

**DAIN AGUS ORAIN
- POEMS
AND SONGS**

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Dain Agus Orain - Poems and Songs by D. M.

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Angus Watson

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

ANCIENT Poetry will appear of inestimable value to those who take pleasure in contemplating the lives and manners of their ancestors, as delineated by their earliest historians, the Bards. In their poems and songs, the exploits of their heroes are preserved, the manners of the people described, and their loves, habits, and superstitions, commemorated. Some nations have made a greater figure than others in this branch of literature; but none, perhaps, greater than the Celts. The most ancient specimens of their poetry are undoubtedly the best, yet, the modern productions of the Celtic Muse are far beyond mediocrity. Some of the *Orain Gaoil*, for simplicity, tenderness, and beauty, cannot be surpassed. Many of the Highland airs are known to be very fine; while the elegance of expression, and the melting strains of the bard of nature, are often inimitable.

As national poetry is therefore of acknowledged value, the loss of such relics is to be regretted. The nation already mentioned is not altogether unfortunate in this respect. Many have been sensible of the importance of rescuing from oblivion, ere it was too late, some of the works of their Bards; and there now remains a lasting monument of the genius, the valour, and accomplishments of a people formerly but little known.

Conceiving, then, endeavours which may contribute in the least degree to preserve any part of our national poetry as commendable, the Editor has made a selection of numerous MSS. in his hands, taken from oral recitation, at different times, to gratify his own curiosity. But after having prepared them for the press, many obstacles occurred. Gaelic collections are commonly published at

the risk of the author, or editor, by subscription. The public is not seldom imposed on in this way, so that one is ashamed, even if he should have time and inclination, to offer a proposal for publishing by subscription. Many of the collections thus published are so incorrect and imperfect—exceptionable in point of morals, or faulty in orthography and purity of style—as to disgust, rather than gratify, the man of taste; and how often do we find the greater part of them transcribed from other collections!—From these considerations, the Editor came to the resolution of publishing this small volume at his own risk. He has taken the greatest care in rendering the poems and songs selected as entire and perfect as possible, by comparing and collating different MS. copies, and rejecting interpolations and spurious editions. By this means he has been enabled to give the poem of *Mordubh* complete in all its parts, less than the half of which was only published heretofore as a fragment; and the favourite song of *Mairi Lurach* in its original state, without Cupid or Venus—having had a copy of it taken from oral recitation, before it appeared in print.

Many are excluded which have been inserted in other collections, and many have been lost (equal to the poems and songs now offered), as the Editor, at the time of writing them, had no thoughts of publishing.

It is to be regretted that no attempt has been made to rescue the memories of our Bards from oblivion, by preserving anecdotes and memoirs of their lives along with their works. The Editor could not venture to supply the loss in this Collection, but in a very limited manner. How far he has succeeded in rendering the volume worthy of the notice of the public, and avoiding those faults which he has taken the liberty to censure in others, must be left to his readers to judge.

D. M.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THE THIRD EDITION OF "COLLATH" AND OTHER POEMS.

It had been an early practice or amusement of the Author to write the poetry of his country which he heard recited, and that their strains or melody recommended to his notice. When more extensive reading made him better acquainted with Gaelic literature, he found many of the poems and fragments that he transcribed were in print, and others so incorrect as not worth being preserved—both which he immediately destroyed; and so were his MSS. increasing and diminishing during his early studies.

Some time after entering the University, he made attempts at compositions of the kind himself, which he destroyed as soon as they were produced, unless they were thought, in his own judgment, not much inferior to the productions of others. He never exhibited them to the inspection of any one, nor acknowledged them to be his own. He had frequent opportunities during the summer season to indulge in either collecting or making assays—which, if not profitable, was innocent and pleasant pastime; and though he must confess that his time might have been more advantageously employed, he never suffered the predilection he had for this branch of literature to interfere so much with his proper studies as to

divert him from the end he had in view, and the course he uninterruptedly pursued. One thing he regretted afterwards was, that he had not then taken notice of any anecdotes and memoirs of the Bards, which those that recollected much of them, and recited and sung their works, could have supplied. He was then insensible of the value of such reminiscences, but has of late years preserved some gleanings of no fewer than fifty of the musical tribe.

When he entered upon more serious studies, he discontinued the practice, and allowed the promiscuous MS. to lie by him for years, with little thought of what delighted his early days. He, however, was always of opinion that all Gaelic poetry that floated on the living voice ought to be printed, which would be the surer way of preserving the productions of native genius: and thus was he induced to publish a selection of the collected and composed poems and songs in 1821. In arranging the MS., he gave the second place in the Collection to *Collath*, and his smaller productions, after that poem, to page 112; and having done so, the Editor of the Inverness Collection, 1821, left it to the printer and booksellers,—he, living in a remote part of the country, was neither able nor inclined to look any further to it. He had to defray the expenses, and to be content with whatever returns were made him. The Highland Society of Scotland awarded him a premium of £5 5s. for it; and he had the satisfaction of thinking he performed some service to posterity in preserving so many beautiful specimens of the Highland Bards, and especially the poem of *Mòrdubh*, complete in three parts—less than the half of which had been at first printed in Gillies' Collection as a "Fragment," and copied from it, in the same imperfect state, into other collections.

Of the Inverness Collection, 1821, a writer in the

Inverness Journal says—"The poems and songs contained in this Collection before us have been well selected, and are beautiful specimens of the Gaelic Muse. The ancient poem of *Mòrdubh* is esteemed by eminent Gaelic scholars as not inferior to the Poems of Ossian." After a lapse of twenty years, the editor of "The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry" took the ancient poem of *Mòrdubh* from the Inverness Collection, 1821, with the brief biography and notes attached to it, and placed it first in his Collection, being a selection of all the published productions of the Celtic Bards; and next the poem of *Collath*, assigning it the same rank as in the former Collection: and the learned author of the long introduction to the well-got-up collection, "The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry," passed it as an ancient poem, and both seemed to think it worthy of the rank assigned to it.

As, therefore, the poem of *Collath* has obtained so honourable a station, which has given it a chance of longer existence than the Author, who almost forgot it, could have expected, and of being regarded an ancient poem of the first class, he thought it his duty to undeceive any future editor and the public: and he conceived no better way of doing that than by publishing this edition of it, along with the other poems already mentioned, and a few more since added to the number. And it may not be unimportant here to observe the motive why it was given at first as an ancient poem.

Modesty or timidity may induce a young author to conceal his name, and make use of a poetical license in giving his production, of which he himself may be but an indifferent judge, publicity. Time, that tries and proves all things, has decided in favour of *Collath*; and it only now remains for the Author to remove the deception, if poetical license might be so called. Although the poem of *Collath* was composed about the beginning of the pre-

sent century, it may be said to have some title to antiquity, as the language is not modern, nor the sentiments and materials; nor are the scenes and circumstances therein described, common. The characters that appear in it seem to have passed away in former times. But, after a lapse of more than a score of years, the Author recollects little more of the matter than what is said in the note at the beginning of the poem, in the first and second editions, a part of which he now cancels, as he can claim no right to the musical term "Fonar," and retains what follows. "Oglaoch, followed by his friends, went to rescue Annir, his betrothed bride, and only child of Ratha, whom Ardan, a chief of a distant isle, carried off in the absence of her sire. Her exquisite beauty gained her many admirers. She preferred the son of Collath to them all. By their marriage, the two most potent families of Caledonia would have been united. But their hopes were blasted in the bud! The poem opens with a vision of Collath, chief of Carrig. It is partly dramatic." We need not add any more. The other notes will explain particular passages.

One of the smaller pieces has been likewise copied into "The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry," in the "Select Number," or Appendix. Our reason for taking notice of this is to acknowledge that the chorus and first and second stanzas of it, as well as of two or three other pieces, are not original—*i. e.*, were not composed by the author of *Collath*—of which the editor of said collection seemed not aware.

The printer of the first edition, who was but imperfectly acquainted with the Gaelic language, undertook to correct the press, and suffered some orthographical errors to creep into it. These will be carefully corrected in this edition, and every attention paid, so as to keep the whole free from faults of every kind.

Many of the pieces published in the Inverness Collection, 1821, have been printed by others since the Editor