highland garb; and if I do,
may I be cursed in my undertaking, family and property—
may I never see my wife and children, father, mother,
relations—may I be killed in battle as a coward and be
without Christian burial in a strange land, far from the
graves of my forebears and kindred; may this come across
me if I break my oath”. This Act, as law and symbol,
struck full at the sacramental life of family, neighbour-team
and clan community, in which labour and prayer had been
indissolubly bound. ¹

¹ The collaboration of friends in Lewis may allow mention of the Gaelic
version of A. Geddes, The Spirit of the Tartan, a Song Drama (English
Version); Souvenir Programme and Book of Songs (Outlook Tower, Edin­
burgh, 1932). In this the spirit of this labour sequence embodied in its
songs and runes is dramatised in its setting of custom and history. The Gaelic
version was prepared by the generous labours of James Thomson, M.A.,
Bayble, and the late Duncan Macdonald, M.A., Sandwick, Lewis.
The difficulty of initiation to intimate usages of language is exemplified in a scholarly and patriotic work, the *Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Gaelic-English, and English-Gaelic) by Malcolm Maclean, D.D., 1925. This standard work incorporates all the words of three previous dictionaries, with many additions. Yet key words of the people's religious heritage, of immemorial age, of living usage, and recorded a generation or so before in the collections cited here, are either absent, or are given the more prosaic or debased of two shades of meaning (not the higher). See "caim, a case, sheath" or shrine; "tiumingsinn, a beginning" (a dedication); *earna, Hail or salutation; *"ora, orra, or ortha, a charm . . . amulet . . . or imposture of any kind . . . Irish . . . prayer in verse—from Latin, oratio" (why prayer in 'Irish' only?); and other vital words. According to this scholarly dictionary, the title of the supreme Scottish collection of Gaelic religious tradition, Carmichael's *Ortha nan Gaidheal* (Latin, *Carmina Gadelica*), is to be translated, not *Prayers*, but "Charms . . . or Impostures . . . of the Gael"!

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Roman Catholicism was far less complete than that ultimately brought about by Protestantism—Episcopalian or Calvinist.

At least twenty-five churches, chapels and tiny oratories are named by Martin in Lewis and his list is incomplete (1934, p. 106). Harris and its islets also had their complement of ‘temples’, in addition to the priory church of Rodel. We may perhaps assume that before the Reformation Lewis had a population of some 4000 persons, or 1000 families, and contained some thirty chapels or oratories in inhabited areas. If so, then one church or ‘temple’, on an average served thirty to thirty-five families, or six or seven farm-groups. Yet only the larger congregations at Eye, Stornoway, Ness or Uig and Rodel would normally be served by clergy; the people of smaller congregations would be without, for weeks and months or even years.

When the people were too distant from priests (and later ministers) to hear the Lessons, they handed down the Word orally. Their power of retaining memorable thought, even in prose, is still remarkable; and verse strengthened memory. For example, ‘the Ten Commandments’ paraphrased in rhyme are recorded in Fr. Allan Macdonald’s little collection, “as given by the God of graces to Moses in the wilderness” (Na Faintean, p. 62). Moses, had he understood Gaelic, would have protested at the omission of the Second Commandment, but no sculptor of Iona, Rodel or Eye would have felt a need for it, being unafraid that a Christian could bow down to a golden calf. Believing, with Solomon, that a craftsman’s work is his prayer, the artist-monks held that an ‘image’ should represent, though never replace, God’s creation, and may even quicken our concept of the Creator in whose ‘image’ mankind was made. As for the number ten, it was simply restored by subdividing the Tenth Commandment into two parts! Thus the letter of the Mosaic Law, be it frankly admitted, is modified! There are also extensions of certain Commandments. Yet, recalling Jesus’s insistence upon the unspoken thought which prompts man’s conduct, one may feel that the blunt Seventh Commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”, is strengthened by the form of its paraphrase: “Avoid all thought, or wish, or deed immoral (mi-bheusach, immodest or vicious)”. The Sixth becomes, “Commit no murder nor sin of wrath”. And the paraphrase of the Fourth, rendered as “Keep the Lord’s Day and each festival”, completes the Commandment as it was obeyed by Jesus and His friends at the Passover, and by Celts and Romans at Easter. The memories of the people were impregnated with abiding truths from the Old Testament, and still more with the teaching and spirit of the Gospels.

All this was incorporated in their lives. As each symbol of nature was truer to Gaelic worshippers because it was not borrowed but experienced, so their interpretation of the story of the Son of Man was the truer because they looked for Him among themselves. Spiritual fears are imaged from bodily perils they knew in the ‘Rough-bounds’ and at sea; and spiritual ignorance is seen as a peat bog’s ‘black morass’, not as a waterless desert beyond Jordan or the Dead Sea. Comfort is rarely suggested by the biblical ‘shade from heat’, but rather by the ‘sun’s mild healing rays’. When Christmas tide, Old Style, brought lengthening days and mantled the Bens with snow, the glow upon their summits in earlier dawns told the Islesmen that the Light of the World was born again. In their thought Jesus shared their communal life with His
widowed mother and her family, working in farm and township, sending merriment at Christmas, and comforting sorrow at Easter or All Souls. And even as He had told the Disciples to heal by faith, so, they thought, had He bidden them. Who could have told the people, in their ignorance, that in a later age they would suffer for this faith?

Thus upon the Lessons read in church (or out of doors) and cherished as the root and stock of faith, there were grafted three types of native shoot. These were the paraphrases, the meditations or commentaries, and the parables or legends. The paraphrases should need no justification here, in so far as the four Gospels are each incomplete and complementary—the Celtic clergy may have known the fragments of a fifth; these 'fulfilled' the older Law and the Prophets. Of the meditations, few would be censured by a Protestant or Catholic theologian on points on which both would agree; points of disagreement in the meditations hardly concerned them. (Cf. in the Rev. Allan Macdonald's collection, "Thoughts on Death", *Smaointean air a' Bhas*, or *Carmina*, No. 7, and many more.) As a theologian might criticise the parables, legends or marginal tales of which so many were told in medieval Christendom, a word should be said of these.

Legends were told of the appearance of Saints to believers, such as that of "The Christ-Child's Lullaby", and of the life of the Holy family. The Gaelic sense of parable was strong (*Carmina*, vol. ii, Notes, *Caim*). In these legends was expressed what the people themselves would have felt and thought in joy or suffering. Legitimately, a preacher suggests a motive or circumstance to bridge the gap in a Bible record; the people did the same. When reverently retold, some suggested circumstance would in time grow to be a legend taking a place close to the Gospel story. A

single example may be given; so far as I know, it is unrecorded. I learned it in South Uist, where Catholic and Protestant mingle in tolerance and sympathy; it had been told by an old woman, a Catholic, to a young neighbour, a Protestant fisherman's son, later a minister.¹

The story takes place after the Crucifixion. It may be remembered that in the Gospels not a word is said of Jesus's mother after His farewell to her from the Cross (John, xix. 26). He—or she—who first conceived the legend may have asked, would not a mother visit the tomb of the son she had just lost? And surely she who at His birth had cried, "My soul magnifies the Lord...my Saviour", would be the first to seek Him out after His death? The legend tells that, on the second day of the Entombment, Mary, Jesus's mother, in an agony of mourning and suspense, visited the tomb of her son, calling upon Him with many an endearing name. From the tomb He answered that she would be consoled, for He would arise. And He told her that because of the depth of her love, of all forms of human love a mother's would be accounted the highest for ever after.

The Gael had fused the grandeur of the Old Testament with the hope and humanity of the New; for them the light of dawn on sea and snow awoke the light within. A last example is taken from two fragments forming part of a single theme, perhaps of one original poem.² Chanted

¹ It is interesting to compare this quiet legend with the late Roman (and Episcopalian) "Apostles' Creed", apparently based on the vivid story in the *Gospel of Bartholomew*: after Christ "was crucified, dead, and buried, He descended into hell" (hades). Montagu R. James (translator), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1924.

² *Carmina Gadelica*, 201, 197. No translation can be perfect, and Carmichael offers alternatives: line 6, "Ti nan duil, Being of life", or "of the elements"; 1. 13, "light on the plain" or "the land", *fearsam*. The last line is intimate and simple: "The hour (or era) God's Son came in (among us)," a *steach*, as into a dwelling.
as the days lengthened during Christmastide, old style, it may be called "The Rune of the World's Light". 

The world, ere came the Son of God, 
was black, a bog forlorn: 
Void of sun, moon or star, 
void of body, heart or form.

'Twas Mary Mother lowly kneeled, 
and gave the Inmost Being birth; 
Darkness and tears were driven afar, 
the guiding star rose over earth.

Light on the land, the deep illumined 
from sullen pool to ocean stream; 
Grief was laid and joy was raised, 
with praise and hail and harping free.

Light on the hills, light on the plains, 
light o'er grey-green sea and firth; 
Light o'er all the world as one, 
the hour God's Son came down to earth.

(d) THE CYCLE OF LIFE

The stages in life's sequence are marked by noble runes, of baptism, initiation in adolescence, betrothal and marriage, childbirth, and of confession and consolation in trials throughout life and, at its close, of farewell. As might be fitting, the benedictions were given by either man or woman: to a child by a parent or elder; to the young and strong by the wise; and by lovers to one another. And in the past, especially in trial, the 'soul-friend' ministered —an anam-chara, a neighbour chosen from lifelong friendships for steadfastness and understanding.

At birth a babe was baptized; and in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit the nurse placed three drops of water on the child's forehead, successively invoking wisdom, peace and purity. Lay baptism, recognised by Greek, Latin, Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, may be partly of pre-Christian communal origin. It retained special significance in isolated communities. Where a clergyman might come within eight days, a temporary name was given at birth: 'Tonsured of the Lord' (Maoldomhnuich) if a male child, and Gertrude (Griadach) if a female. Her immediate duties over after a safe delivery, the midwife forthwith became the celebrant or (as it were) lay priestess, and her neighbourly helpers, her acolytes. As the midwife intoned her part they gave the responses. "By the Book itself," said a reciter in Uist, for many years a skilled midwife, "ear has never heard music more beautiful than the music of the watching women when they are consecrating the seed of man and committing him to the great God of life." Those who care to ponder the thoughts then spoken may believe her word. (Carmina, Nos. 50 and 217-219.)

Initiation grew as understanding dawned and the babe passed on in childhood to be an older helper. Gaelic child-lore gives many a stimulus to an infant's intelligent apprehension of life about him, and to poetic appreciation. These may lead by natural steps to deeper things in adolescence. Homely teaching which led to a first communion, remained an intimate part of life in home and township.

From many parts of the Highlands and Isles, Carmichael and his friends gathered variants of verse prayers invoking graces in the young: Invocations of the Graces, Orachan Buadh (Buadh, victory, achievement or grace; Nos. 3 and 278-281). In Tiree, of which the thoughtful minister had sent a fragment of verses to Carmichael,
the invocation was addressed to boys and girls, in Uist to youths and maidens. The loveliest version of all had been spoken by an old, evicted woman and learned from her by a lad who, as a poor crofter in old age, passed it down for record, for ever. Of this invocation Carmichael wrote, "Probably it was composed to a maiden on her marriage. The phrase 'eala dhonn', brown swan, would indicate that the girl was young—not yet a white swan", a tender and delicate recognition of youth still to attain perfection. Not a thought jars, each stanza building up the rising movement of the whole. In the hundred lines of this poem, metre and assonance are regular except where growing intensity creates new rhythm and design; and the last vowel-rhyme of each stanza leads on to those of the next one, to form an unbroken ascent to the climax.

The Invocation begins, "I bathe thy palms. . . . And I place the nine pure choice graces in thy fair fond face. The grace of form . . . of fortune . . . of goodness . . . of wisdom . . . of charity . . . of choice maidenliness . . . of whole-souled loveliness . . . of winning speech." Then, after the tender image of the brown swan and farewell on departure to a new home, comes a string of exquisite comparisons: to shade and shelter in need, to safety of isle and strength of fortress, to gift of health for the ailing. Each grace, each image, expresses not simply individual qualities but relationships and service for others. After eight choice lines in praise of the girl's womanly gifts—from "Thine is the faith of Mary", through chosen attributes of Bride, the Fairy Woman, Penelope, Emir, Darthula and Maeve, to "the charm of the sweet singer (Binne-bheul)"—the poem, in Gaelic that is sonorous and succinct, passes beyond the sphere of comparison with things or even personal qualities. It-acclaims her joyous girlhood as one with the powers of life-giving, life-abundant things, and as a reflection of the Divine:

Thou'rt the joy in every delight,  
Thou the sunbeam's radiant light;  
Thou'rt the gate of a welcoming chief,  
Thou the clearest star to lead;  
Thou'rt the step of the deer on a height,  
Thou the pace of a steed ere the fight;  
Thou'rt the calm of a gliding swan;  
of longings thou'rt the loveliness.

The lovely likeness of the Lord  
Is in thy pure face,  
The loveliest form  
Was ere on earth.

Poetic form is integral to the conception; hence this translation in verse. But alternatives to Carmichael's choice of English prose may complement his own, in bringing out the meaning. Line 1, 'joy', sonas—and a 'delightful or wonderful thing', ni eibhinn; 1. 3, doris, doorway; 1. 4, iul, guidance, land-mark, way; 1. 6, steud, steed, would imply, in bldr, 'a field' of battle, and, by contrast, 1. 7, stink eal, calm (rather than 'grace') of a floating, swimming swan; 1. 8, rún, secret inclination, longing, and hence too, a person beloved; II. 9, 11, cruth, form, shapeliness (and by implication),
And so, after every good wish for days, years and life, the Invocation closes: "Peter has come and Paul"... the Disciples and the Archangels... Jesus the mild and the Spirit of guidance have come,

And the King of kings has come on the helm, To bestow on thee their affection and their love, 

A bhaireadh duit-se graidh us ruin.

The ideal of choice maidenliness which this Invocation portrays, culminates in the thought of the loveliness that was Christ. It rises, too, to stirring virility: "the island at sea, the fortress on land", or "the step of the steed on the plain". Yet when all is said, it is a womanly image which prevails: after the fortress comes the well in the desert, and after the charger's step, the gracious calm of a floating swan. It is all the more significant that the Invocation was addressed both 'to boys and girls' in one isle, and 'to youths and maidens' in another. Not simply was boyhood taught to honour girlhood: ideal womanhood was invoked to raise manhood itself to fullness.

Upon marriage, the husband replaced the maiden's snood or 

stion that bound her uncovered hair by the wifely kerchief, am breid. Folded diagonally, its three-cornered shape came to symbolise the Trinity, in benediction on the bride's head. A poem to a bride, "now beginning her dual course", commences, "A thousand hails to thee likeness. The short second stanza given stands out alone: the poem, having attained its climax by a rhythm sustaining the upward, sonorous movement, is hushed by its few simple words. In From the Hebrides, Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser rearranged one or two of these lovely stanzas, as one of her 'lyrics with refrain'. Cf. A. Geddes, The Songs of Craig and Ben, vol. ii, 1955.

To tide over the supreme crisis of childbirth the mother was strengthened in confidence, courage and calm. The need was the greater before modern midwifery. In Sutherland as late as 1908, a good professional nurse tending a difficult case of childbirth, anxious and powerless without a doctor, found herself indebted to older wisdom. The patient's mother first filled a small basin with water into which she put trinkets of gold and silver. "She then held the basin to her dying daughter's lips, and made her drink three mouthfuls of the water, each mouthful in the name of Father, and of Son, and of Spirit, 'the three Persons of the Trinity of kindness and power, Tri Pears na Trianaid chaoimh chumhachdaich'. Soon after, the child came...
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and all was well . . . ' How the trinkets in the water could affect the case ', continued the nurse, ' I do not know, but that some occult power was at work . . . I am certain.' As to the gold, did not the Magi offer the same ' magic ' at the Nativity? Is a drink of water not the simplest physic to cool a fevered system? Is not each Name of the Trinity, breathed by a mother to her daughter in labour in her turn, a Word of tender power and courage: while the slow rhythm of the three Names may calm the wild heart-beats which had brought on haemorrhage, and lead to safe delivery?

Throughout life there prevailed the concept of God as 'encompassing' man, woman or child, old or young, in their weakness. This image is ancient, and is found in the Psalms (10, 12, 32, 142). So long as faith were alive the Lord's aid might be called upon for another in need of help, or for one's own protection. To clarify the concept, unseen, by help of a thing seen, a circle was drawn with the hand round oneself or another, in fear, danger or distress. By such innocent aid the people strengthened confidence in sickness and resistance in temptation, and concentrated prayer for delivery from evil.

As age approached, its gifts were honoured. For in age, memory, kneaded by labour, is leavened by leisure; the experience won on land and sea, or in group-farm and home, can be weighed. And gifts of feeling, sown in childhood and growing through life, ripen as grandchildren come in from their herding or play to listen and learn. When manuscripts or books were unobtainable, readings rarely heard, and the people illiterate, teaching could only be given by ear and learning come by heart. Hence elders were the holders of an inheritance of treasures which must be sought from them or be lost for ever. But to be transmitted, the word must remain alive in the mind. Thus both the faculty of memory and the fruit it bore in an elder's mind brought respect, even veneration. Accuracy in retelling is still immensely valued, but so, too, were thoughtful commentary and poetic enrichment. Respect for elders, though general, was not given blindly, but personally and by choice.

As handed down, the Fifth Commandment runs: "Honour thy parents and hold them in loving regard" (Striochd dha do pharanant 's thoir speis dhaibh). The community was pervaded by the Christian concept of a Holy Family, rather than by that of a patriarchate. This concept took root from the first missions to the Celtic community, with which it harmonised and which formed fertile ground for this Christian seed. Hence there was no general assertion of paternal, still less of patriarchal, authority at the expense of youth. Where equal honour is due to both parents, the mother finds equal duty and regard with the father. And although the father's home is close at hand while the mother's may be a little distance away, her parents are likely to be the younger and the more active and helpful to their grandchildren, and the influence of all four grandparents fairly balanced.

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are named in a hymn of the Lewis, sung when going up with the flocks and herds to the shielings; even this may be a Presbyterian adaptation (Carmina). But until the overwhelming weight

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2 Carmina, vol. ii, Notes; cf. Nos. 248-250, etc. Encircling or circuiting symbolically, was also known by a word of which only the literal meaning is now known to most: cuartaichadh.

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1 Rev. Allan Macdonald, p. 62, Na Faintean. The omission of the Mosaic paternal precedence may be a courtesy to motherhood implying equality in parenthood.
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of the Old Testament made itself felt, as in Lewis-and-Harris in the nineteenth century, this narrower patriarchal example hardly affected thought.¹ Rooted in a wider form of family than a patriarchate, and reverencing a Holy Family and all fellowship, Gaelic society honoured age and parenthood for their inheritance, and childhood and youth for their promise.

Such ideals of human relationship led to the veneration of the Saints of the Gospels and of later history, and also of those of legend, especially Bride. Dedications to Bride or 'Bridget' are widespread from Wales to the Lewis; yet her memory has been all but lost in Britain, except in the Isles. Carmichael wrote that "Bride and her services" are dear to the hearts of the people. She is called "Bride of the white feet . . . of calmness . . . of the kine; woman-comrade . . . and woman-helper . . ." "I am in the keeping of my Saint Mary: My companion beloved is Bride." (Carmina, Nos. 70-71; 263-264). As joy, steadfastness and attainment are generally linked to one notable stage in the life of each 'holy companion', the example, aid and fellowship of each saint in turn was especially sought, at a corresponding stage or crisis of one's own life.

The Gael's veneration for saintly men and women was shared by Catholic peasantry throughout Christendom; but its special quality seems to have been closeness of

1 Clanship has repeatedly been said to be 'patriarchal', as an ideal and a system. A different conclusion, that community is the root of clanship (even in its political forms), may come as a surprise. The English or Lowland reader has had access only to the writings of strangers such as Burt. Not knowing Gaelic, these derived their information from Highland speakers of English who, deliberately or unconsciously, were biased by ranking as chief or gentry, and not unnaturally explained their position as patriarchal. Thus strangers ignored the co-parental life of farm-groups and townships, economically humble but spiritually rich, as the root of a clan-community.

CH. VII SPIRITUAL LIFE OF COMMUNITY

fellowship. "The Irish Church", a Roman is said to have exclaimed to a Gaelic Catholic in scorn, "has won no martyr's crown!" "Ireland was named the Isle of Saints not by persecuting but by cherishing God's elect", was the reply. The Celtic Church linked the lands across St. Patrick's Channel; and what was true of Patrick's missionary field seems to have been as true of Celtic Britain, the land of his birth. Kilpatrick on the Roman Wall of Clyde has been claimed as the birthplace of one who was certainly a Cymric Celt by birth and baptism, a Gaul by training, and an Irishman by mission.¹

This closeness of fellowship ranged from personal to divine relationships in waking or rest, with an intimacy of expression all its own. A prayer for rest begins, "I shall lie down with God, and God lie down with me. . . ." A simple and universal gesture of love, in which parent, child or lover slips an arm under the loved one's head, is carried into prayer at rest, "the arm of the Father", or of Jesus or Mary, "under my head". This image must be the inspiration of one of the loveliest of Christian tombs, preserved by clan loyalty, respect for the dead, distance and later forgetfulness on the priory isle of Inchmahome, where the Highlands meet the Lowlands at the Lake of Menteith. As on a number of medieval monuments, knight and lady are sculptured side by side. But here the two lie each with "an arm under the other's head", the free arm of the knight reaching over to clasp hands

¹ While in Scotland the name Bride is now rare as a Christian name, that of Patrick is still found among Grants, Campbells, Macdonalds and others. It is even commoner than English speakers might suppose, owing to the practice—almost the necessity—of giving an English form to a Gaelic name when it is turned to English speech—as Daniel for Dombhnui (Donald), Aeneas for Aonghas (Angus) or Peter for Padhrug (Patrick). Many a Gael in the Lowlands felt obliged to relinquish his baptismal (and ancestral) names, with their link to Celtic Christian tradition.
with his spouse. The knight, the first Stewart Earl of Menteith, had died four years after his wife, in 1294. Medieval sculpture was then attaining its height, as this monument, in spite of the ravages of time, bears witness. The following year, 1295, saw the commencement of "the three hundred years war" with its repeated destruction of Scottish arts and traditions of peace. Under King Alexander III, "that Scotland led in luve and law", peace within the kingdom of Scots allowed a union embracing Gaelic Christian traditions and Scoto-Norman arts. After his death this became all but impossible. So far as scholars can tell me, this almost unnoticed monument remains unique in Christendom, indeed in the world. The arts of Scotland, hitherto in touch with European achievement, were shattered by invasions, and Gaelic tradition was only to be maintained by the very poor, whose debtors, for all time, we have become.

At the approach of death God's mercy and peace were sought. Latterly Roman Catholic prayers stressed the wish for Confession to a priest, followed by Supreme Unction for the attainment of 'Happy death', Bas sona. In early times confession seems to have been made as willingly to the 'Soul-friend', followed by Benediction. When death had come, the mourners sang of sleep and home. In Lewis today funerals are conducted in silence to the graveside, where the last service is held; but

1 A unique medieval tomb at Inchmahome: a cultural link. (Geddes, 1952.)
2 It would be of deep interest to compare the attitudes to death found in 'Spiritual Songs' by Protestant Gaels like Buchanan or Grant, with songs on death which, though maybe of post-Reformation date, are of Roman Catholic origin (e.g. in Fr. Allan Macdonald's collection, poems on the Day of Judgment, and of Wrath; on age and on death; and on Purgatory: pp. 31, 85, 146; 34, 19, 21; 27). Some have much in common, both by virtue of the earlier traditions they shared and still more because of parallel trends of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Cf. Carmina.

CH. VII SPIRITUAL LIFE OF COMMUNITY

Carmichael found versions of a mourners' hymn then still remembered as sung at funerals there. "Never could they who had heard it forget the solemnity of the occasion, where all was so natural and beautiful, and nature seemed to join in the feelings of humanity." 1 "I am going with thee to thy home! . . . Thy home of winter." " . . . To thy home of autumn, spring and summer . . . to thine eternal bed, thy perpetual sleep." "I am going home with thee, thou child of my love, To my dear Son of blessing, to the Father of grace."

Tha mi dol dachaidh leat,
Go do thaigh! go do thaigh!
Tha mi dol dachaidh leat
Go do thaigh geamhraidh . . .

Tha mi dol dachaidh leat,
A leanaibh mo luaidh,
Go Macan nam beannachd,
Go Athair nam buadh.

"The Death Croon", handed down by the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Macleod, leads on from almost the same opening, the Soul-friend singing to the fellow-watchers' refrain. 2 "Sleep, oh love, on thy Mother's bosom, Sleep while she sings soft lullings to thee, The sleep of the Son on Mary's breast. Sleep and put off from thee every woe. . . . Sleep of Jesus's youth . . . life . . . and glory . . . of His love . . . joy . . . and peace. . . . Sleep of the seven virtues . . . the seven moons . . . the seven slumbers upon thee. . . . Dream of Mary and God in her side, Dream of Columba in Isle of Saints, Dream of the Child

1 Carmina, No. 346. The word Mac, Son, is here given a tender diminutive form, Macan, 'dear Son', as if to complement the infinity of the Father's "achievement, victory or grace ".
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that never aged: Each one of these dreams, dear love, be thine.

The dusk of the Death-sleep is, love, in thine eye,
But softly thou'lt sleep, softly sleep.
In name of the Three in One,
Peace to thy pain,
The Christ is come.
Softly sleep, softly sleep.

The late Professor Sir J. Arthur Thomson, deeply moved on hearing it sung for the first time, exclaimed, “How profound the civilisation of those who composed and handed down this hymn of farewell!” The Soul-friend and Watchers seem to unfold before us the wide range of human love, and—as they recall the tender relationships of birth, childhood, parenthood and parting—to touch the universal.

CHAPTER VIII
CHANGE IN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS

(A) COMMUNAL CHRISTIANITY, THE ROMAN CHURCH AND THE REFORMATION

When the Reformation broke upon Scotland and the Church of Rome was driven out, the new Church was slow to replace the priests and conventual clergy by its ministers. More than two hundred years later the minister of Harris wrote, with reason, that in contemplating “the decayed monuments of the piety of our Christian ancestors . . . the pious mind is affected with a mixture of awe and sorrow, while it can hardly admit that the overturning of the ancient church establishment ought to be considered as reformation here”. These words were honestly spoken. The minister continued: “In Harris, where, till within a few years back (from 1790), there has not been since the aera of our reformation from popery, so much as . . . one decent house for public worship; there were of old no less than twelve churches and chapels of which . . . the walls are yet standing, besides others . . . while tradition has preserved their names and dedications”.¹ These are those of monastic cella or cill, of parochial or collegiate ecclesia or eaglets,

¹ Old Statistical Account, x. 376. No doubt many churches had lacked a priest for a considerable time before the Reformation; but taking a long view, the minister's conclusion was sound.
In Lewis, as in the Northern Isles, the early years of the Reformation period had been years of invasion by the King's Adventurers, of resistance, bloodshed and ruin. Hence when Mackenzie brought a Protestant clergyman to minister to the people they flocked to hear him. Naturally the new lord chose one of his important tenants from Kintail, the Rev. Farquhar Macrae. "For forty years prior to the visit (about 1611) no one in Lewis appears to have been baptized or married,"—or rather, no ceremonies had been performed by professional clergy, an important distinction. "'The population', we are told, 'had lapsed into heathenism', but 'Mr. Farquhar’s' mission proved thoroughly successful. 'Large numbers of the people were baptized, some of them being fifty years of age, and many men and women were married who had already lived together for years.' The author also stated that the success of this mission went far to reconcile the inhabitants of Lewis to Lord Kintail’s rule. According to a Kintail tradition, 'the number of people that came to be baptized by Mr. Farquhar was so great that, being unable to take them individually, he was obliged to sprinkle the water at random on the crowd with a heather besom'"—much as it still is on certain festivals in the Roman Church.

The tale of the Rev. Farquhar Macrae shows both the spiritual prestige of one who could read the Scriptures and must understand them, and the people's belief that a lord who brought a Gaelic clergyman must indeed be a Christian and was to be welcomed, or at least accepted. After the larger churches had been rifled by lairds, 'Pro-

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CH. VIII RELIGION AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS
COMMUNITY FROM PAST TO PRESENT PT. II

The advent of the Reformers to the Island may at first have seemed less revolutionary to the people than has generally been suggested by historians of either the new Church or the old. Ministering to one another, the people had not, like the city-dwellers of their time, enjoyed—or suffered—a multiplicity of offices, administered by priests whose ways of living might be a scandal. The Mass heard in Latin was incomprehensible to those of Celtic (or Teutonic) speech without the aid of translation into the vernacular—an aid now universal among literate Roman Catholics. Most of these offices, such as auricular confession to a priest to obtain absolution, with masses for the dead, indulgences and the like, were performed for payments prohibitive to the poor. The Islesfolk, for the most part, lived far both from the orthodox practices of the Latin Church and from the more flagrant abuses against which a minority of the old Church had protested in vain. Hence the transition to early Protestant liturgy would not be too painful. In prolonged isolation, the Gaelic people, perforce, had lived the life of the Lollard and Protestant doctrine of “the Priesthood of all believers”.

After the Reformation the people were bewildered by the mutual condemnation of Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Jesuit, and torn to the quick when all three parties in turn denounced so much that they themselves held dear. The more the rival clergy confused and wounded their minds, the harder it was for younger generations to discern ancient Gaelic wisdom and discard superstition; and the easier to fall into credulous and secretive repetition of rhymes and strings of holy names. The scorn of the wealthy for simple rites and of the book-learned for the symbols of old speech would add to confusion rather than aid discrimination. As pious and understanding crofters complained in Carmichael’s own time, mockery is hard to withstand. One can only guess, as yet, what were the real effects of the decadence of Rome and the impact of the Reformation upon the landward communities of the Lowlands and Northern Isles. But the records of the Western Isles leave no doubt as to the onset of this spiritual tragedy among the Gael, of which Carmichael and others saw the later acts and of which one still finds the epilogue.

The grim desperation of the religious and civil wars, and their persecutions—crucifixions made by every side in the name of the Cross—caused faith to be disastrously shaken. Superstition rushed into the widening cracks in older belief, aided by important sects of clergy. In the Highlands, ‘witch’ torture was never carried to the lengths it reached in the cities, though the last ‘witch’-burning in Scotland may have occurred in east Sutherland (P. Hume Brown, History, ii, 1912, p. 451). But the frenzy of witch-hunting by ministers in the Lowlands, during the widespread evictions and social anarchy of the post-Reformation period, suggests that the Adventurers’ invasion of the Lews, followed by the arrival of new masters and Presbyterian ministers after 1600, must have aroused morbid, anti-social fears. Lewis certainly suffered from fear of the evil eye as late as the nineteenth, and even this, century.

We have to face the effects on the people of religious strife. To ardent Reformers the Blessed Sacrament of the Roman Church was a ‘Jack-in-the-box’; and at the climax of the Mass, the elevation of the Host—the moment of ‘transubstantiation’ with its literal interpretation of the words, “This is my flesh” (Hoc est corpus meum)—was so much ‘hocus-pocus’. Conversely, to Roman Catholics

much of Protestantism was a denial of Christianity. Holders of all these forms of Trinitarian belief have united in condemning Unitarianism as heresy, its earlier Arian form having been stamped out in blood. The ‘heterodox’ are held by the orthodox of many Churches to be awaiting eternal torture. To a thoughtful humanist like Sir James Frazer, on the other hand, the belief that one alone by suffering can atone for the sins of others is of the deepest significance, as being an ancient, widespread and ‘pathetic fallacy’. Happily, one finds the greatest tolerance and sympathy where Protestant and Catholic are mixed in the Isles. Elsewhere, too, sympathy and reverent enquiry are taking the place of dogmatic assertion. It is in this spirit that we can best understand Gaelic beliefs at their highest, and so distinguish their lowered use—or misuse for selfish ends—from the highest use of sacrament and prayer by the pure of mind and heart.

Religion, Magic and Superstition in Daily Life

Evil ends might be sought by means of the ancient runes: the power of their poetry and associations could tempt to perverted use. Carmichael tells how in Uist a malefactor, in terror of the law, went to a needy woman, and by appealing to her pity—and in exchange for a small sum—learned from her an “Invocation for Justice”. Strengthened by its rhythm and imagery, and by his own associated belief in its magical power as a charm, he stood up boldly in Court, firmly asserted his innocence and got away scot-free! Both persons secretly concerned felt that they had endangered their souls by successfully defeating justice through their misuse of the invocation. Can one doubt that they were partly right in both beliefs? The malefactor’s confidence had lent success to perjury, and perjury by help of prayer was deadly sin.

Now, the perverted use of prayer, as in this case, was clearly understood to be evil-doing; but what of magic and superstitious practices? Much has been written of ‘Highland folk-lore and superstitions’. The religion of the past should be distinguished from these. In The Golden Bough, Frazer drew a useful distinction between religion and magic. Religion, he wrote, relies upon the propitiation of higher powers—or even, in more primitive forms than Christianity, the propitiation of the forces of nature—while magic is an attempt at direct control of natural forces. Superstition may be defined here as a body of beliefs and practices in which hopes and fears attach themselves to things seen or done, by a multitude of false analogies and by irrational links of effects to supposed causes. Such superstitions are marginal to the main body of belief, worship and conduct which forms religion.

At the same time, no hard-and-fast line can be drawn between folk-lore and religion, where religion is handed on as living word and ritual almost without the aid of writing. This is particularly true where the religion of which we think, that of the Gael, is founded upon self-supporting peasant life, in line with that of the humble, working founder of Christianity—historically native to an outlying district of his own country—and not with the

1 Cf. the friendly theological arguments between a Bernera Presbyterian and a Roman Catholic from Barra (Bodach Bharraidh—vii, viii), sketched in Gaelic by I. N. Macleoid, Litrichean Alasdair Mhoir, Stornoway, 1932.

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theology and scholarship of a capital city, even of a city so small as Jerusalem! It is sometimes forgotten that the Old Testament, upon which so much of theology is built, contains folk-lore and magic. Not until this is fully understood in the sense in which early Oriental ‘folk’ believed it, can it be interpreted, whether as imaginative symbolism or common sense.1 Much in the orthodox belief of medieval or post-Reformation times was mistaken; yet it formed part of the religion, not the ‘superstition’ of the stage and period. Theology and philosophy are in constant transformation. Sheltered scholars, priests and rulers of cities may be ill-fitted to interpret the inspiration of a religion which grew from life in field, pasture and at sea, whether in its native land of Galilee and the East or among the Gael. One must live with a people and be one of them, at least for a time, to interpret their inner life. Lastly, no generalisation is true for all members of a community: individuals differ. The same prayer, the same rite, may be used in so different a way by each of two neighbours that its use by one is religious but by the other superstitious.

We have seen that the essence of the lore from which we have quoted is not magical, but religious, in use as in inspiration. Strangers who had lost the sense of the beauty in the skies mistook a Gael’s adoration of God at sunrise for prayer to the sun; when a man unbonneted or a woman knelt in the open, face turned to the rising moon lightening the dark, they confused prayer with worship of the moon itself. Now, in paganism, a belief in nature-spirits is strong: but propitiation is made not to objects such as the sun or moon, but to spirits believed to influence or dwell in them—to a sun or moon spirit. If the people once believed in a ‘moon-spirit’, nothing is left to show it. Either the moon is addressed as if she could hear her praise, or—more commonly—“The King of the Elements” or “of life” is thanked for sending her light. The Archangel Michael is associated with the sun’s rays; but symbolically in relation to heart and mind, rather than as literal belief. The response to sunrise and sunset was real; and it is not lost among the people, as a watcher may see.1

It remains true that pre-Christian rites were re-enacted, sometimes in fear and desperation when things had gone wrong, and sometimes in mere play. A Lewisman in Carmichael’s hearing spoke of “going between the two great fires of Beul” (or Baal), his phrase expressing no more than a faded memory. But in Reay, in hard times bordering on famine, a fishing skipper was seen by his small son, supposed to be asleep, to assemble his crew and, after putting out the fire on the hearth, kindle the neid fire by rubbing two pieces of wood vigorously together. Each man then carried a kindling back to his own home.2 Was this a religious ritual of human energy, heat and light, symbolic of forces held to be under Divine control but to be used as they used wind and tide by strenuous effort at the oars? Or was it magic, pure and simple? When men are shaken by failures and the fear of famine, prayer in word and ritual may restore hope for better things—for safety in storm and for fish in abundance as in a miraculous draught—and confidence in their powers for their work. But the same can be true of magic. And neither prayer nor


2 For contemporary record, descriptions of sunsets have appeared in the Stornoway Gazette from the pen of a crofter in retirement, N. Morrison.

Carmina, vol. ii, Notes, Neid Fire.
magic is always efficacious—however desperate the need, however pure the motives of those who ask. These men were said to be the most successful fishers in the place; they were also Elders of the Kirk, who saw no wrong in what they did. They did not inform the minister; but the good man was not a fisherman and did not understand either the mysterious ways of fish or the incitement of a crew!

While this neid fire was kindled in all earnestness, a miming song-dance I have seen in Eriskay is pure fun: 'the Carline or Witch-wife of the Mill-dust' (Cailleach an Dudain), who falls down dead and is brought to life again! Once, perhaps, a half-remembered symbolic 'play' of the seasonal fall and resurrection of seed, it is certainly in form and spirit a thing of happy laughter now! Tales were retold by Martin and a seventeenth-century English skipper, of offerings made to a sea-god, Shony, at Eoropie, Ness, for the sake of seaweed, followed by feasting and drinking in the chapel there.1 The story may be garbled or, if true, may record a pre-Christian survival turned to merriment and of no more significance to the people of the time than 'the Carlino of the Mill-dust'. The prayers for the seaweed necessary for agriculture and daily bread are Christian in spirit.

When the people were at the mercy of periodic famines, diseases and sudden death, there were ample grounds for fears. Hence a word must be said of a belief widespread and ancient in the Old World, 'the evil eye' (droch shuil). In the absence of clinical diagnosis, a malady, or a misfortune to oneself or a valued possession, might cast suspicion on someone present when it occurred; and


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though the suspected person was not thereby accused of ill will, he would have to make some effort to put it right. 'Cure' might be sought either by counter-malediction on the supposed ill-wisher, known or unknown, or else by prayer that the evil should be spread so widely as to be harmless, as "on all the wild birds of Heaven... that it would do them no harm"—a charming touch! (Carmina, vol. iii). Prayer was the normal and the best protection, free of any malediction, and was included in general intercession for loved ones. But fears remain—not only in 'distant' isles—both in peace and in the extreme stress of war.

A psychotherapist of 1917-18, A. J. Brock, wrote that the "War was not in essence a new thing, the ordinary life of every day being itself a sort of battle".1 Brock brought the hard-learned psychotherapy of war to bear upon a fresh understanding of the countryman struggling against an environment with which he has got out of tune. Failing in spite of strained effort to get the food and warmth he needs for himself and his 'wife and weans', the peasant may lose happiness in home and village, and faith in the future. "How did primitive people express all this?" asked Brock, noting that the risks and casualties of bad times in the past brought fears and floating pictures comparable to those of 'shell-shocked' patients.

In all lands the unity of family life and labour is symbolised in homelier folk-lore by the protective spirit of each homestead. As long as the work is carried on heartily and thriftily the Brownie is pleased. But the people may become negligent, or begin to labour from mercenary motives. The true spirit of the work is then upset and (in all folk-lore) the Brownies begin to give

trouble. "Everything seems to go wrong"; and the peasant falls asleep at night in fear of ills to come. First in his dreams and next in his day-dreams, these take shape as an offended, hostile 'spirit'. The spirit of the place —of the place-work—has become angry. So also, if the peasant's wife pursues her household work 'in the right spirit', then in her dreams and reveries she is helped by kindly presences; but if not, things go wrong, objects mislaid have been taken by 'someone' and a tormenting house-imp plays havoc with her home. These figures of day-dreams were involuntary and 'shady', without the clarity either of earthly things or of heavenly visions. Yet they personified moods of real significance.

The Uruisg of the Gael helped about the farm and household—like the Tonte of Sweden and the Lubber-fiend of Merrie England in Milton's *L'Allegro*. Each task may have its own symbol. Of one of these, the cattle-tending *Glaistic* of the Highlands and Isles, Brock quotes from Mrs. E. Carmichael Watson: "Harmless and lovable as a rule,—especially in the older stories—in a few of the later stories she is represented as irritable... The more recent stories about the Glaistic are rather unpleasant. She no longer plays with the children or sings rhymes—she has degenerated into a kind of female ruffian. Probably it would be nearer the truth to say that the change has been in the Highlands rather than in the Glaistic." Brock comments, "This last remark is significant. The increasing irritability of tutelary nature-deities means that the spirit of the old economic life—the equilibrium between Highlanders and Highlands—is being upset"; and so too is that between Highlander and Highlander! In *Lewis Ni Chlach Urlar* (She (or It) of the Hearth Stone), who personified domestic strife, makes
gentle frankness, as there is for reticence. But since Augustine, orthodox religion, Catholic and Protestant, has overstressed and misunderstood the folk-lore of 'the Fall'—originally, it seems, a legend of fertility and fulfilment! In part as a result of the teaching of the doctrine of the 'Fall', there has arisen an attitude to parenthood which falls short of rational understanding and reverence for human life. If fact be the best guard against superstitious fancy, and if sensibility and tact can soften the first shock of adolescence, then the Gael knew wisdom.

Returning to the main theme, it is clear that primitive religion and folk-lore alike show misunderstandings of cause and effect, and of the action of 'mind' on 'body' and 'matter'. What are facts to faith may be symbols to science; yet if these symbols prefigure truth, they may outlast the present stage of scientific recognition. Gaelic belief and practice show a recognition of communal as well as individual spirituality; of the depth of consciousness below its upper surface, and its upwelling power; and of the visible world without, in all its beauty, as a gate to the world within. Above all, harmony of relations, at every stage of life, in man and woman, was felt to prefigure relations with the Divine. The religious poetry of which the Gael were the creators and heirs, promoted courage and calm. True, its very power could lead to superstitious respect for mere forms of words, debased as 'magical' charms. Such misuse was 'superstitious', being false in itself and falling short of the clearest thought, the highest aspiration, of the time and the community. Worse still, use with evil intent could concentrate ill-will and evoke mutual fears. Yet at its best, thought was clearer, less confused, than is commonly imagined. To the aspiration and attainment of the Gael—in congregation or solitude, in meditation or labour, in love and faith or in works—the fragments of their oral heritage bear witness.

1 Needless to say, Gaelic verse has its moments of coarse freedom like that of any tongue. Of the lively lilt (puirt-a-beul) sung when there is no piper or fiddler to play for dancing, most of the words are delightful, but a few are not. A rather 'drinky' dissolute fellow—a small contractor on one of the Isles whose apprenticeship in the cities had not improved his character—once quoted a coarse jingle to me, only to see little amusement at his song and some contempt for its singer. He excused himself by saying, 'It's rough... it's rough—but it's not dirty!' His excuse sums up the cruder expressions of animal spirits found in Gaelic jingles. One may adapt it as 'Sometimes coarse, but rarely or never vicious'.


The Churches have given attention to the second chapter of Genesis, at the expense of the first. Gaelic spiritual tradition seems to have been singularly unwarped by such confused mythology, and to have held firmly to the first chapter, in its noble simplicity.

(c) LITERACY AND EVANGELISM: 'THE MEN' AND THE DISRUPTION

From before 1680 "a school for the gentlemen's sons and daughters" was open in Stornoway. Latin and English were taught, and a century later even Greek had been added, as recorded by W. J. Gibson, for many years Rector of Stornoway's high school, the Nicolson Institute, in his Education in Scotland, 1912 (chap. v). Particularly towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Gaelic School Society and other bodies, like the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, sent out schoolmasters to teach the reading of the Scriptures. Industrial schools were set up at the same time by Lady Seaforth, to teach spinning by the wheel, replacing the slow distaff. It was not till nearly a century later that teaching of English was widely taken advantage of—partly by the compulsion of the
Education Act of 1872, for the people "did not want to give their children wings to leave them".¹

The reading of Gaelic progressed fairly rapidly after 1800, in order that the Bible might be read. By 1833 something like one in three or four of the population, or more than half of the younger people, could read Gaelic. The Hon. Mrs. Stewart-Mackenzie of Seaforth, it seems, had a 'warm sympathy' both with teaching to read the Scriptures and with evangelical preaching. The coming to Lewis in 1824 of the first evangelical minister, the Rev. Alexander MacLeod, an Assynt man, is described in his memoir in a striking volume, Disruption Worthies of the Highlands, edited by J. Greig (1877).

"At the distance of more than half a century it is not easy to form a conception of the religious and moral condition of Lewis previous to the year 1824. The present writer has heard a still living minister of the Free Church, who is a native of Uig, declare publicly that only two or three copies of the Bible could be found within the wide extent of the parish, and that he himself travelled a journey in search of a copy of the blessed book, and all in vain. . . . The densest intellectual and spiritual darkness held universal sway. Notwithstanding the pleasing features that characterise Highlanders, even in their most primitive condition, this state of things could not fail to be attended with baleful fruits. Despite their constitutional warmth of heart and loyalty of nature, unbending fidelity to what they esteemed to be honour, and their unbounded kindness and hospitality, many gross vices were found commingling in the characters and lives of the Lewis people. For, however strange it may appear, at the first prayer-meeting which Mr. Macleod attempted to hold at Uig, one of the former elders actually offered a request that a wreck should be cast ashore in the neighbourhood;¹ while another elder, referring to the death of our Lord as a misfortune, used strong expressions of depreciation of its having at all occurred.² . . . The reason is easily furnished; the Lewis ministry was not evangelical. Moderatism held the land in sole possession . . . Nor did it act merely in a negative indifferentist manner. Moderatism contained in itself elements of positive distaste to Gospel truth, and enmity towards gracious influences and experience. As a matter of course, it was perfectly compatible with this system to grant toleration to superstitions and superstitious observances, which had been handed down through the Dark Ages of Popery from the still darker ages of Druidical idolatry. Acts of adoration, having for their object the heavenly bodies, were common. It is scarcely necessary to state that family worship was unknown among the people, and even at the manse. For although the public ordinances were dispensed as a matter of form, they exerted no practical influence upon the conduct. They rather tended to lull more profoundly asleep by imparting and maintaining a feeling of security to the poor dark benighted souls who participated in them."

People did come to church "in tolerable numbers" from the very outset of Mr. Macleod's ministry, but "Here for the first time was a preacher who showed by his whole . . . people did come to church . . ." ¹ Shipwreck was still thought of as an 'act of God', and a dire 'misfortune'. Not only is there no hint of deliberate wrecking ever taking place, as on some other British coasts, but abundant record of aid to the shipwrecked and respect for their property in the absence of the skipper and crew. (Martin, 1695; and later.)² According to Evangelical theory the punishment of guilty and innocent alike was part of the Divine plan. How different this, from the faith of the Islanders till then!

¹ Quotations to this effect, dating from the Old Statistical Account until 1883, are given in the Brand Report of 1902.

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manner that he had in hand business of eternal moment to his hearers. That business was to warn them of the wrath to come, which impended over unpardoned Christless sinners, and to proclaim the way of escape by the open door of a crucified and risen Saviour. Not more than two months had elapsed since Mr. Macleod's admission when the 'stupid attention' and vacant stare passed into the wistful anxious listening, the suffused eye, the tender subdued manner, and in some cases the heart-wringing enquiry, 'What must I do to be saved?'

"For something like two years this minister ' refused to dispense the Lord's Supper '. . . . A very early effect of his work was the extinction of various worldly and pernicious customs and amusements to which the people had been previously addicted, and the substitution of meetings for prayer, diets of catechising, day and evening schools, family worship, and other spiritual exercises in their room. Many at the outset felt greatly aggrieved at the new order of things. Meanwhile the Lord stood by his servant, and the word mightily prevailed against all opposition. Incredible efforts were made by earnest souls in all parts of the island to be present at the preaching of the Word, even on ordinary Sabbaths." By 1828 "the whole island seemed to be moved by one powerful spiritual impulse" and 9000 people flocked from all parts to the Uig communion. "When the memorable 18th of May 1843 dawned"—that of the Disruption—"no part of the country was readier to rally round the banner then displayed, because of the truth, than the island of Lewis almost to a man." It was "an unspeakable relief to the ministers' spirits to escape by one decided step at once from the bondage of State control and the chilling atmosphere of Moderatism. . . . Even where evangelical preach-
year in which John Bunyan was born". Archbishop Sharp "banished him to the dungeons of the Bass Rock for twenty-eight years, and it was during his imprisonment that the meetings of communicants were kept going by a parishioner,—a reformed tinker and a gifted and consecrated lieutenant". This tradition of the 'Men' renewed itself and spread with each wave of 'Revival'. It sprang up in the Islands more than a century ago, as it had on the north-western mainland during the later eighteenth century, and in 'Easter' Ross two hundred years before.

The spiritual crises of the Reformation and of the Cromwellian and Covenanting age are still profoundly influential; yet they seem hard for those from the Lowlands and England to understand because they occurred so long ago. But in Lewis, Macfarlane writes of the 'Men' whom he knew and admired, in order to keep their memory green. Once more, life in the Isles throws fresh light on the past, revealing its significance.

**Evangelism and Erastianism, Wrath and Woe**

The Disruption gave a powerful urge to the movement for freedom, in many ways. Throughout Scotland the people were made to feel that both landlordism and the

1 The issues of Disruption, for the sake of freedom from the choice of a minister by the landlord's patronage and from State control, were reviewed by the Rev. Prof. G. D. Henderson, in *Heritage of the Disruption*, 1943 (published at the centenary, and nearly half a generation after the Union of 1929). While the Free Church still maintains a strong hold in the Island—and among a small minority elsewhere who feel that even the terms of the Union could not secure full moral freedom—it is claimed by the Church of Scotland that its constitution now goes far to solve "the age-long antimony of establishment and freedom", a view widely held abroad, both in Germany and in the smaller lands of North-west Europe occupied by the invader, at the time of the centenary.

1 'Erastianism' is the doctrine of the supremacy of the State in ecclesiastical causes, a term which came into use in Britain in the seventeenth century. Actually the problem is one which Erastus, 1524-83, nowhere entered upon; none the less, the name is established, and it denotes a major issue of principles.

2 J. Greig (ed.), *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands* (1877).
The Evangelicals, so insistent in condemning the beliefs and worship of ancient Christianity as 'vice' and 'superstition', comparatively rarely condemned words and rites designed to bring punishment upon a person believed to have wronged one—that is upon a person one hated! Of such was the practice, widespread in the Old World, of moulding a clay figure representing the person to be harmed, and either sticking pins into it, exposing it to fire, or leaving it in a stream, with a prayer that as the figure wasted away so would the object of hatred. An educated Lewisman I knew, Dr. Norman Morrison, stated that an aunt of his own performed this rite. No doubt she persuaded herself that if the desired injury took place, natural or Divine law was at work and she herself was therefore innocent or actually just. What is striking is that in the twentieth century, long after the healing beauty and Christian calm of runes and rites had been banished and the healthy laughter of gay custom silenced, this pre-Christian rite of ill-will had lived on. One hardly knows whom to pity the more: the hated, for the fear they would feel if they knew the rite was at work, or the hater. The extreme Evangelicals made so little appeal to reason based on fact, that the irrational element in superstition was not firmly replaced by a sane, scientific outlook. Indeed 'science' was condemned as 'unbelief'. The constant evocation of wrath, anger and "the punishment of just and unjust" played havoc with the emotions.

Those brought up on the precepts of Presbyterianism—especially in its milder forms—and familiar from infancy with a selection of Old Testament readings, can hardly appreciate the shock to a sensitive heart of first hearing the whole of the Old Testament read Book by Book. The shock is due not only to the acts of vengeance or massacre, but still more to their repeated justification in the name of the Lord 'God'. ‘God’ the universal (Elohim) came to be identified with the tribal god Jahveh or Yahweh, altered, late in Jewish history, to “the LORD God”, the term still used in Bibles. The war cry of the Jewish tribes, as they swept in from the desert or tightened their hold upon citizens and cultivators, was that of many wild wanderers, before and since, who have cried upon their God of Battles, upon Jahveh, or Allah. Magnificent in its affirmations of righteousness, the Old Testament can be terrible in its denials of pity.

The Bible (literally Biblia, the Books) reflects the search of a people through centuries towards the idea of God; but the tragedy of the Bible, or rather of its historic misuse, came with the acceptance of all 'Scripture' as equal in inspiration and truth. The early and the late were accepted together, the mixed or false with the true. The custom of seeking Divine guidance by simply opening a page of 'the blessed Book'—that is, any text on any page of any one of its books—was an example of such acceptance; and it was only possible for the literate. In Lewis, Macfarlane records the custom, practised by 'The Men', late in the nineteenth century.

Reading came late to the Islanders, but its effects were as direct as among the Puritans or Covenanters at an earlier period. The people, whose hearts had long since been wrung with pity at the Crucifixion and who were steeped in reverence for the Gospels, became 'changed' indeed. Once their minds had been crushed by the Old Testament's massive weight, the 'change' was reinforced by the vision of a world to come, limned by fevered imagination in the New Testament's finale, the Apocalypse. The 'change' was brought by Evangelicals who had themselves
undergone the same crushing experience, at a time when communal life was being overthrown by the Industrial Revolution. "Terrible old men!" exclaimed a wise Lewis schoolmaster, of these 'Disruption Worthies'. It was not that they were inhuman—that is clear from the warmth felt for them by so many of the people, who would never have taken kindly to the unkind.

Nor were the first Evangelicals invariably severe. Of the Rev. Mr. Macrae, long in Lewis, it is told that, when young he had rebuked an older fellow-minister for levity at a ministers' supper on Communion Monday. Leaping up, the minister seized Macrae by the shoulders and danced behind him, till Macrae was forced to join in the laugh! Macrae never forgot the sane and kindly words spoken to him after: and he saw he had been wrong to identify cheerfulness with irreligion. Yet much joy was extinguished or found illicit vent. To such ruthless zeal, there came inevitably reaction, noted even by 1877, and still more notable during the war of 1914-18 and after. Conflict or compromise was inevitable where Churchmen emphasised terror and inveighed against the calm heritage of their forebears and the happiness for which human nature asks. The days of emotional 'Revival' are by no means over and from them the pendulum may swing from excess back to relieved but wearied unconcern. Moreover, with the emigration of so many of the men, the balance of family life was upset. Some thoughtful men and women feel that the 'Revival' which swept their Island (with the rest of the Presbyterian Hebrides) before 1939 and during the war was partly due to the excessive influence of spinsters, to whom strict Presbyterianism offered little outlet for motherly emotion or sisterly service.

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(b) SOCIAL CUSTOMS IN CHANGE

In spite of 'the wrath to come', life had to go on, work be done, and natural affection find an outlet in youth. How could the women waulk the cloth without a chorus to keep their beating hands in time? Songs had to be allowed by the sternest for this work in common. In a land where marriage was not an affair of dowries, but chiefly of love choice among the young folk, the old court­ring customs could not wholly be denied. Curiously enough, drinking was not severely looked upon by Scots rural Evangelists; in one story in the Old Testament, it is not the drunkard, but his mocker whom the Lord punished! In a city, a drunk man is a prey to thieves and harpies; but in a township none will do him harm. But today there are Evangelical ministers who think that drink should be frowned on at weddings and ceilidhs, while song and dance might be tolerated.

Not all the people gave in willingly to the severity of the new creed. In Uig there is a cave, the 'Piper's Cave', to which a crofter was wont to resort on dark nights, his pipes in his oxter, when the wind blew from the manse and out to sea! Ultimately the least willing were forced to give in, first, by the appalling threat of the refusal of communion, and secondly, by denunciation from the pulpit and the ostracism of the Elders. Much was destroyed that can never be recovered now, and many a fine heart saddened or broken. It was the most intimate expression of their lives, their religious lore, which suffered most.\footnote{Carmichael gives an infinitely pathetic account of a conversation in a home in Ness about 1880–85. \textit{Carmina}, pp. xxvii–xxxii.}

Yet something remains, preserved by the good sense,
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intuitive and traditional, of the people, and their love for the good and beautiful. Song collectors from outside the Island have found little and assumed that song had been swept away. Discretion is certainly needed for song collection! Years ago in Bernera I had been told of a pretty love lament I had not heard. Calling with my hosts to invite him to their house that evening, we found the singer, a burly crofter of fifty or so. We had been about to mention the word 'song', when the word was checked on our lips by a swift, warning glance. The singer lived with his old mother and she must not be told that her son went out on such an errand! Nevertheless, Islanders themselves are collecting many unpublished songs, where strangers failed. The Laxdale School choir wins prizes at many a national gathering or Mod, for their spirited singing of songs, many of them unpublished. Owing in part to their very isolation, these songs have remained as pure in form as in the Catholic Isles, whether in time and rhythm or in scale and mode. Thus the sub-intervals or 'quarter-tones' of the modal scale add subtlety to the melodic line of an air, as in the melodies of Wales or of distant India. These intervals are rarely heard on concert platforms, being unrecognised by many 'Mod medallists'. They are rarely known to professional musicians trained to the mechanical scale of the piano, and who are asked, as adjudicators, to award praise or criticism by alien standards.

Courtesy and modesty are noticeable among the young


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people, although life in crowded quarters and daily concern with the rearing of animals make for a frankness not readily understood by strangers in Victorian times. The standard of morality in the Isles is high, and the rate of illegitimacy low. A courting custom, once common through the northern and western coasts of Britain, as in Norway and New England, was 'bundling', a preliminary to marriage, or bed-fellowship (leapachas). This is noted with disarming frankness by various writers. After the ceremonial and festivities of the betrothal, reiteach, a young man was allowed to sleep beside his betrothed; but the marriage ceremony was to precede, not follow, consummation. At wedding festivities, sweethearts found their way to the barn and took their rest together on the straw. In the shielings, too, courtship was given some freedom: trust is a necessity where there could not be total restraint.

To what extent marriage sometimes took place or may still occur after consummation and the expectation of a first child, only one with close local knowledge could say. 'Hand-fasting', marriage made binding only by the conception of a first child, was an ancient custom. Two things must be remembered. First, the strength of parental benediction and authority, backed by a community in which all knew one another from childhood, gave binding force to betrothal and its obligations; and ceremonies such as that of the kertching effectually replaced legal and ecclesiastical marriage when there was neither registrar, minister nor priest. Secondly, marriages blest with children tend to be happy ones. Fulfilling the cycle of life, children also provided the support to old age needed among peasants living on the edge of poverty.

1 W. A. Smith, Lewisiana; and Brand Report, 1902.
(r) A CHANGING CHURCH: 1820–1943

Underneath the doctrinal severity of the Presbyterian Gael, there has continued some of the cheerful faith in living, the belief in mutual aid, the tolerance and calm, breathed in our native religious lore. The sternest Presbyterianism, which swept the North-west after 1820, still makes the Gaelic North its fortress in Scotland. Yet the maintenance in the Scottish Church of a doctrine of universal love was due, no less, to Gaelic ministers, and seems to have owed its rebirth to Gaelic tradition through these men. The question of continuity is important: for this doctrine, embracing all mankind, not only the predestined few, has profoundly influenced the attitude to life in all Protestant lands, throughout a century crucial to human development.

The most notable of the Scots ministers concerned with the doctrine of the Atonement were John McLeod Campbell and his younger friend, Norman Macleod. Born in Argyllshire in 1800, McLeod Campbell was ordained in 1825, and preached the assurance that God loved, and Christ died, for all men. For this he was charged with heresy by the Church of Scotland, and deposed in 1831, a trial he bore "with saintly charity and patience", refusing to found a new sect. In 1832 he went through the Highlands and Skye, preaching everywhere in Gaelic. A Moderate minister, John Maciver, who attended his services, said to him: "I never understood so much of your views before; now in the strength of God I will enquire more into them". It was very different when he met his own cousin, Roderick McLeod, who eight years later swept the island of Skye into the Free Church and led the Evangelicals in the Hebrides. To his sister

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Campbell wrote, "My reception by those who are called 'professors'", the lay leaders who 'professed' the Evangelical doctrines, "was trying to the last. Holding that Christ died for all seemed to them so fundamental an error as to poison all my teaching." Thereafter, Campbell retired, in Glasgow, to read, preach to a few, and write, keeping in touch with Norman Macleod and Erskine in Scotland, and in England with J. F. D. Maurice (1805–72). After Christ, the Bread of Life, Campbell wrote The Nature of the Atonement (1856). Readers felt not only that he was one of the most lovable of men, but a profound theologian, a view reinforced today. "Of all books that have ever been written on the Atonement", wrote Dr. Denney, "McLeod Campbell's is probably that which is most completely inspired by the spirit of the truth with which it deals. Its originality is spiritual as well as intellectual. In speculative power he cannot be compared to Schleiermacher, nor in historical learning to Ritschl; but he walks in the light all the time, and everything he touches lives."

Here then was a man who seemed to have been born "in advance of his time", yet who came of a community of deeply traditional cast. His life's thought was attuned to that of his forebears, and expressed itself most intimately perhaps in their own tongue. Campbell was born and reared in Lorne, Argyllshire, which had first received Protestantism through Carswell, who, in translating Knox's "Liturgy" into Gaelic, incorporated the old Gaelic labour prayer of the fishermen (Chapter VII (a)). The gentler form of Protestantism brought in by Carswell may have allowed the spirit of Celtic Christianity to survive among the people of 'Mid-Argyll' and Lorne, down to Campbell's boyhood. It may thus have contributed to the making of "a Scottish
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saint, a character so eminently Christ-like “,’ and to his intimate beliefs, doctrine and wide influence. The same Highland roots and deep charity characterised Dr. Norman Macleod, author of the popular classic, *The Friend of the Gael* (*Caraid nan Gaidheal*).

If a student of community ventures upon an interpretation of theology, it is because, to him, any attempt to understand “the relations of God to mankind” must take account of men’s relations to one another. Ideas are transformed by human experience during economic and social revolutions, and in their turn they transform society. To make contact with reality, theology must regard mankind: it must be integrated with sociology. Because of its close bond with communal life, the religious spirit, recorded in Gaelic lore, was jarred, almost overwhelmed, when community was shaken to its foundations by the commercial, agricultural and industrial revolution. Happily, the value of communal Christianity has been acknowledged both by Roman Catholics—notably (among Gaels) by the Rev. Allan Macdonald of Eriskay—and by Protestants. In the Scottish Presbyterian Church today, the movement which seems most deeply aware of the need for a new society has acknowledged its debt to communal tradition where this has been best maintained, that is, in the Isles. Seeking to aid Christian endeavour, international and national, this movement has turned for inspiration to Iona. In Iona, of which the noble cathedral belongs to the Church of Scotland but is open for service to all denominations, Presbyterians have found a new symbol.

2 “The Church should interpret the Love of God by a flaming zeal for the redress of the social order.” (The Very Rev. Prof. John Baillie, Moderator of the Church of Scotland, at St. Andrews, 1943.)

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“The Iona Community is a Brotherhood of men within the Church of Scotland seeking to find the implications of the Kingdom of God for modern society. During the summer months they worship, work and live together on Iona, rebuilding the ruined Abbey on a co-operative basis. Half the Brotherhood are young clergy pledged to work for two years in the difficult places of the cities (after three months in Iona), emphasising the place of the Church in the New Community that is emerging in the world. The other half are skilled artisans who desire to express their labour as a ministry within the Priesthood of all Believers and create—in the building—a microcosmic witness of how labouring is transformed when seen as a Sacrament. The Brotherhood is based on Reformation principles. Several members of the Community are married. At present the artisans return to the ordinary labour market in the winter time.”

In the Iona Community, theology is linked to communal labour and the re-shaping of society; and its symbolic centre, Iona, is more than a literary name, or a historic ruin, to those who have set about rebuilding its cathedral tower, cloister and surrounding dwellings. Continuity is exemplified in its leader, the Rev. George F. Macleod, a descendant of Dr. Norman Macleod, the friend of McLeod Campbell. The significance of this Community to the theme of this chapter lies in the endeavour of its members to learn, by help of ancient native ways, new ways of Christian life in their own land. The attempt to link industrial Scotland, and lands beyond, to the Gaelic West, is a notable recognition of what Celtic Christianity, maintained and renewed by communal tradition, has yet to give the world.

1 From the magazine of the Iona Community, *The Coracle*.
CONCLUSION
(Chapters V to VIII)

Manifestly, prevailing views of the relationships of chief and people, and above all, of the people to one another, must be revised, even reversed. So must widespread views of the relation of clerical to 'lay' members in the living, though unseen, Church. The enduring character of the people's primitive faith, from its early arrival to our time, may be almost unique in Western Christendom; distance and sheer physical poverty proved to be its protection. Had they been better preserved, the temporal and spiritual traditions of the Eastern Gael, and also of Scots Lowlanders, might well justify a revision of views. In the Isles again and again the people were placed under 'Authority'—under laird and soldier, legislator and official, priest and pastor, orthodox cleric and unorthodox 'intellectual'. Should not each of these ask with humility whether they and their predecessors have not often misled those who might have led them, mistaught those from whom they might have learned?

CHAPTER IX
ECONOMIC CHANGES: 1750–1919

(a) TRANSITION: MIGRATION, FISHING AND KELP-MAKING

Until the 'Forty-five the township had lived an almost self-contained life. Its traditional economy was self-sufficient except for two indispensable commodities—salt for the housewife and iron for the smith. Beyond this, the chief demand for payment was the rent to the lord, with tithes for the kirk. For these needs and demands a step towards production for exchange was required, the more so that what was exported might include the very necessities of life in 'bad years'. The rent was paid largely by the sale of a surplus steer or two, and drovers called for the cattle. By 1790, if not before, two or three open boats set out annually from Uig, for instance, for Glasgow, laden with salt beef and dried salt fish. Although salt seems of little account today, it once bulked large in the Budget, its price being heightened by duty, especially after 1707: "as dear as salt", was a saying, cho daor ris an t-salluinn. Salt was needed to preserve the carcase of a 'cattle-beast' or sheep killed in autumn, and for cod and herring curing. Wrecks were valuable, as on all infertile undeveloped coastlands, both for their timber and their iron. Cairds or tinkers occasionally brought metal goods; or a packman called, as strange a figure then