

## LAST FAREWELL TO THE HILLS.

AFTER THE GAELIC OF DUNCAN MACINTYRE.

I was on Ben Doran yesterday.  
Its corries—I can well recall them,  
And I looked down on many a glen  
And many a ben—I know them all there.  
Oh, it is a sight surprising  
On the hills to go a-climbing  
Yes, to see the sun arising  
And to hear the deer a-calling.

It's fine to see the herds so gay  
That move away so noisily ;  
The hinds that near the water stay  
While play the young calves prettily.  
Turn round and look down on the deer,  
The black and red cock whirring near,  
'Tis a sound the finest you can hear  
When you hear it at the break of day.

Now my head is "at its greying,"  
And they're saying my hair is thinning ;  
But I've oft let slip the greyhound  
When we went round at the hunting.  
To me, as of old, the hunt's still dear,  
And on the slope I see the deer ;  
Yet never more will I get near—  
For I am scarce of breathing.

My blessing on the forest lies,  
Where rise in glory all the mountains,  
Where streams run hid in dark-green moss  
And toss from out a hundred fountains.

The moors are fine as in days of yore,  
 The rocks will be wild for evermore,  
 But I will climb them now no more—  
 My thousand blessings I leave upon them.

#### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

The foregoing verses are taken from one of the best known poems in the Gaelic language. The original is known by heart to every Gael who cherishes his native literature, and it is not difficult to find West Highlanders who can recite it off-hand. Its recitation, in such a case, is done softly and tenderly, as of something which makes an intimate appeal to the Gaelic heart. By common consent Macintyre ranks as the greatest of Gaelic poets, or at any rate as the greatest master of Gaelic versification. Something of the loving esteem in which he is held may be gathered when it is added that to-day, more than a hundred years after his death, he is still referred to by the affectionate title which he earned in his lifetime, "Donnchadh Ban nan Oran"—"Fair Duncan of the Songs." He wrote songs and odes, and what comes out in most of them, as in the specimen rendered above, is his great enthusiasm as a huntsman. Besides this there is the local colour. He was a native of Glenorchy, and his verse has bound his memory to Ben Doran (Beinn-dorain), near the foot of which he was born. This "Farewell to the Hills" was written in 1802 when he was seventy-eight years old; and his monument is really that stately hill which is mentioned in the first line of it. The West Highland railway now runs past the poet's old home; and the "smoky chariot," as it is called in Gaelic, carries multitudes every day along the very base of Ben Doran who know nothing either of Macintyre or his songs. Such is progress.

The rendering given above makes no claim to being poetry, or even good versé; nor is it a strictly literal translation. What has been really attempted is to reproduce the swing and movement of the original, to

catch, so to speak, the music of the Gaelic verse and reproduce it with English words. The attempt may have been worth making, but the difference between the two languages practically precludes any real success. For English is a hard-bitten consonantal tongue ; spoken Gaelic is a soft string of vowel sounds. Moreover, Gaelic verse proceeds on different principles from English verse, principles which arise from the nature of the language itself. Gaelic rhyme is quite a different thing from ours. Full-blooded rhymes at the ends of lines, such as we have, are not common ; in fact rhyming words like "mountains" and "fountains" scarcely occur in Gaelic. Instead of this most of their terminal rhyming consists of a mere assonance of vowels. This I have attempted to reproduce in "noisily," "prettily," "break-of-day," and so on. I imagine that "recall them," "all there," "a-calling," are almost assonant enough to satisfy a Gaelic ear, that is to say, to constitute a rhyme according to their ideas. Much better defined than the terminal rhyme in Gaelic verse is, as a rule, the internal rhyme, represented above by "lies," "rise," "moss," "toss," and so on. This internal rhyming is a very favourite device of the Gaelic poet, and produces an echoing effect frequently of very great charm. It is found abundantly in Highland songs ; but it is rare in English poetry, though an instance of the same sort of thing may be found in Shelley's "Cloud":—

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers  
From the seas and the streams ;  
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid  
In their noonday dreams.

Broadly speaking, I think it is true to say that the Gaelic poet has a larger scope for ingenuity in verse-making than the English poet has. Above all other considerations, he has an audience whose ear is intensely receptive to the sound of his verse, more

ready to be captured, in fact, by the sound than by the sense. The English poet as a rule makes an appeal to the intellect which outweighs his appeal to the ear.

Let us take for instance four lines from Macintyre's poem (the last four lines of the first verse.) Here they are :—

B'e sin an sealladh eibhinn,  
 Bhi'g ineachd air na sleibhtean,  
 Nuair bhiodh a' ghrian ag eirigh,  
 'S a bhiodh na feidh a' langanaich.

These lines describe a Highland sunrise; but they do not describe, they merely suggest. Their charm lies almost entirely in the sound of them. Put beside them for comparison the Lowland poet's description of a Lowland sunrise :—

The rising sun o'er Galston's muirs,  
 Wi' glorious light was glintin',  
 The hares were hirplin' down the furs  
 The laverocks they were chantin'  
 Fu sweet that day.

It is a complete picture, painted in with a few bold strokes. But Burns appeals primarily to the intelligence, not to the ear. As a poet he was far greater than Macintyre as regards observation and intellectual power; but he was less musical. For his audience were Lowlanders, that is, thinkers and doers; Macintyre's audience were singers and dreamers. The same contrast, of course, presents itself when one compares Highland and Lowland folk-song. The former is ethereal and spiritual; the latter concrete and actual. In Lowland songs the words and melody are found in the best instances to balance one another. All the music which the Lowlander wants is supplied by the melody; the words supply the ideas. With the Gaelic folk-song, on the other hand, ideas become of less importance than moods and emotions, and the whole tendency seems to

be to throw the theme entirely into music, a conjoint music of word and melody in which little remains sometimes of the sense of the words except the mere atmosphere they go to create. The Gael is much more intensely musical than the Lowlander; thought and ideas do not interest him so much. It is the highly musical character of a typical piece of Gaelic verse which I have endeavoured to bring out in the foregoing translation.

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