

**ORAIN AGUS DANA
GAIDHEALACH LE DONNACHADH
BAN MAC-AN-T-SAOIR;
SONGS AND POEMS IN GAELIC**

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Orain agus dana gaidhealach le Donnachadh Ban Mac-an-t-saoir; Songs and poems in Gaelic by Duncan Ban Macintyre

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DUNCAN BAN MACINTYRE

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LE
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SONGS AND POEMS
IN GAELIC

BY
DUNCAN BAN MACINTYRE

THIRTEENTH EDITION

*WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF "COIRE
CHEATHAICH" AND "BEN DORAIN"*

Edinburgh
JOHN GRANT

1908

A SHORT
MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

DUNCAN MACINTYRE, or, as he was commonly called, *Donnacha Bàn nan Oran*; i.e. "Fairhaired Duncan of the Songs," was born of poor parents, at Druimliaghart, in Glenorchy, March 1724, where he spent the earlier part of his life, engaged in fowling and fishing, of which he was very fond. He never enjoyed the benefit of attending school, and never learned to read during his lifetime. At that period, the Highlands were not blessed with the means of education now so liberally supplied through the instrumentality of the different philanthropic and religious societies. Although he early displayed a strong love for his native poetry, and exhibited symptoms of having the poetic vein himself, he produced nothing worthy of preservation until his twenty-second year. Having joined the royalists, as a substitute for a Mr Fletcher of Glenorchy, he was present at the memorable battle of Falkirk, fought on

the 17th of January 1746, and served under the command of Colonel Campbell of Carwhin. On joining the army Mr Fletcher had supplied Duncan with his sword, which, unfortunately, he lost—some said he threw it away—in the retreat; and on his return without it, he was refused the sum for which he engaged to jeopardize his life, 300 marks Scots, or £16, 17s. 6d. English money. It was then, and for that reason, that he composed his poem called “The Battle of Falkirk;” in which he gives a minute and lively description of what came under his own observation; and especially of “Claidheamh Ceannard Chloinn-an-Leistear,” *i.e.* the Chief of Clan Fletcher’s sword. He there endeavours to justify himself for his retreat, and more especially for parting with such a useless weapon; and hints that he would have fought with more zeal and heart, had it been in the cause of the unfortunate Prince. The poet, however, had ample retaliation on his principal for his meanness in refusing to pay him the amount agreed on; for the poem was soon known and recited throughout the country; and the ridicule thrown so ingeniously on Mr Fletcher for refusing to pay him the bounty, was well known in all directions. And, not satisfied with what he had said of the useless sword, he complained to the Earl of Breadalbane of the injustice done him, who

compelled Mr Fletcher to pay him what he promised. This act of justice by the Earl so exasperated Mr Fletcher, that he seized the first opportunity he had of meeting the poet, to apply his stick to his back, crying out,—
 “ Bi dol, a bhalaich, agus dean òran air a sin,” *i.e.*
 “ Go, fellow, and make a song on *that*.” The humble poet was obliged to submit in silence, and, shrugging his shoulders, walked away, little regarding the slight pain inflicted on him ; but the wounds of the passionate man inflicted by the cutting satire of genius, was worse to cure ; and was only probed anew by the disapprobation and disgust of all who saw or heard of this cowardly action.

Duncan was shortly after this period appointed forester or gamekeeper to the Earl of Breadalbane, in Coire-Cheathaich and Beinn-dòrain, and afterwards to the Duke of Argyle, in Buachail-Eite. In these situations, he invoked the Muse with success, and his description of these delightful spots given in his celebrated poems “ Beinn-dòrain” and “ Coire-Cheathaich” are inimitable, and have secured his name a conspicuous place in the list of our Highland Bards.

Our Author afterwards served six years in the Bread-

albane Fencibles, in which regiment he held the rank of sergeant; and on its being broken up in 1799, he became one of the city-guard of Edinburgh. But Duncan was not naturally fitted for the active duties of a soldier, and though he was generally left on all field-days or extra occasions, to act as captain of the guard at home, or to superintend the mess, he often neglected his duty, by falling into one of his poetic reveries; and, to their great mortification, his hungry and worn-out companions in arms, on their return after the fatigues of the day, would find him and their mess just as they left both in the morning. He shone best at the canteen board, which was then kept by his beloved "Mairi Bhàn." He remained in the city-guard till about the year 1806; being then enabled, by means of his little savings, and the profits of the third edition of his poems, published in 1804, to subsist in comparative comfort during the remainder of his life. He died about the 14th of May 1812, aged 88 years; the precise day, we have not been able to ascertain; but the records of the Greyfriars Burying Ground, Edinburgh, where his remains were laid, fix the date of his interment on the 19th.*

* There is a notice of his death in the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*, of 7th October 1812, without specifying the day of his decease; but the date above given may be relied on as correct.

In personal appearance, especially during his younger days, he is said to have been remarkably handsome and prepossessing, and throughout life his manner and disposition were agreeable and easy. He was noted for his convivial and pleasant company; and many anecdotes of his wit and repartee are still on record. Though inoffensive, and seldom known to provoke any person when not attacked himself, his verses told severely on his enemies, or on those who had merited his resentment; and this he could do on the spur of the moment. It is related that when he presented his inimitable panegyric of John Campbell of the Bank, he demanded a bard's fee for the verses. "No," replied that gentleman,— "what reward do you deserve for telling the truth? You must confess that you could say no less of me; besides, I doubt if you are the author: so to convince me, let us hear how you can dispraise me, and then I shall know whether you have been able to compose what you have just repeated." Duncan instantly commenced in the same measure, and continued, in ready and flowing numbers, so to amuse those who were present, that the gentleman was glad to make him stop, by giving him his reward. When our bard was travelling through the Highlands to dispose of his poems in 1790, a forward young man came rudely up to him and asked,—“An

sibhse rinn Beinn-dòrain?" to which the bard answered, "Ud! ud! a ghaolaich cha mi; 's ann a riuneadh Beinn-dòrain comhladh ris na beanntaichean eile, ciann mu'ò d'rugadh tu-féin no mise;" that is, "Was it you that made Beinn-dòrain?" To which the poet answered, "Tut! tut! my good fellow, Beinn-dòrain was made along with the other mountains, long before either you or I was born; but I made a poem in praise of Beinn-dòrain."

We have already noticed that our author could not read, and consequently could not write down his poems when composed; but so tenacious was his memory, that he could recite all his own verses, and great part of his native bards. The first edition of his poems, published in 1768, was written by a clergyman from oral recitation, and this may account for the incorrect division of the lines, which in the former editions were more like prose than poetry. These however, have been all corrected in this present fifth edition, which materially improves the verses; besides, several omissions and pieces have been added, and the whole carefully compared with the first, second, and third editions. The second edition was published in 1790, the third in 1804, and the fourth, after the death of the author, in 1833.

Edinburgh, March 1, 1848