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THE GAELIC NUISANCE

It is not a very creditable fact that after centuries of national consolidation, there should be communities within the British Islands who use different vernacular tongues and are ignorant of English. In other words, there are large numbers of persons who cannot in ordinary circumstances be directly communicated with. They can neither send nor intelligibly receive letters through the post-office. Summoned as witnesses on civil or criminal trials, they are in the position of foreigners, and stand in need of interpreters. Cut off from English books and newspapers, a correct knowledge of history, of science and art, and of passing events is scarcely possible. They necessarily vegetate amidst vague legends and superstitions. Theirs is a life of stagnation and impoverishment, in the spot where they were born; for anything like voluntary emigration to improve circumstances is only exceptional. And all this has been complacently tolerated, if not pampered, for hundreds of years by a nation full of enterprise, and which, with no injustice, aspires to be in the front rank of general civilisation.

We are quite aware that much the same thing can be said of most of the continental nations. All are a little behind in this respect. The ancient Breton language survives in France, as does the Basque in Spain. Switzerland, Germany, and Russia are respectively a jumble of spoken tongues. In Holland and Belgium, we have the Dutch, French, Flemish, and Walloon. To accommodate the inhabitants of Brussels, the names of the streets are stuck up in two languages. These continental diversities do not greatly surprise us. In frequent wars, revolutions, conquests, annexations, along with want of means, and a host of inveterate prejudices to be encountered, we have an explanation of the strange mixture of languages and dialects which still prevails in continental Europe.

The case is somewhat different in the United Kingdom, where everything but old prejudices would seem to favour a uniform native language which all can use and understand. Yet, as we have said, there exist communities who are still less or more ignorant of English. Centuries have rolled on, and notwithstanding all appliances, groups of people are yet found speaking a language which was common a thousand years ago, but now occupies an obscure and fragmentary position. We do not say that matters have not been advancing towards uniformity. Little by little, outlying communities have been satisfactorily Anglicised, not by anything like legal compulsion, but by what might be termed a natural process of assimilation. We may speak of two important cases. In the Shetland and Orkney Islands the Norwegian language existed until within the last two centuries. It is now totally gone, and the vernacular is a pure English; vastly to the advantage of the natives, who besides being open to common civilising influences, are prepared for pushing their fortunes in any part of the British dominions; some of them indeed making no mean figure in current literature. The other case is that of Galloway, a district embracing two counties in the south-west of Scotland, where the Gaelic prevailed longest in any part of the Lowlands. 'The wild Scots of Galloway' was once a well-known phrase. It has passed away along with the Gaelic speech. The Gallowegians – abounding in men of genius – are now a lively and prosperous English-speaking and English-writing people. For them the change has been a very happy one.

With a knowledge of these two instances of social improvement, there is the more reason to regret the protracted existence of non-English speaking races. No one will say that any good has come of the continued prevalence of Erse, the old Irish tongue; nor of Manx in the Isle of Man; nor of Welsh, though that, as regards literature, is considerably ahead of any branch of the once

universal Celtic tongue. Considering what spirit is demonstrated in the way of books, newspapers, and otherwise, Welsh rises to a comparatively prominent position; but there always remains the unpleasant reflection, that interesting as the Welsh tongue may be, it distinctly mars national unity, and must be a drawback on those adhering to it alone, and reared in ignorance of English. To this cause is doubtless attributable the lingering of many whimsical superstitions in the Principality.

Should any one desire to see what mischiefs are effected by adherence to a language long since out of date, he should visit some parts of the Highlands and the Western Islands of Scotland, where, by a well-meant but mistaken policy, Gaelic is still perseveringly maintained. Some years since, it was our fortune to pay a visit to Barra, one of the Outer Hebrides; and the feeling which rose in our mind was that what we beheld was a specimen of Scotland as it existed in the sixth century, when St Columba spread a knowledge of Christianity in the western Caledonian regions. We seemed to step back twelve hundred years. It was a marvellous kind of look into antiquity. In their language, in their rude dwellings of stone and turf, in their religious forms, and in their dress, the people belonged to a far-back age. Their existence was an anachronism. And the curious thing was to find this condition of affairs within four-and-twenty hours of Glasgow, with its enterprise and prodigiously busy population. We have seen the Micmacs living in a way little better than dogs in the wilds of Nova Scotia, but one is not greatly astonished to see Indians dwelling in a state of primitive wretchedness. The sentiment of wonder is raised on finding natives within the British Islands still living as their ancestors did at a time coeval with Vortigern and the Saxon Heptarchy. There they are, for anything we can see, unimprovable. Speaking Gaelic and nothing else, they, in their dismal isolation, are left behind in all ordinary means of advancement. Who has not heard of the institutions plausibly and benevolently set on foot to enlighten the aborigines of the Highlands and Islands? Well, here, after all that is done, things are much as they were in the era of St Columba – people living almost like savages, without the ability to hold intercourse with strangers, or the power to improve their circumstances, in consequence of knowing no other tongue than Gaelic. That language is their bane. It keeps them poor, it keeps them ignorant. So far as they are concerned, the art of printing might as well never have been invented. The intelligence communicated by books and newspapers is for them wholly unavailing. Practically, they are living hundreds of years before the ingenious discoveries of Gutenberg and Coster. To think that with all the costly apparatus of national education, such should be going on within the compass of the British Islands!

It is no use to mince a matter so grave in its results. The upholding of Gaelic as a vernacular tongue is, in our opinion, an error to be lamented and abandoned. In saying so, we are reminded that an effort has been made by an eminently enthusiastic Professor to gather funds for the purpose of endowing a Celtic Chair in the University of Edinburgh. To that effort, which is likely to prove successful, we make no special objection. Let Celtic, like any other ancient language, by all means be cultivated among the higher aims of philology. Students who like to pursue learned inquiries of this kind may do so. But it is a wholly different thing to maintain a system of elementary teaching in schools which tends to perpetuate Gaelic as a spoken tongue to the exclusion of English. Apart from social intercommunication, there may be a difficulty in substituting English for Gaelic. Teaching to read English alone in Gaelic-speaking districts is said to be of little use. The pupils learn to pronounce the words without attaching any meaning to them. Impressed with this awkward consequence, the Society for the support of Gaelic schools, which has been in existence upwards of seventy years, suggests that the best way to promote a knowledge of and taste for English is to begin by teaching pupils to read Gaelic. 'The people,' it is represented, 'having once got a taste for learning, are not satisfied with their children being able to read Gaelic; a number of them pay the teacher for instructing them also in reading English and writing at extra hours.' There may be some truth in this view of the matter; but unfortunately we are confronted with the greater truth, that considerable numbers in the Highlands and Islands still speak Gaelic, and are ignorant of English to any useful purpose.

If it be absolutely necessary that schoolmasters must begin by teaching to read the Gaelic, they ought not to end there, but proceed to offer, by a close translation, the requisite knowledge of English. There are surely teachers qualified to make Gaelic-speaking children understand the meaning of English words. The trouble to be taken may be considerable, but there are few things either great or good which can be effected without trouble. We cannot doubt that Highland school-boards might find a way to make pupils understand English provided they have the will to do so. Indifference and the grudging of expense perhaps lie quite as much at the root of the difficulty as traditional prejudice. It is open to conjecture that, but for undue fostering, Gaelic would stand a fair chance of disappearing altogether from the Highlands and Islands, as it did in Galloway and elsewhere simply through the operation of natural causes.

The question, Gaelic or no Gaelic, has, we fear, been too long treated in a sentimental point of view. For example, we see it fervently argued that Highlanders should be able to understand and relish the ancient Gaelic poetry, as if an acquaintanceship with a few old songs and ballads were a primary concern in life. Poor people nailed to a sterile soil by their hereditary ignorance of English, are to be congratulated for their knowledge of some poem which the world at large never heard of, and does not care about! Happy people, to whom food, clothing, and cultured intelligence are as nothing in comparison to the enviable pleasure of singing a ditty ascribed to Fingal or some more modern and less apocryphal Celtic bard! It is gratifying to know that Highlanders themselves are a little scandalised by these and similarly absurd propositions. Sensibly, they observe that it is time to get rid of Gaelic, as being entirely out of date, and only an impediment. Two years ago, in a Glasgow newspaper, one who subscribed himself a 'Western Highlander,' took exception to the unreasonable clamour that had been got up for the maintenance of Gaelic as a spoken tongue. He says very rationally: 'We Highlanders have a language that, whatever its beauties, suffices merely for speech; a language by which we cannot acquire knowledge in art, science, history, commerce, or – if we exclude the Bible – even religion. With a poor and infertile soil, we live alongside a people rich in every gift of nature, possessing every advantage that can insure worldly prosperity. We are debarred from all the stores of wisdom locked up in the English language. Thus heavily weighted, we cannot hope to rival our neighbours' wealth, but we can wish and strive to make the best of our opportunities. We intend to win our way if industry and thrift can do it. We can endeavour to improve our infertile soil, to attract capital to our agriculture, to establish better communication with the rest of the world. Proud as we are of the mountain and the glen, we know that we cannot live by scenic beauty alone. We are tired too of kilted glory, and of dressing and acting up to Cockney sentiment about the savage Celt. We wish to recognise and study the conditions of existence, the methods of supporting life and securing comfort. And to do all this, if our much-loved language has become an impediment rather than a gain, why, let it go. We shall remain good Highlanders regardless of any particular mode of speech. At a time when the first whisperings of prosperity are beginning to reach us, when steamers deeper and deeper laden ply to every corner of the west, when the completion of a railway will soon make Oban a great commercial centre, when comforts hitherto undreamt of are everywhere obtainable – is it right at such a time of promise to intensify our disadvantages and to make our backwardness more backward still?' Shrewd remarks these, well worth taking to heart.

It cannot be ascertained from any official Reports what is the exact number of persons – men, women, and children – whose language is wholly confined to Gaelic. In the second Report of the Education Commission published in 1867, it is said to be 'probable that the population of the parishes within which Gaelic continues to be the only language which is understood by the majority of the people cannot exceed a hundred and fifty thousand; these being chiefly the parishes of the Hebrides, which are wholly insular, and the mainland parishes of the west coast of the counties of Sutherland, Ross, Inverness, and Argyle.' It is believed that since 1867, the number whose speech is limited to Gaelic has diminished through various influences, among which commercial intercourse by means of steam-vessels and otherwise has been conspicuous. We should almost aver that Hutcheson's

magnificent fleet of steam-vessels, whether devoted to the carrying of goods or passengers, had done more to introduce a knowledge of English, along with conditions of prosperity, into the Hebrides than any other appliance whatsoever. In the remoter or lesser islands which are little visited by strangers, there is a corresponding backwardness. Barra we have already spoken of as still in a singularly primitive condition. At Coll, Tyree, and some other islands, the knowledge of English is also unhappily deficient. In comparatively recent times, a great change in proprietorship has come over these islands. The old families – such as the Macneils and Macleans – have mostly disappeared, and new landlords with the means and desire to improve the condition of the soil and the population, find themselves obstructed by the difficulty of holding any intelligent intercourse with the natives. The disadvantage is mutual, for on all hands the Gaelic-speaking inhabitants are unable to make their wants and feelings known to those who wish to be their friends. A melancholy case of a rigid adherence to Gaelic, is that of the extremely remote island of St Kilda. Here, as was described a few months ago by Mr J. Sands in our pages, the natives speak Gaelic and nothing else; in Gaelic they are preached to by a minister originally from the mainland; he and his wife being the only individuals who know English. Of course the natives can hold no epistolary correspondence with the exterior world, on whose sympathy they are forced to rely. A present of English books would be valueless, for they could not read them. They could not emigrate unless accompanied by an interpreter, much after the manner of a party of travellers in the East under the guidance of a dragoman. We ask, Is that a position in which any of Her Majesty's subjects should continue to be placed through the effect of custom or prejudice? Such an afflicting condition of affairs is little better than a national disgrace.

It is hard to run counter to long-cherished and in the main amiable feelings. It is hard to find fault with persons and institutions whose motives in encouraging Gaelic have been alike pious and benevolent. But circumstances oblige us to be candid in a matter so momentous to public welfare. The Gaelic language may be as copious and energetic as the Greek; it may be not less suitable for poetry than the Italian; it has strong archæological claims as a relic of the tongue which in its various forms was at one time spoken all over the British Islands, if not over all Europe; but it has survived its usefulness, and is out of place as a vernacular. In short, looking to the wants of modern society, and seeing the mischief it produces, we are – however hateful the term – warranted in characterising Gaelic as a NUISANCE, which every one should aid in removing with all reasonable speed.

W. C.

FROM DAWN TO SUNSET

By 'Alaster Græme.'

IN THREE PARTS. – PART II

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

No one but Mistress Margaret and Marjory knew that Deborah and Kingston Fleming were betrothed. Meantime Deborah, with her love-secret folded like a flower within her heart, devoted herself to her father, and Kingston remained with them. But Deborah's presence was required at Lincoln; the tenantry were anxious to welcome the new mistress; and like a dutiful daughter, fondly hoping that the change would restore her father, she determined, by Kingston's advice, to go there at once, and to leave Enderby to undergo thorough repair. So they left the dear old place. 'What will happen,' thought Deborah Fleming, 'ere I see Enderby again?' Mistress Margaret would not leave Enderby, for certain private and sufficient reasons of her own; so she pleaded to be left behind. She was in daily expectation of receiving a secret summons to follow her husband, and her heart clung to her old father and the old place.

They arrived at Lincoln Castle in the late summer gloaming. Groups of solemn cedars were just visible, and the little melancholy bats were flitting round like spirits; the grand old ivied keep loomed darkly before them; and beyond, under a glimmering archway, were lights and figures. Deborah shuddered; she knew not whether to weep or pray, as she laid her head on her father's shoulder, and thought of herself entering in triumph as Adam Sinclair's bride. She felt a traitor, taking Kingston there, her lover, her betrothed, even though he was going away that night; and the grim presence of Adam Sinclair pervaded all the place. The same in the gorgeous rooms, gloomy though full of brilliant lights. On one side walked her tall kinsman-lover, and on the other stalked the spectre of Adam Sinclair. Deborah shivered, and clung to Kingston's arm. She went out with him under the stars to bid him good-bye. Two tall cedars met overhead, and the night-wind just sighed amongst their branches; the night-flowers were exhaling their fragrant odours.

'Deb,' whispered Kingston, 'I have half a mind to leave thee, love! Men of rank and position would flock to woo my beautiful one. Thou'rt very young. Wait; and let me come and know thy mind hereafter. *Wait*, Deb. I speak no jest. Wert thou poor, I would make thee wed me now; but love – as thou art – I cannot. Wait, Deb; and I will exact no promise from thee.'

'Thou never didst know me, King, and never will! My love was quick to come, but it was and ever will be changeless. Dear, I have seen many men; and more than thou wott'st of have made love to me. But what are they all to thee? From childhood, *thou* hast been my love; I feel no shame to tell it thee. And wilt thou, for my poor fortune, leave me? Why, thou dost tempt me to fling it all away as dross, rather than lose thy love. King, if thou leavest me, I shall *die*! For old kin's sake, thou couldst not! Remember that we are kin near and dear! Thy father and mine were boys at Enderby, and played in the same old haunts; companions near and dear. Ah well, King as thou lovest me, promise soon to come back!'

He took her face between his hands and hesitated. Perilously dear was she to him; but oh! that golden casket in which his jewel lay – he hated it! Kingston Fleming was proud where he loved.

'If thou wilt not promise,' said Deborah, 'thou shalt not go! *I* shall do the wooing! – Oh, I am too bold! But my heart saith thou lovest me. Then fling this pride away. King, darling, do not break my heart!'

He was vanquished. Vows, caresses, sighs, and the lovers parted.

PART III. – NIGHT

CHAPTER THE FIRST

The young and beautiful Lady of Lincoln won all hearts; not that she visited any but the poor in those days; but the fame of her beauty and sweetness spread abroad even so; and the 'Rose of Enderby,' though not to be seen, was known to be brightening the stern old castle. The tall gaunt father and the beautiful girl lived in utter seclusion, except when amongst the poor – always together. Strangely enough, he never tried to wander. She never had him left alone day or night; but he never seemed happy save with Deborah. And still she watched for and prayed for a change in him. She talked to him, waited on him, sang to him from morning till night. Out in the broad sunny court that lay between the door and the entrance-gates, Deborah and her father, and often old Marjory with them, would sit and look up the long grass avenue that stretched far away, a vista of giant trees, ever twilight, where the antlered deer would trot past, to seek fresh shade and pasturage, and where the far-away murmur of country life, the lowing of cows, the tinkle of a sheep-bell, the bark of a dog, the shout of a boy, or the cries of children at play, would be wafted to them musically.

One morning, left alone, Sir Vincent said to his child: 'Where are we, Deb?'

Often he had asked the same question before; and she answered as before: 'At Lincoln Castle, father.'

But he went on: 'Who lives here?'

'You and I, father, and I hope Charlie soon. Adam Sinclair gave us this place. Wasn't it good of him?'

'Adam Sinclair?' He looked bewildered, and shook his head. 'I know naught of him, Deb. Deb, little Deb, I was thinking of Kate Shaw. I saw her yesterday.'

'Who was she, father, dear?'

He stared at her. 'Why, your mother!'

Her heart fluttered. 'My mother! And did you see her yesterday?'

'Ay; she was walking under the trees yonder. But she looked ill, sadly ill; her hair was as white as mine. She gave me such a look!'

Deborah went and kneeled by her father, and put her arms around him. 'Poor sweet father! This could not be. Thou knowest my mother died long, long ago. And was her name Kate Shaw, father?'

'Ay;' and he smiled. Wrapt and intent, his eyes seemed gazing far through and away. 'She was Kate Shaw, Deb; a gipsy lass, and beautiful as the dawn. No one like her! Such eyes, such feet, such grace! Sweet Kate! sweet Kate!'

Deborah knew that her mother's name had been Kate. She marvelled, trembled.

'I walked with her yesterday, Deb; didn't I? Yes; under the trees at Enderby; and I found she loved me. Little witch! She was hard, hard to win; so coy, so whimsical! She had a gipsy lover too. I made short work of *him*.'

'Didst shoot him, father?'

Sir Vincent laughed aloud, then feigned to look greatly scandalised amid his mirth. 'Shoot him? Fie, fie, Deb! Ask me not what I did, child. Why, one day she cared for him, the next for me. I could not stand it. A Fleming too! The Flemings woo maidens honourably. 'Fore heaven, I made Kate my Lady Fleming – my sweet little wife Kate! But I let her go no more to the camp. Sometimes I think she pines. She talks sometimes about her mother, in her dreams – that old hag! My wife must give up all, and cleave to me. Kate, Kate! dear love!' Then he said no more, nor did Deborah; but she marvelled at what she had heard, and what could have recalled her mother so vividly.

It happened one afternoon a few days after this and their arrival at Lincoln, Dame Marjory entered with a pale face. 'My Lady Deb, there's a poor woman round there at the gates wantin' to see thee; she is very ill. She lies there; 'tis like she's dyin'; so Master Coleman thinks. She can't be moved away.'

'I will come,' cried Deborah. 'Send Coleman to father. I will speak to her.' Beautiful, pitiful, Deborah appeared in her long black robes to the vision of the dying woman, bending down to her. She was an old, old woman, with wild and wintry hair; death in her face, but life in her great burning eyes, and those were fixed on Deborah. Deborah started back. It was *the* gipsy! A hundred doubts and certainties rushed surging to her brain. The gipsy beckoned her nearer.

'Speak to her,' whispered old Marjory emphatically. 'Go nearer.' And then Marjory, standing by gaunt and grim, waved the other servants away.

Deborah kneeled and bent her ear to the dying woman's lips. 'Girl,' said the faint voice, 'I forgive and forget! Let me die like a woman, not like a dog. I am thy mother's mother, an' I have been round day an' night to seek thee. *She*

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