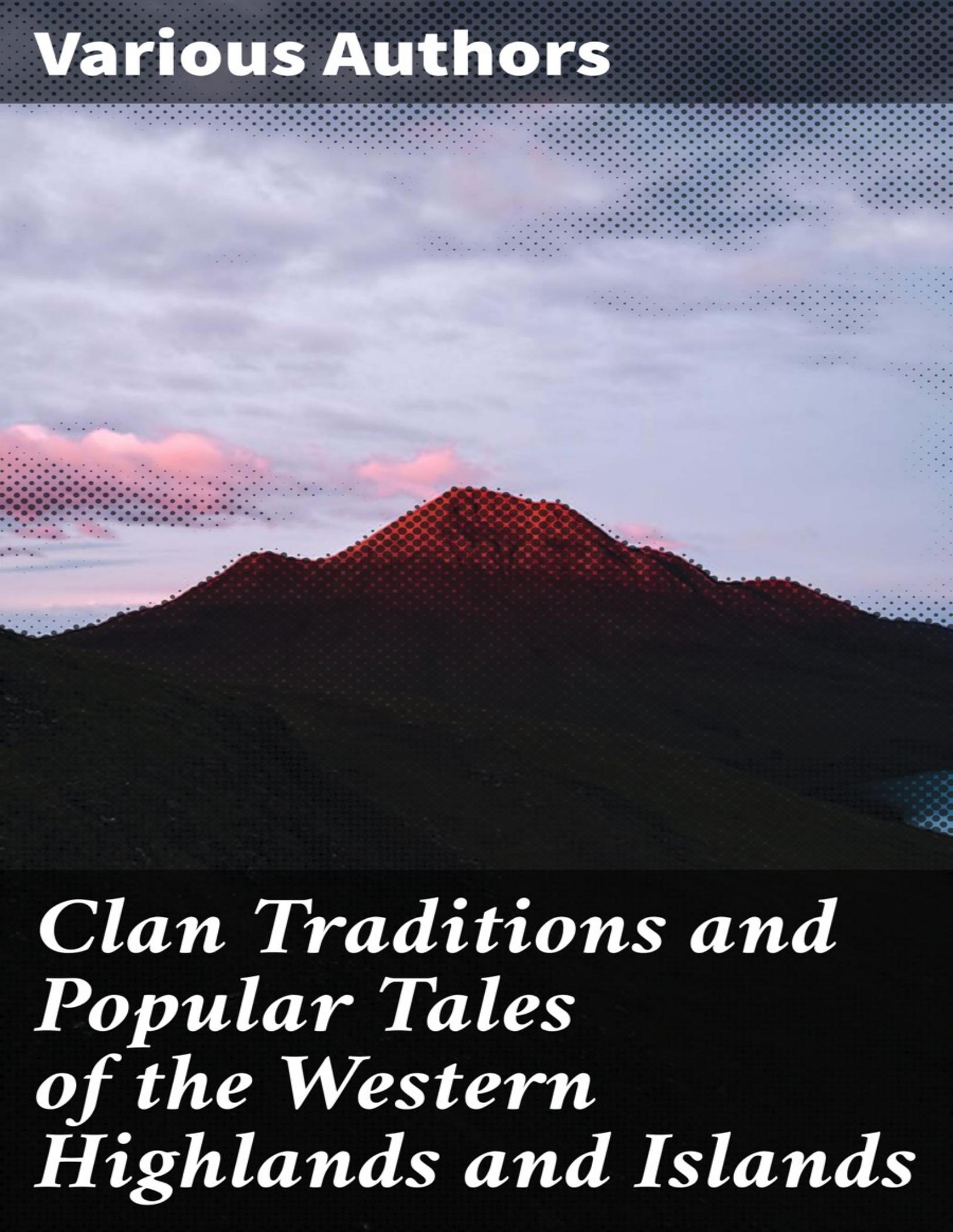


Various Authors



*Clan Traditions and
Popular Tales
of the Western
Highlands and Islands*

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A SELECTION FROM

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It has been thought well and due, by those who knew the late J. G. Campbell of Tiree, to give to the public more tales collected by him, and his sister has made over the following collection, selected by herself from among the tales gathered in the course of many years. We send them forth as a fitting memorial to his memory, and as another stone added to the cairn lovingly erected by old friends. At the end will be found a few letters which passed between the late minister and the late Iain Campbell of Islay, showing the methods of collecting followed by these two lovers of the folk-lore of their native land, and which in consequence cannot but prove of interest and value to those who have followed the steps of the gleaning of folk-tales throughout the British Isles—we may add throughout the world. These patient labourers in such fields were the true pioneers of the movement in Scotland.

Notes, where not otherwise stated, are the author's or editors'; those signed A.N. are due to Mr. Alfred Nutt; those signed A.C. to the undersigned.

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.

Feb. 11, 1895.

INTRODUCTION.

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MEMOIR OF THE LATE JOHN GREGORSON CAMPBELL,
MINISTER OF TIREE.

[The following Memoir is chiefly from information given by Mr. Campbell's sister, Mrs. Wallace of Hynish, thanks to whose unwearied and sympathetic assistance it was that the previous volume in the series, 'The Fians,' was made ready for and passed through the press, and that the present volume has been selected and put together from the mass of the material left by the author].

John Gregorson Campbell was born at Kingairloch, in Argyllshire, in the year 1836, the second son and fourth child of Captain Campbell of the *Cygnets* and of Helen MacGregor, his wife. The fondness for study, the devotion to his native literature and lore, which were such marked features of his life, and which earned for him an abiding reputation as a Gaelic student, would seem to have been his by birthright. His maternal grandfather was an ardent Gael, as may be judged by the letters that passed between him and Dr. Mackintosh. On his mother's side he was descended from Duncan MacGregor, 13th in direct descent from the first MacGregor who settled at Roro, in Glenlyon, Perthshire, whilst through a paternal ancestor he traced back to a race that had had dealings with the 'good people,' and on whom a *bean shith* had laid the spell 'they shall grow like the rush

and wither like the fern' (*fàsaidh iad mar an luachair 's crìonaidh iad mar an raineach*).

The house of his birth on the shores of Loch Linnhe was small and lonely, and when he was three years of age his parents removed to Appin. His childhood was that of many young Highlanders. From earliest boyhood he attended the parish school in the Strath of Appin, walking daily with his older sisters the long stretch that separated it from his father's home. He loved to recall his early schooldays, and their memory was ever dear to him. He had learnt more, he was wont to say in after years, at that school than at all his other schools put together. And on the hillside and along the valley, traversed twice daily, he drank in a love for and knowledge of nature in all her manifestations that remained to him as a priceless possession throughout life. At ten he was sent to Glasgow for further schooling, passed first through the Andersonian University, and went thence to the High School, preparatory to entering College. We have interesting glimpses of him at this period. He seems to have been a dreamy, quick-witted but somewhat indolent lad of whom his masters said, 'if Campbell likes to work no one can beat him'; hot-tempered too, as Highlanders, rightly or wrongly, are credited with being. The only Highlander in the school, he had doubtless much to put up with. His Glasgow schoolfellows had probably as little liking for Highlanders as Baillie Nicol Jarvie himself, and many were the petty persecutions he had to endure. He has himself related how he suffered several hours imprisonment for fighting another boy 'on account of my country.' Like all who are steadily bilingual from early youth he recognised how powerful an

intellectual instrument is the instinctive knowledge of two languages, and was wont to insist upon the aid he had derived from Gaelic in the study of Hebrew and Latin. To one familiar with the complex and archaic organisation of Gaelic speech the acquisition of these languages must indeed be far easier than to one whose first knowledge of speech is based upon the analytic simplicity of English.

From the High School he gladly passed to College, where a happier life and more congenial friendships awaited him. He had many Highland fellow-students, and at this early date his love for the rich stores of oral tradition preserved by his countrymen manifested itself. He sought the acquaintance of good story-tellers, and began to store up in his keenly retentive memory the treasure he has been so largely instrumental in preserving and recording.

After leaving college he read law for awhile with Mr. Foulds. In his lonely island parish he later found his legal training of the utmost assistance. Many were the disputes he was called upon to settle, and, as he has recorded, few there were of his parishioners who needed to take the dangerous voyage to the Sheriff's court on a neighbouring island. At once judge and jury his decisions commanded respect and acquiescence. At this period, and for some time previously, his interest in and mastery of Gaelic legendary lore are shown by the fact that he acted as Secretary to the Glasgow University Ossianic Society, founded in 1831 by *Caraid nan Gàidheal*, and still flourishing.

His thoughts and aspirations had early turned towards the church, and in 1858 he was licensed by the Presbytery of Glasgow. But suffering as he then was from the effects of

inflammation of the lungs, the result of a chill caught in his student days, and the effects of which were perceptible throughout life, he was forbidden to preach for six months. The interval, spent in recruiting his shattered health, was profitable to his growing zeal for folk-lore studies. In Ayrshire or at Blair Athole he showed himself a keen and sympathetic collector of floating oral tradition.

In 1860 he accepted the appointment to the united parishes of Tiree and Coll from the Duke of Argyll, and took up the work which was to occupy the remaining thirty years of his life. It is to be wished that a sphere of activity more commensurate with his abilities had been accepted by him, as when he was offered the assistantship of St. Columba, Glasgow, and he seems at times to have felt as much. But such thoughts were certainly no hindrance to the performance of his duty, interpreted in the largest and most liberal sense. He was the guide and counsellor of his flock, who turned to him with unfailing confidence for advice, exhortation, or reproof. An amusing instance of his parishioners' belief in his capacity may be cited; a sailor lad from Tiree got, as sailor lads will, into some row in Spain and was marched off to jail. He took the matter philosophically, remarking, 'so long as the minister is alive I know they can't hurt me' (*bha fhios agam co fad's a bha 'm ministear beò nach robh cunnart domh*). The esteem and affection in which he was held by his parishioners were cordially reciprocated by him. He is reported as saying that nowhere could be found a more intelligent community than the Duke's tenantry in Tiree, and in the preface to Volume IV. of

the present series he bears witness to the knowledge, intelligence, and character of his informants.

We do not go far wrong in conjecturing that the minister's zealous interest for the preservation and elucidation of the native traditions was not the least potent of his claims upon the respect and love of his flock. How keenly the Highlander still treasures these faint echoes of the past glories and sorrows of his race is known to all who have won his confidence. Unhappily it has not always been the case that this sentiment has been fostered and turned to good account by the natural leaders of the people as it was by John Gregorson Campbell.

In the guidance of his people, in congenial study, in correspondence with Campbell of Islay and other fellow-workers, specimens of which will be found in the appendix (*infra* 138), time passed. His mother died in 1890 at the manse, and his health, for long past indifferent, broke down. The last years of his life were solaced and filled by the work he prepared for the present series. At last, Nov. 22nd, 1891 he passed from his labours and sufferings into rest, the rest of one who had well earned it by devotion to duty and to the higher interests of his race.

In person Campbell was tall and fair, with deep blue eyes full of life and vivacity. He was noted at once for the kindness of his manner, and for the shrewd causticity of his wit. The portrait which serves as frontispiece is taken from the only available photograph, and represents him in middle life.

HIS WORK AS A FOLK-LORIST.

The Gaels of Scotland cannot be accused of indifference to the rich stores of legend current among the people. From the days of the Dean of Lismore, in the late 15th century, onwards, there have not been wanting lovers and recorders of the old songs and stories. Unfortunately, in the 18th century, a new direction was given to the national interest in the race traditions by the Macpherson controversy. I say unfortunately, because attention was thereby concentrated upon one section of tradition to the neglect of others equally interesting and beautiful, and false standards were introduced into the appreciation and criticism of popular oral literature. Valuable as are the materials accumulated in the Report of the Highland Society, and generally in the voluminous literature which grew up round Macpherson's pretensions, they are far less valuable than they might be to the folk-lorist and student of the past, owing to the misapprehension of the real points both of interest and at issue. Two generations had to pass away before Scotch Gaelic folk-lore was to be studied and appreciated for itself.

To Campbell of Islay and the faithful fellow-workers whom he knew how to inspire and organise, falls the chief share in this work, belongs the chief honour of its successful achievement. The publication of the *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* was epoch-making, not only in the general study of folk-lore, but specially for the appreciation and intelligence of Gaelic myth and romance. No higher praise can be given to John Gregorson Campbell than that his folk-lore work is full of the same uncompromising fidelity to popular utterance, the same quick intuition into, and sympathetic grasp of popular imagination as Islay's. His

published work has indeed a somewhat wider range than that of *Leabhar na Feinne* and the *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, as it deals also with those semi-historic traditions, the nearest equivalent the literature of these islands can show to the Icelandic family sagas, which Islay excluded from the two collections he issued. The following is a complete list, so far as can be ascertained, of the published writings of John Gregorson Campbell, in so far as they relate to the legendary romance, history and folk-lore of Gaelic Scotland.

IN THE "CELTIC REVIEW," (1881-85).

No. I. p. 61, West Highland Tale: How Tuairisgeal Mòr was put to death.

" II. p. 115, The Muileartach: a West Highland Tale.[\[1\]](#)

" III. p. 184, West Highland Tale: How Fionn went to the Kingdom of Big Men.[\[2\]](#)

" IV. p. 262, West Highland Tale: MacPhie's Black Dog.

IN THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE INVERNESS GAELIC SOCIETY.

Vol. XIII. (1888) p. 69, Tale of Sir Hallabh O'Corn.

" XIV. (1889) p. 78, Healing of Keyn's Foot.

" XV. (1890) p. 46, Fionn's Ransom.

" XVI. (1891) p. 111, The Pigmies or Dwarfs (*Na h-Amhuisgean*).

" XVII. (1892) p. 58, The Fuller's Son or School of Birds.

IN THE CELTIC MAGAZINE, VOL. XIII, (1887-88.)

No. 148, p. 167, Battle of Gavra or Oscar's Hymn.

" 149, p. 202, do. do. do. (Continued).[\[3\]](#)

HIGHLAND MONTHLY.

Vol. I. No. 10. p. 622, Introduction, &c.

WAIFS AND STRAYS OF CELTIC TRADITION.

Argyllshire Series, No. I.: The Good Housewife (p. 54-69).

Argyllshire Series, No. IV.: The Fians: or Stories, Poems, and Traditions of Fionn and his Warrior Band. Collected entirely from oral sources. 1891.

In presenting his material to the English reader Campbell may profitably be compared with Islay. In few ways was the work of the latter more fruitful than in his mode of rendering Gaelic into English. It is impossible, for instance, to look at the work done of late by the distinguished Irish folk-lorists who are adding a new chapter to Gaelic romance, at the work of Douglas Hyde and W. Larminie and Jeremiah Curtin, and not recognise how much in point of colour and tone and smack of the soil their translations excel those of the pre-Campbell generation. Islay may, at times, have pushed his theory of idiomatic fidelity too far, occasionally where he aims at a rendering he achieves a distortion, but as a whole the effect of strange, wild, archaic atmosphere and medium is given with unerring—one would call it skill, did one not feel that it is the outcome of a nature steeped in the Gaelic modes of conception and expression, and bold enough to invent the English requisite to give an adumbration of them. For indeed the speech of the *Popular Tales* is a distinctive variety of English, deserving study both from the philologist and the artist in words. Islay himself never handled this

speech to better effect than did John Gregorson Campbell in the fine tale, for instance, of Sir Olave O'Corn (*Gaelic Soc. of Inverness*, Vol. XIII.), or in the *Muileartach* (*Waifs and Strays*, Vol. IV.), though as a rule he keeps closer than Islay to the ordinary standard of English expression. Readers of this volume cannot fail to note the exceeding skill with which the pithy, imaginative turns of thought, so plentiful in the original, are rendered into English. The reader is at once taken out of nineteenth century civilisation, and, which is surely the first thing required from the translator, by the mere sound and look of the words carried back into an older, wilder, simpler and yet, in some ways, more artificially complex life. The difficulty of rendering Gaelic into English does not lie in the fact of its possessing a rude simplicity which the more sophisticated language is incapable of reproducing, but rather in that, whilst the emotions and conceptions are close to the primitive passions of nature in a degree that our civilisation has long forsworn, the mode of expression has the richness of colour and elaborate artificiality of a pattern in the Book of Kells. To neglect the latter characteristic is to miss not only a salient feature of the original but to obscure the significance of a dominant factor in the evolution of Gaelic artistry.

That Campbell, like Islay, felt the paramount necessity of endeavouring to reproduce the formal characteristics of his Gaelic text is certain; like Islay, he too, had the true

scholar's regard for his matter. To put down what he heard, to comment upon what he found, was his practice. It seems obvious, but many collectors neglect it all the same. Nor in his essays at interpretation is he other than in full sympathy with his subject. He not only understands but himself possesses the mythopoeic faculty, and if this is endowed with a wider knowledge, a more refined culture than belonged to the Gaelic bards who first gave these songs and stories their present shape, or to the peasants and fishermen who lovingly repeat them, it differs in degree only, not in kind. It may be doubted that the framers of the *Muileartach* consciously embodied the conceptions which Campbell has read into the old poem (*Waifs and Strays*, IV. pp. 131-135), but I think it certain that he does but give shape with the precision of a a higher culture to ideas which, with them, never emerged from the stage of mythic realisation.

THE PRESENT WORK.

Most of the matter contained in the present volume had been partially, if not definitely, prepared for press by the author. The choice and arrangement are largely due to his sister, Mrs. Wallace, his devoted fellow-worker. Still it must not be forgotten that we have here a collection of posthumous remains which have not enjoyed the benefit of the author's final shaping and revision. But it has been judged best by the editors of the series to preserve these remains substantially as they were left, with a minimum of indispensable revision. The volume may lose in other respects, but it is, at all events, the work of the author and not of his editor friends. The latter have felt that regard for

the genuineness of Mr. Campbell's text was the first of their duties towards his memory.

This volume thus represents the contents of Campbell's note-books rather than provides such an ordered collection of material, bearing upon a particular section of Gaelic folklore, as he has furnished in the preceding volume of this series. But for this very reason it yields better evidence to the wealth and variety of Gaelic popular tradition. A large portion of the book is local legendary matter, and is closely analogous to what the Icelandic Sagas must have been in one stage of their development, a stage overlaid by the artistry of a greater school of prose story tellers than ever took the sagas of Gaelic Scotland in hand. Professor York Powell has well analysed the phase through which such stories as those of *Burnt Njal* or *Egil Skallagrimm's son* must have passed before they reached the form familiar to us.^[4] He describes the popular narrator working up a mass of local, fairly authentic detail about his hero, running it into a conventional mould, and then fitting the result into a scheme of wider historic scope. The Gaelic matter preserved alike by Mr. Campbell in this volume and by Mr. MacDougall in the first volume of the series has not got beyond the local anecdote stage, though, as in the variant forms of the tale of the *Grizzled Lad* and *MacNeill* (p. 5, *et seq.*), we can see the conventionalizing process at work, accentuating certain details, discarding others, with the view of transmuting the blurred photographic variety of life into the clear-cut unity of art. But the process is rudimentary. It is strange that this should be so considering the wealth of conventional situations that lay ready to the hand of the Gaelic story

teller in the highly elaborated sagas of Cuchulainn and of Finn, for the purpose of moulding the achievements of historical Campbells, MacLeans and MacNeills, into a satisfactory artistic form. Such convention as is apparent in these scraps of sagas is related to that of the folk-tale rather than to that of the great heroic legends. An interesting example is afforded by the story of Mac an Uidhir. This may well have a basis of fact, indeed Campbell cites an actual analogue, but it has been run into the shape of an ordinary separation and timely-recognition folk-tale. Other instances will present themselves to the reader and afford instructive study of the action and reaction upon each other of folk-life and oral narrative legend.

Any fresh addition of moment to the considerable recorded mass of Scottish local historic tradition increases the wonder that material of such vigour and interest, full of the clash of fierce primitive passion, rich in character, should have had so little literary outcome. The stuff is not inferior to that of the Icelandic tales, but instead of a first-rate contribution to the world's literature we have only a chaos of unworked up details. Yet during the time that these implanted themselves and took shape in the popular memory, Gaelic story-tellers, elaborating and perpetually readapting the old mythic and heroic traditions of the race, were producing narratives of rare and exquisite charm. Perplexity is intensified if, as Professor Zimmer maintains, the Norsemen learnt the art of prose narrative from the Irish and developed the great school of Icelandic story telling on lines picked up in Gaeldom. Certain it is that the Irish annals, relating the events of the 3rd to 9th centuries, which

assumed their present shape sometime in the 10th to the 12th centuries, contain a large amount of historic narrative that is closely allied in form and spirit to the contemporary Scotch Gaelic sagas. There is the same directness of narrative, the frequent picturesqueness of incident, the pithy characterisation; there is also the same failure to throw the material into a rounded artistic form, and, most curious of all resemblances, the conventions at work distorting historic fact are those of the folk-tale rather than of the national heroic epos. I would cite in this connection certain episodes of the Boroma[5] (in itself an admirable example of the failure of Gaelic story tellers to work up into satisfying form very promising historical material) such as that of Cumascach's visit to Brandubh, or again many passages in the stories about Raghallach and Guaire. The whole subject is, as nearly everything else in the record of Gaelic letters, fraught with fascinating perplexities. The present writer can but here, as he has so often done before, make a big note of interrogation and trust that Gaelic scholars on both sides the water will consider the problem worth study, and succeed in solving it.

I note those points which interest me as a student of tradition in general, and of Celtic tradition in particular. For most readers these scraps of local history derive their chief value from the vivid light they flash back upon the past, from the evidence they yield of the wild, fierce—I had almost written savage—life from which we are separated by so few generations. Some there may be to mourn for the past. Not a few Highland landlords will possibly regret the good old days when the MacLean planted his gallows in the

midst of the island of Tiree, and the last comer with his rent knew what awaited him (p. 13). Truly a more effectual means of getting in the money than by writ which the sheriff cannot execute.

The remainder of the volume comprises matter more upon the usual folk-lore lines; much, familiar already but valuable in the good variant form here recorded, much again novel, like the curious tale of the Princess Thyra and her lovers. Taken in conjunction with the author's previous volume in this series on the Finn tradition as still living in the Western Highlands, the whole offers a faithful picture of the imagination, memory, and humour of the Gaelic peasant playing round the old-time beliefs, stories and customs handed down to him from his forefathers.

ALFRED NUTT.

I append a list of the chief informants from whom Mr. Campbell derived the material contained in Vol. IV. and V. of the Argyllshire series of *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*.

- Malcolm MacDonald, Scarnish, Tiree.
- Malcolm MacLean, Kilmoluaig, Tiree.
- Hugh MacDonald, do. do.
- John MacLean, (bard), Balemartin, Tiree.
- Hugh Macmillan, (tailor), Tobermory.
- Angus MacVurrich, Portree, Skye.
- Duncan Cameron, (constable), Tiree.
- Allan MacDonald, Mannal, Tiree.
- Donald Mackinnon, Balevoulin, Tiree.

- John Cameron, (*Iain MacFhearchar*), Balevoulin, Tíree.
- Archibald Mackinnon, (*Gilleasbuig ruadh nan sgeirean dubha*), Tíree.
- Donald Cameron, Ruaig, Tíree.
- Donald MacDonald, Mannal, Tíree.
- Malcolm Sinclair, Balephuill, Tíree.
- John MacArthur, (tailor), Moss, Tíree.
- Duncan MacDonald, Caolis, Tíree.
- Neil MacLean, (the elder), Cornaig, Tíree.

Footnote

[1] Reprinted *The Fians*. p. 131–158.

[2] Reprinted *The Fians*. p. 175–191.

[3] Reprinted *The Fians*, p. 28–48.

[4] *Folk-Lore*, June, 1894.

[5] The *Boroma*, the story of the tribute imposed upon Leinster by Tuathal Techtmar in the second century and remitted in the sixth century, has been edited and translated by Mr. Whitley Stokes, (*Rev. Celt.*) and by Mr. Standish Hayes O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*.