

**CELTIC MSS. IN RELATION TO THE
MACPHERSON FRAUD: WITH A
REVIEW OF PROFESSOR
FREEMAN'S
CRITICISM OF "THE VIKING AGE"**

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Celtic Mss. in Relation to the Macpherson Fraud: With a Review of Professor Freeman's Criticism of "The viking age" by J. C. Roger

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J. C. ROGER

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PREFACE.

THAT portion of this tractate which relates to Celtic manuscripts and the doings of Macpherson, was transmitted to the *Scotsman* newspaper, in reply to an article by Professor Mackinnon which appeared in that journal. My communication was however returned by the editor on the plea that he could not find room for its insertion. It was perhaps too much to expect that a journal owned by one of the secretaries of a Society, which had engaged the services of the Celtic Professor at Oxford, to uphold what I call the Celtic myth, should open its columns to one inimical to Macpherson, and utterly sceptical in regard to his pretended translation. Mr. Mackinnon's enumeration seems a vindication of the antiquity of Celtic MSS. in general, and was no doubt also projected "as a basis for more extended collaboration."

It occurred to me that my remarks on the Ossian MSS. might with advantage be incorporated with some notice of Professor Freeman's

criticism of "The Viking Age," both tending in the same direction. One wipes out the Celts as the pioneers of civilization, the other explodes the Saxons as a race distinct from the Scandinavians. With this in view I have been aiming for some time past, to put my thoughts in train for publication, but want of time has always stood in the way.

J. C. ROGER.

FRIARS WATCH,
WALTHAMSTOW.

October, 1890.

CELTIC MSS.
IN RELATION TO
THE MACPHERSON FRAUD, &c.

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My attention was lately directed to a lengthy article that appeared in *The Scotsman* of the 12th of last November, bearing the initials of Mr. Mackinnon, Professor of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, to whom I sent a copy of my book, *Celticism a Myth*, then just issued from the press. The article begins with a tribute to the assiduity of the Historiographer Royal in the cause of Celtic literature; but is plainly intended as a refutation of my statement to the effect that "It is no longer pretended that any Gaelic poetry has been preserved in early manuscripts," &c. In citing the remark of Dr. Irving it was certainly not my intention to call down an exhibition of Professor Mackinnon's Celtic wares—of the authenticity and character of which I am profoundly ignorant—but simply to express my conviction that the alleged manuscript documents of which Macpherson professed

to give a translation did not exist. *De non existentibus et non apparentibus* Dr. Johnson says, *eadem est ratio*. There are unfortunately now no Doctor Johnsons, or Pinkertons or John Hill Burtons to deal with these possible inventions or forgeries of a later age, the perhaps "other evidences" of what the great lexicographer characterised as "Scotch conspiracy in national falsehood." Ample time and opportunity has been afforded since 1762—the date when Macpherson first gave to the world his *Ossian the Son of Fingal*—to fabricate missing documents or supply others of more startling character. A pungent criticism from the pen of Mr. Hill Burton, or a crushing commentary by either of the other named critics, would probably have relegated these so-called Celtic MSS.—some of them at least—to the nothingness whence they came. It is clear that what Professor Mackinnon brings forward is not *evidence*, certainly not such as would be accepted in a Court of Law. There is no substantiation of the Macpherson manuscripts save the statements, and what I fear must be regarded as the fabrications, of a number of interested individuals retailed at second hand, none of all whom can be accepted as unprejudiced witnesses. After

the strictest search for the originals of Ossian, Dr. Johnson came to the conclusion that as regards Scotland and the pretensions of James Macpherson, there was not in existence "an Erse manuscript a hundred years old." Any attempt therefore, in our day to bring into agreement this literary imposture with the difficulties which stultify all conception of its genuineness is foredoomed to failure. If, as Mr. Mackinnon alleges, it be "perfectly established" that Macpherson carried away from the North-West Highlands several Gaelic manuscripts it is equally certain he never exhibited them to any one capable of forming a judgment as to their authenticity. "The collection proper," it would appear, "consists of sixty-three separate parcels." How many of these are genuine we shall probably never know. These are "Transcripts of several MSS. or portions of MSS. by Mr. McLachlan, and the Rev. Donald Mackintosh," and collections of "Ossianic poetry made by a schoolmaster at Kilmelford," volumes of tales which belonged to Mr. Campbell of Islay, a collection of Gaelic poetry made by a schoolmaster at Dunkeld, the MSS. whatever these may be, written in "The old Gaelic hand!" the use of which, we are told, was discontinued

about the middle of the last century. "Regarding the history of the great majority of these documents," it is said "we are ignorant"—certainly at least, I am, most profoundly. It appears however, that "The Rev. Mr. Gallie saw in Macpherson's possession" "several volumes, small octavos, or rather large duodecimo in the Gaelic language and characters"! Scarcely less authentic is the fact that Lachlan Macviurich "remembers well that Clanranald made his father give up the *Red book* to James Macpherson," and that Macpherson himself deposited certain MSS. with his publishers Messrs. Beckett and Dehondt which for a whole year remained in the custody of that firm. These manuscripts mentioned by Mr. Mackinnon were probably the Gaelic leases of Macleod of Rasay referred to by me in *Celticism a Myth*. The fact that Macpherson so prostituted his talents, and character for integrity was stated to me many years ago by an aged clergyman of the Church of Scotland, who vouched for his statement on the faith of his friend George Dempster of Dunichen, who was cognizant of the circumstance. Father Farquharson, it is alleged, made a collection of Gaelic MSS. before 1745, the last leaves of which were used to kindle a stove fire