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DUNDEE HIGHLAND SOCIETY

*(Branch of An Comunn Gaidhealach)*

PROPAGANDA PAMPHLETS No. 1



# The Gaelic Concepts of Life and of Death



By H. CAMERON GILLIES, M.D.

# Dundee Highland Society

(Branch of An Comunn Gaidhealach).

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## OBJECTS.

The D. H. S. being now a Branch of An Comunn Gaidhealach its objects are to encourage and promote:—

- (a) The teaching and use of the Gaelic Language.
- (b) The study and cultivation of Gaelic Literature, History, Music, and Art.
- (c) The Native Industries of the Highlands of Scotland, and the wearing of the Highland Dress.
- (d) The welfare of Highlanders in Dundee and neighbourhood; and
- (e) The furthering of Celtic and patriotic interests.

The Society is non-political and non-sectarian.

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## MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS :

Life, £1 1s. minimum; Ordinary, 1s. minimum annually.

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**Mr JOHN WALKER,**

Solicitor,

**16 Euclid Crescent, Dundee.**



# The Gaelic Concepts of Life and of Death.

BY

H. CAMERON GILLIES, M.D.



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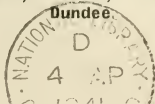
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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Dr CAMERON GILLIES, the Secretary of the Scottish Gaelic Academy, is a native of Sunart, Argyleshire. He studied in Glasgow University, where he graduated M.B., M.Ch., in 1882. In 1893 he took his M.D., being top graduate. In 1877 he compiled a collection of Gaelic Songs for the use of schools. In the preface of that work he said—"I believe that in the Gaelic song lies the means of the Gaelic redemption," a prophecy which is being verified every day. In 1881 he edited a collection of the Gaelic Songs of Dr John MacLachlan, Rahoy. In 1885 he issued "Gaelic Texts for Schools," and in 1896 a Gaelic Grammar, as well as "A Class Book of the Gaelic Language." In 1899 he published "The Gaelic Names of Disease and Diseased States." In 1906 he gained the prize offered by the Caledonian Medical Society by an essay on "A Gaelic Medical MS. of 1563," and the same year he published "The Place Names of Argyll." In 1911 he gave the world "Regimen Sanitatis—the Rule of Health," a Gaelic medical MS. of the early 16th Century. He is at present engaged on the "Dunolly Manuscript of 1611." He has contributed numerous articles to the various medical magazines and journals, and was President of the Caledonian Medical Society in 1903.

The following pages are an extension of a lecture delivered by Dr Gillies to the members of the Dundee Highland Society on January 20th last, and form the first of a proposed series of pamphlets for the furtherance of the objects of the Society.

DUNDEE, April 4th, 1913.



# THE GAELIC CONCEPTS OF LIFE AND OF DEATH.

*By H. CAMERON GILLIES, M.D.*

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I would ask your attention to the form of words in my text: I have not said the Highland concept, but the Gaelic concept. There is nothing in our Highland story so far as I know it, that we need be ashamed of, but very much indeed that we may be proud of; if in the light of our Providence we think we ought to be proud of anything at all, but always thankful for all good and beautiful things. The Gaelic concept is a very much bigger matter than the Highland concept however admirable. The Gaelic language, and the concepts within it, not alone in this aspect which I am about to bring before you, but in many others also is one of the deepest if not even the very deepest factor in European civilisation, and we should be immensely thankful that our Highland people have conserved and have transmitted to us this Gaelic language and the old elemental healthy concepts with which it is so richly and so abundantly stored. Long before Julius Cæsar landed upon our shores with the hosts of Rome, and long before Christianity came into being, the Gaelic language was very old, indeed extremely aged. It was then and long before then falling to pieces because of old age. It had broken into permanent dia-

lects long ages before. We are apt to let expressions regarding time slip off the tongue and through the ear without any clear apprehension. Let us put it in this way. We have all of us, say, that we know, or have known our parents, and I am sure not all of us our grand-parents, and very few indeed our great-grand-parents—although I am greatly thankful that I have on one side both of them, and one on the other for some years. Beyond that all is blank, so far as the human realisation of living feeling is concerned. This only means a hundred years, or a hundred and fifty at the outside, but the language of our people speaks to us out of the utter darkness of thousands of years beyond — and it speaks infallible truth. It is the only truth. It is the crystalized life essence of millenniums, after being filtered through the ages.

### The Language.

Let us think of this for a moment. What is language? Where does it come from? How does it grow? How does it live and remain? I have just now said a strange thing. I have said that language is the only truth, and I wish you to keep your mind's eye upon the expression to see if I am right or wrong. Language has grown from the beginning exactly as it is growing now, and in no other way. To the mind comes an idea or a concept as I prefer to call it. No one knows where it comes from. It comes out of the unknown. Our infinite environment of land and sea and sky generates it in us. We are growing. This thought when it comes is a step in our evolution. We need a word for it. The word comes or is made, and it starts out on its travel in the history of the world—perhaps for all time. The human concept is embodied

in that word, and you can easily understand that so long as that word exists in the world you can, if you understand the word, find within it the elemental thought which brought it into being—and that is the only truth worth entertaining.

I have said that the Gaelic language has crystallized from the filtrate of the ages. Now I mean by this that the thought originally embodied in the word and the word-form itself was not only acceptable and valuable to the generations, but that they treasured them and bequeathed them as gems of rarest value to us of even the present day. Now if you find a highly thoughtful people transmitting crystallized thought through many hundreds of generations down to our day and time, from the very dawn of human knowledge I must ask you where can you expect to find truth if it is not there. There is no standard fixed truth—not even in pure mathematics—but when you find thoughts lasting through long centuries of intelligence and coming into our lives of this day they are surely worthy of consideration.

Again and finally upon this prefatory aspect of the matter you will at once see that from a language you can easily judge and measure with precision the thought and the character of the people who made it. You can have no more difficulty in distinguishing between the filthy billingsgate of a low people and the language of high manliness than you can have between the squeak of a mouse and the roar of a lion.

Now let us see what the Gaelic language says, but I would like first of all to paint in the background as it was according to English historians, who, by the way are the most ignorant and prejudiced people I ever made

acquaintance with. I cannot devote any time to this, but if you doubt me or want to understand me read first Lord Macaulay's chapter upon Highland civilisation in his "History of England," where the Highland people are described as filthy, cut-throat savages of the vilest imaginable kind. Read it and read it often. There is nothing in English literature more entertaining. It has given me hearty laughter for many years. There are other lords and supposed historians of the present day who would like to say the same or similar things, but they dare not. They have not the courage. Our active awakening in these later days to the realisation of the worth and worthiness of our own people and to our own true history is too much for them, and they fall back into the very secondary place which is theirs by every natural intention. Let us appeal away from them and from all such to our own people and our own language on the solid and unquestionable basis I have just laid down. I am not going to begin where Prof. Schäfer left off with the vital energies of an oil globule or when synthetic babies can be bought at the chemist's shop or at the grocers. I begin where man reveals himself by his intelligence as expressed in his language

There are one or two ways or perhaps three by which we can follow the concepts of my text. There is first the testimony in the essential language itself which cannot err or be mistaken, as I think I have already shown. Then there is our very long tradition, "Lord knows how long," for tradition has a long memory. Then there is the written word, although in our case it must be rightly esteemed as a chapter of our tradition.



### Circumstances of the People.

I would like here just to point out the circumstances of our Gaelic people. Let us say that they could neither read or write, and that is very near the truth. I am most thankful that they could not. They simply lived and grew and thought in their great and glorious surroundings. They became of necessity wise. They could not help it. They got saturated with the influence of their natural environment, and so as to conserve and economise their life observations they concentrated them into something like Algebraic formulae. In this way they left us incomparably the finest body of Proverbs upon the face of the earth. If we had nothing but these Proverbs to our Gaelic name we are an extremely rich people. I will give you one or two of these, and leave you to search the whole history of mankind to find anything which surpassed them; aye, or even equals them. Here is one: *Is i an dias is truime is isle chromas ceann*. It is the heaviest ear of corn that bends the head lowest. You will tell me when you find anything to surpass the fine humanity in that expression, so richly laden with the humility that always goes with true greatness. Then there is the old Ossianic conundrum, *Ciod e is deirge na an teine?* What is redder than the fire? The answer was and is: A generous hospitable man's face when a guest comes and he has nothing worthy to put before him. I make no comment on that. Take it with you. I know it is in the heart and blood of you all, but remember where it came from—from the savages, our ancestors! One more—"A man should shake hands with a clean hand." If comparison is possible this is the greatest of the beautiful three. It goes to the back and

to the bed-rock bottom of all cleanliness in all life conduct — in manner, in honour, in honesty, and in truth.

These are only three out of the almost equally beautiful thousands I could give you. What do you think of these things? Do such things as these come from thoughtless savages? Are such concepts as these worth knowing, worth having, worth cherishing, worth treasuring? I think so. Our ancestors thought so, and surely that man is not to be envied who does not think so now. It is quite possible that there may be some who are not quite clear why you have a Highland Society in Dundee, although I know well that some of you do know, and that is the explanation of your vigorous and very purposeful existence. Cleanliness and manliness are no mean elements in a human life; in fact, that is all the religion I want, and our people have sent down to us, their children, these fine concepts in brimful measure. We must hold these great things fast and sacred, and we must pass them on. If we do not then certainly we are unworthy of the names we bear, and that assuredly will not be good for us. One of our oldest and greatest proverbs is: Follow close, adhere intensely to the fame of your fathers. *Lean gu dlùth ri cliu do shinn-sir.* May it be so. So may it be.

### Some of the Men.

I will now bring before you in brief review some of the men who grew within the old Gaelic language, and I shall leave it largely to your own judgment to estimate the concept of life which they reveal. The first man I wish to bring before you is the Gaelic *Duine Còir*. Now who is he? What is your concept of him? Those of you who know Gaelic,

and have the Gaelic instinct will at once say that he is the kind man, the generous man, the altogether good man—and you are right. But who really is he? He is simply the just man—and none but he *Còir* means justice and to be just; and justice implied to the Gaelic concept all that was best and highest in the nature of man. There is not upon the whole earth, and there is not possible to the human imagination a finer character or a finer type of man—so far as he reaches—than the *Duine Còir* of the Gaelic language.

The next man I am to introduce, or rather to reveal to you, is the Gaelic *Duine-foghainteach*. Now who is he? He is the hero you say, the brave man, the warrior. Yes, I will take all that. The *Duine-foghainteach* is all this, and more, in one. But who really is he in Gaelic. He is just and simply the *sufficient* man—no more and not less. He is the man that the great American Waldo Emerson described as “the man at home” within himself—the self-contained man, the sufficient man, the man waiting for the occasion, and ready at all times for the occasion, come what may. He is the strong man—in reserve. We have no word in Gaelic for a bully, as we have no word for a coward. The sufficient man was good enough for our people. May I express the sincere hope that we, their perhaps weaker descendants, may keep a place of high esteem for this very fine strong man—the *duine-foghainteach*.

### An Duine-cothromach.

The next man in my review is the *Duine-cothromach*, a very near relative of the *duine-foghainteach*. Who is he? You know him well, I hope. He is the man who harbours not hate nor declares his love to excess.

He is not a slave to anger nor to timidity. He boasts not of his strength, and he shows no weakness. He suffers neither from poverty nor from riches. He is the *equally-balanced man*, for that is what the name means literally. *Cothromach* means equally balanced by the rigid beam in character, conduct, and estate. You will, I am sure, agree with me that he was and is a fine equable, stable solid citizen. We could always do with a great many of him, because to quote Emerson again, "Your civilisation is not indicated by your census or the size of your cities, but by the breed of the people it produces." Lord Bacon said the same thing, and we all know that it is quite true. It will be a very bad day for us and for our country when the *duine-foghainteach* and the *duine-cothromach* gets rare.

### An Duine-beairteach.

We have two men, two Gaelic men, who are supposed to be rich in the English sense. If I ask you the Gaelic for a rich man you will at once say *Duine-bcairteach*, and those of you who know your Bible may say *Duinc-saibhir*. The *duine-beairteach* is in every day use; the *duine-saibhir* is not in so common use. He is more Scriptural, and he is perhaps more classical than the other, but they are both perversions. They are both splendid Gaelic men, but they cannot be, or be made Englishmen. Who are they? The *duinc-beairteach*, who is he? What is the meaning of the word *bcairt*? It means an act, a work done, something worthily attained and accomplished, and our great Gaelic *duine-bcairteach* is the man who has a rich sheaf of duty done in his right hand. In the 145th Psalm we have *Do bhearta iongantach* and *Do bhearta-uamhasach*—Thy wonderful and Thy terrible

deeds, and in our everyday speech we say *droch-bheairt* and *dòbhairt* for an evil deed. Now we see quite clearly that *bheairt* is a good deed or a good work done, and that the Gaelic *duine-bheairteach* was a man of deeds, a man of action; a man, say like Lord Kelvin or Lord Lister, and that the money-bag's man had nothing to do with the case or the concept. The moneybag's man had another place in the Gaelic estimate to which I may presently refer.

### An Duine-saibhir.

The other one, the *duine-saibhir* is the rich man the Dives of the New Testament, who went to Hell and did not like the place (Luke, 16). I have always protested against this degraded use of a splendid word, and I do so again now, and stronger than ever if that is possible. The *Saoi* of Gaelic was and is a brave man, a hero, even if he never had a copper in the world, and his degradation to an English guinea pig is to me hurtful and hateful. In one of our *Sean Dàna* I came across a very fine statement of the *Saoi*:

Esan a thuiteas le buaidh  
Tha e 'faotainn caochladh nuadh  
A' mealtuinn ionmhas nan saoi  
Nach ionmhuinn a chaoidh a chomhnuidh.

—"He who falls with victory, he gets a new change, he enjoys the riches of the brave, how blessed for ever his habitation." There is very much in this quotation that I wish you to remember for a few minutes, and as long as you can. Not so very long ago I had a letter from an evidently accomplished Highlander whom I do not know, and he finished the letter with the words, "*Is mise a shaoi do charaid.*" I have no suspicion that I merit the term, and I only mention it because of

my friend's correct use of the word from his point of view and estimate.

The omnivorous English language has for long tried to swallow and digest these two great men of ours, but they have disagreed with its stomach. They have proved to be indigestible. They cannot be assimilated in English. They remain our own. Our own two fine fellows—the *duine-beairteach* and the *duine-saibhir*—our man of deeds and our hero, and we do not want to part with them. This is not good physiology, but you must excuse it. There is some truth in it, even if it is crudely stated.

### An Duin'-uasal.

Another of our Gaelic men in review, which the English language has tried to absorb and digest, but cannot, is our *Duine-uasal*—and for that failure one person in the world is thankful. There may be more. The English tongue and the English concept has no room for our *duine-uasal*. They have a very fine man of their own—the gentleman—and they think that he is the same as our *duine-uasal*, but he is not. The English concept in the Gentleman is really a very fine one, and although the name is of Latin origin, which we need not follow through its long career in later languages, it is even upon its face value of simply the *gentle man*, a very fine and admirable character, but he is not our *duine-uasal*.

Our man contains the gentleman as the greater contains the less. Our *duine-uasal* must be a gentleman, but he is far more. I have been in England now for practically a life time, and have met many English gentlemen, but it has been to me quite wonderful how very few men I have met to whom our

*Duine-uasal* could be rightly applied, according to my judgment. I think I would make our late King a *Duine-uasal*. I would certainly do so if he had been a Highlander, which, I believe, he in strong part was. There are one or two Englishmen in our public life just now whom I might almost risk to call *duine-uasal*, but it would be invidious to mention names. I say, however, in all judicious charity that the English *duine-uasal* is rare, very rare. But, after all, we must remember that the *duine-uasal* is a product of our Gaelic life and language, and in later days of the Highlands of Scotland, and we cannot expect to meet him everywhere. I have seen him abundantly among the Camerons and the MacDonalds, of Lochaber, and in the MacLeods, of Morven. One of the MacLeods of Morven, Sir George, was teacher of Surgery at the University of Glasgow. A finer specimen of a man, with his supreme natural dignity, was rarely to be seen. I do not know the other parts of the Highlands intimately enough, but I have no doubt that the *duine-uasal* was there, too, and I hope still is. The most perfect specimen of a Highland *duine-uasal* that I ever saw was a grandson of Flora MacDonald. His name was Allan Ronald MacDonald Jeffrey, on whose coffin I dropped a little white flower in Norwood Cemetery, London, now too many years ago. We may have Knights of the Thistle and of the Garter and of St Patrick and of other things, but the *duine-uasal* is our man—the aristocrat of Nature, and by nature. He is quite sufficient for us. Who is he? Some have thought that he is the Nobleman of English—or the distinguished man. No, he is not. The *duine-uasal* very often prefers not to be Know-able or distinguished. Great humility

is almost always of his finest factors. It is the heaviest ear of corn that bends the head lowest—and we have noblemen who do not suffer in this way. Many a man is distinguished because he is most anxious to be so—because he cannot afford to be otherwise. Not so the *duinc-uasal*. He is Nature's full and complete man up to the present time. He is our *duinc-còir* and our *duinc-foghainteach* and our *duinc-cothromach* and our *duinc-beairteach* and our *duinc-saibhir* all rolled into one. Now again, who is he? You know that the word *uasal* is the exact opposite of the word *iosal*, and you know that *iosal* means "low" in English. Now when you speak of a "low" man in English it is very bad indeed. Perhaps there is no more comprehensive word in the English language than this for worthlessness and unmerit. Now take his very zenithal opposite man the "high" man and you approach to an apprehension of the *duinc-uasal* of Gaelic. The *duinc-uasal* is the upwardly man, the man making for above, the man with his face turned upwards towards great things, and not downwards, to things small and mean and low. It is surely interesting that the Greek name for a man means "the creature with the face turned upwards," but this was merely in the animal sense, and not as our *duinc-uasal* who has his face upwards in the moral and intellectual and truly spiritual sense. We have no *duinc-iosal* in Gaelic. As the English have no "high" man we have no "low" man in the language, although we have one that does duty for him, as I may perhaps show you.

The Gaelic *duinc-uasal* has been dragged into English by several ignorant ways. By the wretchedly ignorant people called English historians he has been equated with the



*vassail* serf or slave of the Norman Conquest and its vile degrading consequences. Mathew Arnold, a lovely cultured man, with wide, healthy sympathies, and a sincere student of our Keltic tradition called English history, "a Mississippi of Falsehoods." These people did not know

The brave *duine-uasals* three thousand times  
three

That marched with the bonnets of Bonnie  
Dundee.

No, and they do not know him now. Our *Duinc-uasal* is of our own genesis—our own special culture, and wherever he is, in his own Highland glen or at the ends of the earth, every beat of his heart says *duin-uasal*, *duin-uasal*, for his own moral and spiritual sustenance first, and then by his influence, for the good of all mankind. It will be a very bad day and a very sad day indeed when the concept and inspiration of the Gaelic *duine-uasal* falls out of the life of humanity. Let us earnestly hope and pray that it never shall.

### An Trusdar.

We have now made the acquaintance of our Royal Family. What of the other side of the medallion? Our Royal Family is numerous; the names on the other side are few, I am glad to say, but they are terribly expressive. The *Trudar* or *Trusdar* is King of them\* all—the great king of dirt and worthlessness. In order to perhaps assist my own measure and understanding of this fellow I consulted my Highland Society's great Dictionary, and this is what I found. "*Trudar*, *Trusdar*—a dirty, worthless fellow, homo vilis, faedatus; an obscene fellow, impudicus, impurus quis—a filthy or nasty fellow, spurcus, immundus

quis--filth, dirt, unclean, impure," "immundus canis" a dirty dog, as Horace has it, lutum. spurcities, mud, mire, scum of the earth. Again under his profession or life-purpose of *Trusdaireachd* I found dirtiness, filthiness, immundities, meanness, worthlessness, vilitas, obscenity, obscenitas, impuritas." These are not my words. If I used words like these you might think that I was overdoing the *Trusdar*, greatly as I dislike him. These words came from the clean hand and the clean heart of Ewen MacLachlan, the scholar absolute, and I should not mind saying the Highlander of most delicate mind and touch who ever lived—at anyrate in our knowledge. He was the author in Gaelic and in English of "Air faillirin illirin" and of very many other things in Gaelic in Greek in Latin and in Scots—a gem of our people and of our race, one of the healthiest Highland minds in our healthy Highland story. Whenever you find yourselves in that small great Lochaber you will see his obelisk monument on the *Creagan* there, and you will make your reverent bow to the memory of this man. It will do you good. I have done it more than once, and felt better every time. He clearly did not like the *Trusdar*.

Now who is this fellow the *Trusdar* on which such a cataclysm of loathsomeness and dirt has fallen? He is a very simple, single-minded man after all. He is simply the Gatherer — the selfish man, the *Trus-adair* with the verb *Trus* "gather," as the base. He is the man with the muck-rake of the "Pilgrim's Progress"—*Bodach an Ràchdain* as he has been most happily translated. If this was a meeting "for men only" I could give you very strong proof of how our people loathed the selfish man—the Gatherer. I am

fairly familiar with the expressions used regarding the selfish man in quite a number of languages, but they are mere mild poetry compared with the terrible intensity with which the Gaelic tongue blasphemes this fellow—the Gatherer, the *Trusdar*.

### An Tuathal.

The only other character on this side of the account I wish to refer to is the *Tuathal*. He is the *weakling* of the Gaelic language, the pithless, purposeless, feckless, luckless, useless man. He is as very nearly the opposite of the *Duine-foghainteach* as the *Trusdar* is of the *Duine-còir*. The healthy Gaelic people threw him on the rubbish heap as a creature of no account. You wonder why I should trouble with him. Wait and see. He is a most interesting fellow. If you cut off his tail—the tail of the word *Tuath-al* you are left with the word *Tuath*, and thereby hangs a tale—even if you have cut the other away. The word *Tuath* means North—so the *Tuathal* is the man who goes North, which implies that the sensible, purposeful man goes South. This is, of course, a big compliment to those who have found their way to London—to make their fortunes. The matter is quite clear. Samuel Johnson—*Bodach na Beurla*—said that the Scotsman's finest vision was the way South. He said that deep down in geological strata you could find that the big beasts of the prime were always on the way South—as their footprints in the rocks show; and in the ages to come some wise man of science may discern the footprints of the Lewisman and the Skyeman with his terrier in the hardened London clay in the northern suburbs of London—on his way South. and if he does not it is not because they are not

there. "Gang Sooth" is the great Scottish advice, and that it has been accepted there can be no doubt at all as the whole and best life of England shows to-day—and it is not to the loss of England.

There is another very interesting facet to the *Tuathal*. He is a most interesting remnant and product of the old Sun-worship religion of the Gaelic people. To go *Tuathal* is to go "the left-hand gait"—to turn to the left was the most unfortunate, inauspicious, and disastrous course that could possibly be the commencement of any undertaking. It was *ipso facto* doomed to failure. Why? Let me recall one or two familiar things to you. If you face the East, where the sun rises, you call that the *Aird an car* and your back is towards the *Aird an iar*. But *car* or *oir* means the front or edge, and *iar* means behind or after. Your right hand is *Deas*—you say your *deas-lamh* right hand or really South hand, and your left hand is *tuath-lamh* or North hand. What is the meaning of all this? It means that our people were Sun-worshippers or Nature-worshippers, as they even now are to a very remarkable extent even if they may not know it. When in your Psalms you sing an *Iolach àrd* you are only singing *Yule-tide*, when the sun turns from the South on its way North. Yule is perhaps a Scandinavian word—and these people had even more reason than ourselves to make *Yule-uch* when the sun turned. We have always turned towards the sun, and I hope we always shall. We so far North always get the sun from the South, and that is why we find there our right hand and our left hand *tuathal*—to the North. So the poor *Tuathal* is after all an interesting person—even if in a sort of negative sense. Poor

*Tuathal* I have some sympathy with him while I have none at all for the *Trusdar*. It is not my purpose nor my duty on this occasion to show you how very much of paganism remains in our great religions, but it is there, and strongly there.

### The Written Word.

Our written word, so far as it concerns us just now is very limited, but yet most interesting. The poetry of Ossian and the *Sean Dána* recorded by Dr Smith are all I shall refer to. You may know that regarding these and their authenticity there has been endless discussion and doubt, but I have several extremely good reasons for believing in their genuineness and in their very great antiquity, and that they must have come down by the long tradition of our people. MacPherson and Smith merely recorded them, and perhaps strung them together. They clearly did not understand them, because when they attempted to translate them they failed entirely, and spoiled them, but for all that they have done us an immense service in securing them and passing them down. We should be much poorer without them. It was utterly impossible for MacPherson and for Smith to have shown the results of modern archæology, and yet these are clearly revealed and confirmed in this quite wonderful poetry in a very remarkable way. You must then take my own word, or at anyrate accept my judgment upon these old things, so that when I appeal to them you may with some confidence accept the evidence in them as showing a very early and appreciable stage in the mind and civilisation of our race and people.

The deepest impression that has come to me from the study or rather the assimilation of



these old records of the mind of our race is the entire absence of the fear of death—and at this point you will kindly notice that I am entering upon the second part of my text. It is, and it has been a very difficult matter for me to make sure that our people of those far-away days apprehended death at all. They saw and recognised a *change*, but that was all. The modern mind is strongly inclined to look upon death as extinction. Our teaching has to do with this, and it is not healthy. The old Gaelic concept had nothing of this in it. The departed heroes looked down from their grey, great hall in the clouds in sympathy of pride or distress upon the actions of their sons or sires below, and their spirits were in the thick of the battle as truly and powerfully and effectively as the bone and sinew of those below upon whom they looked down and inspired. I will give here a few expressions of this concept, which are to me sublime:—

*From Tighmora—Ossian:*

C' uime 'labhras an rìgh mu 'n uaigh?  
Threig a thuar an laoch  
Biodh sòlas mu anam-sa shuas.

“Wherefore does the King speak of the grave? The hero has changed his complexion (that is all). Let there be joy over his soul above.”

*Again from Tiomna Ghoill—Sean Dàna.*

Agus a Mhorna na'm faiceadh tusa  
Dò mhac a teicheadh o'n àraich  
Nach tigeadh rudh air do ghruaidh aosda  
An lathair nan laoch neulach.

“And Morna if you saw your son flee from the field would not redness (a blush) come to your aged cheek in presence of the heroes in the clouds.”

In Tiomna Ghoill—on his death, later on the poem has it—

Mar dean soillse nam speur dhoibh innseadh,  
Innsibh a reulta ruiteach  
Do theach nan laoch mar thuit mi-fein.

“If the brightness of the skies do not declare it. Let you ye ruddy stars tell in the home of the heroes how I fell.”

### The Long Bow.

They could draw the long bow handsomely. The Eagle of Gwern Abwy quoted by Renan when asked how old it was gave answer, “When I came to this place there was a rock here so high that from the top of it I used to peck at the stars every evening, but time has worn it so that it is now only a few inches high”—surely a tall rock and a very old eagle. I came across another good example in the description of a fight between the hosts of the Feinne and their enemies—“When the hosts met it was like the clash of two days of Judgment.” That is not a bad effort. I think it is very good. Then of Caoilte, the Mercury of the Gael, it was said that when he ran, his speed was such that the onlookers saw three of him. And the dog Luath was so swift that he left the hurricane far behind. As he ran behind the mountains a dog was to be seen at each pass at the same time.

I will not weary you with more of these. You may take them like the three proverbs I gave as going all the way, and that a long way indeed, into the life of our people and into a life of supremest interest and value to us who inherit the tradition. We have been robbed of this very fine concept of life by an alien teaching, for which we have no use. I do not like our modern concept of death at

all. In fact I dislike it very much. I prefer the fine paganism of our people a thousand times. The old concept made heroes; this of latter days makes cowards. The coward was not then known to our people, but now the hero is looked upon as an exceptional person. The Gaelic people did not know the hero nor the coward. The moment the one is admitted the other is for the first time realised. Without the coward there is no hero.

### An Gealtair.

I should like you to look upon this clear absence of the fear of death in the life of our race as not a virtue or a wonderful thing at all. To their mind and feeling this was as natural and as necessary a function of life as their breathing. A healthy man does not know and does not think that he is healthy until he sees the diseased man. The brave man has no knowledge that he is brave until he sees that diseased creature, the coward. The Gaelic language had no word for a coward, and I take this to be good proof or rather justification for the position which I wish to maintain—that our people had no concept of cowardice and no fear of death at all. Why had they no name for the coward? Simply because they did not know him. They did not have the word because they did not know the thing. If they had the thing or any concept of it they would certainly have the word—but they had it not. The coward only came to us in later days with alien things and thoughts, with our civilisation so called, but even then our people having no knowledge of him and not recognising him called him *Gealtair*, that is to say—madman; and that, I am thankful to say, is our name for the coward now. It is surely a



fine level of humanity where there is no concept of the coward, and the level is not much lowered when we look upon him as a madman. So and such was the thought of our people, and so it is now for which we should be profoundly thankful.

The fear of death which has come into our later life is a vile destructive disease, worse by infinity than all our consumptions and cancers. It poisons and paralyses and degrades human life from the beginning and throughout, and to the end. There was no death in the old Gaelic life or language as I think I have in past shown, and if people only knew and realised it there is no death in the language now. We certainly have the word *bàs* for death, but the word is never correctly used of the human being, but always of the death of the lower animals. When the human being dies we always say *chaochail e*—he has changed—the exact same word that we use when the face of the skye changes or the weather. We also say *shiubhail e*—he has gone on his journey just as we say when a man leaves home on a journey. These words are in common use to-day, even if new values are attached to them unfortunately. But the words themselves are the abiding protest against their wrong interpretation. There is no concept in them of extinction, as the modern mind is disposed to imagine. They are rather a progression—an advancement of life—and not death at all. These are very beautiful and man-making concepts. They give courage and strength. They don't make us afraid. Let us keep them, lay strong hold upon them and not part with them.

These expressions cannot be used of the death of the lower animals as any one who knows Gaelic will tell you, and this again

reveals a very high and delicate concept which we are none the worse for knowing and cherishing.

### Hero Land.

We have neamh in common with the other Indo-European tongues, but our own word for heaven is flathannas—hero land. We never had a word for Hell until Ifrinn was lent us by the Roman Church. We don't hear much of it now; Carlyle said that Robert Burns closed it up.

### Tiodhlacadh.

Our word for a funeral or burial is altogether lovely. It is *tiodhlacadh* or the gift—the same word you would use in giving a wedding present to a bride. There is no sorrow in the concept nor any sadness. It is simply the change or the further continuation of the journey. The Lord Christ is *Tiodhlacadh Dhè*, the Gift of God to the world. Nothing imaginable to me can be more beautiful or more healthy, and this, remember again, is the language of our ancestors, the dirty savages of the English historian.

But when I say these things don't you for a moment believe that our healthy old paganism—which simply means the religion that grew in the open country, and not in the towns—has disappeared from, or has no place in our religions of later day. No. They are full of it saturated with it, and all you have to do is to scratch the surface, and you find it there strong, deep and vitally, and morally effective. Yes, and more than that if you keep your eyes and your ears and your understanding open it will not be very difficult for you to recognise that the tendency of the religious currents of the present day is setting strongly towards the old natural thought.

In my younger days I used to look with unlimited admiration upon the Prince Charlie monument in Glenfinnan at the head of the unspeakably grand Loch-shiel. In my very boyhood I got fascinated by the Gaelic inscription upon the Tower, and it has stuck to me through all my days. For the purpose of this paper I asked the priest of Glenalladale, Father William MacDonald and another friend to send me copies of the Gaelic inscription—it is in Latin and in French also—and I have it here with me, by their kindness. The point of interest to you is in one expression: “Chaidh an Tur so a thogail leis an Uasal urramach Alasdair Domhnullach Triath Ghlinnealadaid, Ceann uidhe na feile a chaochail beatha an Duneidinn Bliadhna MDCCCXV an Tùs àidh”—This Tower was raised by Alexander MacDonald, Chief of Glenalladale *who changed life in Edinburgh* in the year 1815. There is no concept of death there—in fact the splendid expression excludes it entirely. This is only an expression of yesterday, of to-day, if you like—but, and do not forget it, there is a fine fragment of our inheritance from “the tale of other days,” from the concept of the days of old, from the savages our ancestors. It is delightfully beautiful, and I am very thankful to be able to place it before you.

### Testament of the People.

The Gaelic people have behind them the accumulated inertia of their race history and of their language for many thousands of years, and if their children only understood and realised the immense moral and socially effective power which this gives them they would part with their right arm sooner than with

a tittle of the finest inheritance of any people in Europe. If they part with their language, kilts and sporans and plating and bagpipes will not save them from the contempt which their folly merits and invites—although when I say this I must yet say that the Highland tartan dress is the most picturesque and artistic dress in the world.

Let us put the matter in another way. Suppose we had no tradition and no accumulated inheritance of the natural observation or of that wisdom and practical experience of life which has come down to us from generations that were forgotten thousands of years ago, what should we be worth? We should be worth nothing at all, but what we could in our own one short life realise. We should stand in naked helplessness in the utter darkness, cowed and amazed before the undetermined forces of Nature, living in caves and rock-shelters, making more or less ingenious war with wild beasts in order to live. But now at the very day of our birth we are the heirs of all the ages. It is as if our lives were extended to 10,000 years instead of our poor 70. Will you throw that away or any part of it? We have no records of human experience nor any storehouse of human wisdom that can at all be compared with language. It is the great and abiding Will and Testament of the people of the past to their children of the present time, and as far as we are concerned in that Will and Testament there is nothing which should be at all so precious to us as the language of our inheritance and of our blood and being. It has bequeathed to us the *Duine-còir*, the *Duine-foahainteuch* and the *Duin'-uasal* and the others, and an astonishment of delight and

wisdom besides. "Wherefore being surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us run with patience the race set before us."

*Cuimhnich air na suinn o'n d'thainig, 's lean gu dlùth ri cliù do shinnsir.*



FHIR ASDAIR  
 M'AS MIANN LEAT LUaidH  
 AIR SGEUL AINMEIL NAN LAITHEAN A  
 THREIG  
 THIG DLUTH, AGUS DEAN UMHLACHD!  
 SO AM BALL  
 AN D' FHOILLSICH PRIONNS TEARLACH  
 A BHRATACH,  
 'NUAIR A SGAOIL AM FIREUN OG A  
 SGIATHAN,  
 AM MORCHUIS ANAMA,  
 A CHOSNADH NA RIOGHACHD A CHAILL  
 ATHAIRICHEAN:  
 AGUS A THILG E E FEIN  
 GUN CHOMHNADH GUN CHARAID,  
 AN UCHD FIUGHANTACH NAM FLATH  
 MEAMNACH,  
 'S NAN LAOCH THREUN,  
 A THOGAIR EIRIGH GUN ATHADH,  
 A DHIOL A CHORACH NO CHALL A  
 BHEATHA.  
 MAR CHUIMHNE  
 AIR AN RIOGHALACHD, AN DILLSEACHD,  
 AGUS AN CRUADAL,  
 ANNS GACH GABHADH A LEAN,  
 CHAIDH AN TUR SO A THOGAIL.  
 LEIS AN OG UASAL URRAMACH  
 ALASDAIR DOMHNULLACH, TRIATH  
 GHLINNEALADAILL.  
 CEANN UIDHE NA FEILE  
 A CHAOCHAIL BEATHA AN DUNEIDINN,  
 BLIADHNA MDCCCXV  
 'AN TUS AIDH.

*Gaelic Inscription on Prince Charlie's Monument  
 at Glenfinnan, Inverness-shire.*







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