

Book Reviews

Blair, Rev. Duncan, *Parting, Prophecy, Poetry*. With trans. by John A. Macpherson and Michael Linkletter (Sydney, Nova Scotia: Cape Breton University Press, 2013). Pp. 256. ISBN 978-1-927492-43-7, EPUB 978-1-927492-45-1. CA\$14.95.

This present work is one by the Rev. Duncan Blair (1815-1893). This stimulating publication is shaped quite elegantly and it comes with a translation by John A. Macpherson and Michael Linkletter.

While much of the story is concerned with the settlement of these displaced Celts in Canada, readers will be most / as much interested in the account of their nurture in Scotland, as they will be in the circumstances of the life of Duncan Blair, his studies in Edinburgh, his learning of Gaelic, and the phases of his family's bonding with Scotland, despite the removal to Canada. Equally fascinating is the system of links between the Scottish intellectuals, at their native homes in Scotland, in, and with, their several universities in Scotland, and then in their fine parish work in Nova Scotia.

This unexpected and very illuminating work is a product of the Cape Breton University Press in Canada, and is most concerned with the Reverend Doctor Duncan Black Blair. Much, too, is concerned with / treats of aspects of the disruption of the clan system in the 18th century, and the concomitant loss of the native schools in which poetry, medicine, law, and music were formally studied, and it is also / constitutes an illuminating account of the ways in which poetry, folk tales, and other aspects of oral tradition (and indeed written and printed matter in the nineteenth century) were to be communicated, since their exile had removed the obvious easy move to print as could and did occur in Scotland.

In fact, the most significant aspect of the book is its account of the continued transmission of the proud and traditional Gaelic culture, this usually done in the nurturing atmosphere of their homes in Scotland, as well as the rise of the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), for it itself was / is a considerable influence in the development of Gaelic literacy, and the accounts of this aspect of their family life and its talk, and then writing, are both surprising and very moving in the courage and persistence of the displaced to keep strong and, duly, nurture their identity. After its foundation in 1709, the SSPCK had been decidedly anti-Gaelic in its early mission to bring religious education to the Highlands and other 'uncivilized' parts, but, by the early 1800s it had adopted an approach of fostering reading in Gaelic to facilitate access to the Bible, with the ultimate goal of translating it completely into English'.

The industrial printing press in the larger urban centres had greatly facilitated the rise of a new Gaelic prose tradition in the 19th century. It was one which clearly nurtured the rise of narrative prose, and an elegance of style that could be learned as well as savoured by the readers. And the significance of the Rev.

Dr Norman MacLeod seems to have been of the greatest here, as he had produced the *Gaelic Messenger* 1829-1831, and the 'Traveller of the Glens, 1840-1843', these works establishing a more formal and fluent register for Gaelic prose. Beside providing material of his own composition, he had also wanted to make the information available in English language texts, at the same time as he had wanted to make this information available to Gaels in their own language. To this end, he had included translations on such topics as history, geography, current events, science and religion.

His life is also given in some detail—born in Strachur, Cowal, in 1815, and educated at the University of Edinburgh, Blair had gone to Nova Scotia in 1846, and visited the Niagara Falls in the following year, an experience which had made a considerable impact on the young man, his poem on the scene being his best known work. The biography is a complex one, but his father had managed a large sheep operation for many years in Glendale, but had eventually settled in Laggan. His son had begun school in 1823, and was able to read the English Bible before leaving school. Clearly he was precocious, and he 'had a mind to be a minister', moving to the University in 1834, and joining the Ossian Society at the university in 1836, and, after a period, had sailed to Canada in 1826. There, as in Scotland, he had been moved by magnificent landscape, even as he was attached to the people. And there is told the engaging story of how his admirers obtained a Doctor of Divinity for him.

However, the best sense of his writing's passion may be obtained from this Gaelic piece, 'Persecution by the Landlords' (it being translated in the volume, pp. 212,ff).

Have you heard the story?
 Hey! Ho! The landlords!
 The bitter plunderers vanished,
 Hey! Ho! The landlords!
 The deer and their foresters left,
 The sheep will follow,
 The people will get the land ready,
 They will be happy and hearty there.

These are the men who did the damage,
 Hey! Ho! The landlords!
 They annihilated poor, feeble people,
 Hey! Ho ! The Landlords!
 They Harassed women and children,
 The houses went ablaze above them,
 As severe snow and frost
 Made them irascible and tremulous.

These were men without compassion,
 Hey! Ho! The landlords!

They were nasty to the people,
Hey! Ho ! The landlords!
The rent was increased,
Poverty and misery came
It left their complexion emaciated and grey,
Their skin had no colour.

And so Sutherland becomes 'dark and dreary, and then

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There was no concern for the people ,
But to deport them across the ocean
To the wide, endless forests,
In North America.

This and other poems are empathetic towards the crofters, disgusted at the new and hornless sheep, and at those who trust in wealth at any price, and how men are trampled under foot, and so there is left but

'Poor, bereft, miserable people'
and ejected by the harsh edicts.
Yet they must not despair—
But improvement will come quickly,
The wheel will be turned,
People will get justice,
And the elite will get notice of removal.

When Gladstone takes control
As leader of the government,
Everything will start afresh,
And their situation will be different. (p. 216).

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the text is the notion of a classic period albeit one of suffering, in the homeland, and of the need for the colonists to, never forget the tragedies inflicted on their people.

The editor of these materials is John Alick Macpherson, a native Gaelic speaker brought up in Harris and North Uist in Scotland, and now living near Sydney in Nova Scotia, after a career in the United Kingdom in broadcasting in Gaelic for the Gaelic Language Act. His collaborator, Michael D. Linkletter comes from Prince Edward Island, and had studied and taught Gaelic at Harvard University, and worked on the records left by the 19th century scholars from Nova Scotia.

J.S. Ryan

Scottish Studies: The Journal of the School of Scottish Studies, no. 36 (2011-2013). ISSN 0036-9411.

We are pleased to report on an exchange copy of a fine journal in a field analogous to Australian Folklore, this being the most recent volume, no. 36 (2011-2013) of *Scottish Studies: The Journal of the School of Scottish Studies*, University of Edinburgh, and edited by John Shaw. This research arm of the University of Edinburgh has gathered up six of their studies in the field of Scottish ethnology, with digitized work there involving both of the indigenous languages of Scotland with the preponderance of Gaelic-based materials reflecting the impressive contents of the School's archive. Ultimately one of Europe's foremost 19th century folklore collections will both become an effective research tool, as well as making all these materials available to communities throughout Scotland. This work will highlight the efforts of the most prolific collector, Calum Maclean, and another manuscript of 150 Highland tales from the early 19th century is now freely available online, while a like project aims to so produce a new critical edition of Walter Scott's (epistolary) of the Scottish Border and like research proceeds on:

calendar customs;
community rituals;
Scottish emigrant communities;
place names; and
traditional music.

[For these see: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/research-publications/overview]

It is exciting that six of the research reports given in this present volume, edited by John Shaw, at the cost of twelve Great British pounds, and with 152 pages, is also available online: <http://journals.ed.ac.uk/scottishstudies>. (The printed version is referenced as ISBN 978-0-900949-03-6.)

G.L. Ablander, 'Richard Wagner's *Der Fliengende Holländer*, A Flying the Bredean (?) in Disguise', pp. 1-14;
V.S. Blankenborn, 'The Reverend William Matheson and the Performance of Scottish Gaelic 'Strophic' Verse', pp. 15-44;
Joshua Dickson, 'Piping Sung: Women *Canntaireachd* and the Role of Tradition Bearer', pp. 45-65;
William Lamb, 'Reeking in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland's National Music', pp. 66-102;
Emily Lyle, 'The Food Man's Croft', pp. 103-124;
Carl Zall, 'Learning and Remembering Gaelic Stories: Brian Stewart', pp. 125-139 (this last item having a splendid bibliography so printed that it is particularly easy to read).

These articles are followed by thirteen pages of informative reviews all concerned with themes, about places of advance in research, and also with providing reflective commentaries on the transmission of tales, songs, and other lore, the key events being excellently contextualised and nicely assertive of the

Scottish cultural mainstreams and as appropriate being personal, communal and poetic.

Indeed, the core of one review—that of *Hamish Henderson, A Biography*, by Timothy Neat, speaks for so much of the whole journal as well as for this biography. We now quote from p. 149,f.:

Timothy Neat's two substantial volumes constitute the first biography of Hamish Hamilton. Vol. I. *The Making of the Pact* (1919-1953) (2007); Vol. II. *Poetry Becomes People* (1952-2002) (2009).

And from a Hamilton lecture in Ireland in the late 1940's—

Art depends on the society. In primitive societies the poet or bard was an honoured person. Integrally part of the community. His songs or hymns were a part of the reality for the people (the poet's 'illusion' of the harvest field was part of the reality)... In all class societies the completeness of the artist's perception of reality is to a certain extent crippled... Even in the period of imperialism—the robust self-confident capitalism of the Victorian age could still produce a Dickens—but in this anxious, despondent, febrile period of late capitalism artists have become more and more shut in on themselves... Poets of course realise this, realise what has been lost. (vol. I: 235)

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And the Australian Response to such a collection?

While this may sound like a small collection of reports and views, the reality is surely much more than this. And the point may be made by an illustration. About the time of their seeing issue 8 of *Australian Folklore* in 1993, the Modern Language Association in the U.S.A. had suggested to our then Editorial Board that the volumes be closely indexed, and this was done from journal number 11 in 1996. Much subsequent correspondence from many countries makes it clear that such analyses are an invaluable aid to researchers—both for 'facts', and for the easier location of themes, names, lexis, etc. In the very dense texts in our journal of course, the same is so very true of the present rich and remarkably perceptive collection. It is appropriate to cite, and tabulate, the masthead expansion of the title, *Scottish Studies*, edited by John Shaw—

Scottish Studies is the journal of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. The journal reflects the eight main research areas of the school:

- Tales;
- Custom and belief;
- Material culture;
- Song;
- Instrumental music;
- Place-names;

Dialectology; and
Social organization.

Pleasingly, this range is attempted and in part achieved by several of the best-known of the national journals that seek to preserve and research the many more pre-Industrial Revolution aspects of cultures, language clusters, 'colonized' territories, cultural referents and similar identity-affirming referents.

Scottish Studies volume 36 is a very finely produced and erudite collection and one which puts in perspective particularly well the given range of the 'eight main research areas of the School'. Yet, these found here are, surely, both accessible and luminous for those working in many cultures, but particularly for those with Indo-European antecedents to them.

While much is clearly pre the Industrial Revolution, the emphases on change, diaspora, tradition and adaptation need no advocacy now. Pleasingly, there is stronger emphasis on music, calendar customs and ritual; and particularly on the relevant emigrant communities. Even more intriguing is the intention of the editor/editorial board to explore possible survivals 'from Indo-European times' (p. ix).

In short, the issue contributes to folklorists—and especially to all with some background in genealogy—the finest of reference manuals now reflecting judiciously across the major aspects of the folkloric/antiquarian disciplines.

J.S. Ryan and Robert James Smith (editors)

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