

THE HEBRIDES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

The name of the Hebrides, the islands scattered along the western coast of Scotland, from the Orkneys to Ireland, is unusual enough to remain in one's mind after a single hearing. Frequently it seems to suggest the lost Pleiades, or the French Revolutionary month, Brumaire; occasionally it is mistaken for the name of a constellation, and perhaps something of the glamor that is attached to stellar bodies is attached to these islands.

Through the reading of the last seven years I have found this name recurring, always with the same value in establishing atmosphere or suggesting remoteness; and to discover whether these values were constant and how far they extended seemed worthy of the undertaking. It seemed probable that the definite contribution of the Hebrides to Barrie's play, Mary Rose, one of the first

pieces of writing to call my attention to the islands, might be approximated in the works of other authors. At the outset, the study promised interest primarily as a survey of one relation between literature and geography, but as it has progressed, it has shown unexpected similarities among writers of different periods and temper.

In making this study I have attempted to discover and record all uses of the Hebrides in English literature; to indicate the forms that these uses have taken, general as well as purely literary; and to show what common characteristics belong to this body of writing. It has been necessary to sail without chart for most of the way, and to follow any clue that appeared. A few books, such as The Cambridge History of English Literature, the Encyclopedia Britannica, Poole's Index of Periodical Literature, and A Topographical Dictionary to the Works of Shakespeare and his fellow Dramatists, by E. H. Sugden, have been of service; but the

search has been directed mainly by the likelihood of certain authors' having visited and written of the Hebrides. The works thus found represent not the entire, although probably the most important contribution of the islands to English literature; more time and more guidance from topographical indexes might complete what has already been discovered.

This material I have discussed according to literary form, or, as in the fourth chapter, lack of literary form. The largest part is narrative prose in novels or tales; a slighter amount is furnished in dramas; a considerable portion is composed of general treatments of the islands, such as lives of the Hebridean Saint Columba and the journals of travelers; and the most important part, if not the most extensive, is the treatment of the Hebrides in verse. This last division, more clearly than any of the others, shows the characteristics common to

all the treatments of the islands, and emphasizes the second discovery in this study: that there is in these works a recognizable similarity beyond geography, a similarity in the points of view of the authors making for common characteristics.

The characteristics are four and may be defined as follows: first, a consciousness, often intense, on the part of the author, of nature surrounding him with an almost animate wall of rock and sea; second, a perception of the contrast between even the strongest powers of human beings and immovable external forces; third, a heavy knowledge of gloom and shadows; and fourth, a recognition of mystery, occasionally sinister, in nature or in its relation to humanity. Of these four elements, the first is the most readily observed; the fourth, the most peculiar to the Islands.

One has only to open at random
 Dr. Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands,

for example, to find some word about the presence of frowning rocks and "craggs irregularly broken" and "dreary vaults" near the sea; or to look through Thomas Campbell's Reullura for the "southern gale"; or to read in A Princess of Thule of "lemon" and "violet" sunsets in Lewis; in all Hebridean writing, these facts and others similar are present to indicate the writer's attention to nature.

Scarcely less frequent than these descriptions are oppositions between humanity and nature: Mary Macleod in The White Heron^{1.} watching the sea in which her lover has been drowned; David Balfour marooned on his island; Macleod of Dare and his captive on the sinking yacht; these and many other characters array gallant courage against enemies of sea and rock. It is not surprising that the pages of Hebridean literature are full of shadows and voices of the drowned;

1. In The Divine Adventure, by Fiona Macleod.

that the "Merry Men" send terror to those who hear them; and that the Iona fishermen tell with a shudder of the man who was transformed into a seal.

Nor is it surprising, since these other elements are found, that the fourth should be a sense of strangeness, which may lead to knowledge of remote beauty or to unreasonable dread. Such a sense of strangeness is found in Mary Rose, in the untrustworthy beauty of the small island, and again in Green Fire in Alan's wandering through the green haunted caves of Rona; in the sudden rising of the three black birds in Gibson's poem, Flannan Isle; in the very greenness of Ulva in Macleod of Dare; and in the Sin-Eater's vain struggle against his enemy's conscience on the island of Iona.

Perhaps this fourth characteristic is an extension of the sensitiveness to nature of which I have spoken: a subjective strain which permits, or forces, a mind to see a malevolent seal under a green wave,

or to predict the appearance of one of the Sidhe. Whatever its explanation, and to whatever use it is put, this attitude shows a penetration beyond externals. Some of the writers have gone far beyond the apparent toward their conception of the real; all, to some extent, have diverged from a too-solid view of the universe; and certainly, such divergence is no unimportant effect for one region to cause in a literature.

CHAPTER II.

The Hebrides in English Narrative.

"A whisper of the secret tides upon another coast."
 Fiona Macleod.

The history of the treatment of the Hebrides in English narrative, begins with the development of the novel, and continues with greater or less importance until the present, including a body of writing, not extensive, but sharply individual, and representative, at each point, of a special temper among contemporary writers. The body as a whole has a marked similarity beyond the likeness explicable geographically: a similarity of idea and reflection on the part of the authors, which it is interesting to observe manifesting itself in the work of two such apparently antipodal figures as Samuel Johnson and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The main forms which this narrative has taken are the diary, the novel,

and the tale, varying from the short sketch to a length only slightly less than that of the novel; and within these forms, another division may be made between narratives which introduce extraneous characters into a Hebridean setting, and those which present native characters for their own sake. The most important and extended treatment of the islands in narratives by one person is the work of Fiona Macleod, who has left seven volumes of writing. The most famous diarist, Dr. Johnson, while proposing to deal with what he finds, brings with him to the Hebrides all of his beliefs and prejudices and classical memories: so that what he does is to show himself remembering antiquity and, rather unconsciously, absorbing a good deal of strangeness without date: his diary belongs, then, to the second division.

The first important work in which the Hebrides appear, however indirectly, seems

to be The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell, a journalistic biography based on the life of a notorious fortune-teller of Defoe's time, published by Daniel Defoe in 1720. The slight use of the Hebrides in this may be assigned to the first group, or that in which purely Hebridean material is presented. The presentation is extremely slight, but interesting in that Defoe makes use of Martin's Description of the Western Islands to justify the power of second sight possessed by Duncan Campbell.

The citation of numerous examples of second sight from Martin's Description furnishes most of the seventh chapter of the Life of Duncan Campbell: several of the extraordinary happenings on the Isle of Skye are described, and a full account given of the spirit Brownie, in whom Martin appeared to be much interested, and who, Defoe

suggests, may have had a prototype engaged in directing Duncan Campbell's activities.

Defoe mentions the Hebrides again in The Adventures of Captain John Gow, without, however, using their names. The hero of this tale is the original of Cleveland in The Pirate of Sir Walter Scott. The Orkney Islands are the scene of the principal adventures of Captain Gow and of the Pirate, Cleveland: but Captain Gow, in the course of his expeditions, fails to take a chance of escape and stays at Garris-town in the Orkneys.

"Had Gow taken the alarm, as he ought to have done, at either of these accidents, and put to sea, either stood over for the coast of Norway, or have run through westward between the islands and gone for the Isle of Man, or for the North of Ireland, he might easily have gone clear off: for there was of force sufficient to have spoken with him." 2.

In the end, the unfortunate pirate was captured, taken to the Marshalsea, and finally

hanged.

A disciple of the early novelists, and one who "wished to be as particular as Mr. Richardson, as manly as Captain Fielding, as breezy and vigorous as Dr. Smollett"^{3.} was the next important writer to include some reference to the Hebrides in his writing: Thomas Amory, the author of The Life of John Bunclé and Memoirs Containing the Lives of Several Ladies of Great Britain. The second of these two works is certainly as puzzling an anomaly as Edmund Gosse described the first to be: "No odder book than John Bunclé was published in England through the long life of Amory.... The curious feature of John Bunclé is that the story is told with the strictest attention to realism and detail, and yet is embroidered all over with the impossible."^{4.}

3. Gosse, Edmund: Gossip in a Library - P. 219.

4. Ibid., P. 218.

In the Memoirs, which turn out to be a long and rather confused biography of one English Lady "of importance," Mrs. Marinda Benlow, Amory includes a diary of a trip to the Hebrides, taken, supposedly by this same lady. So far as internal evidence is concerned the diary may be authentic; but the apparent mixture of fact and unreality in John Bunclé, which Gosse notices, makes one hesitate to decide how much of the biography of Mrs. Marinda Benlow is authentic.

The diary of the trip to the Hebrides is by consequence of the uncertain fabric of the whole, difficult to classify. It is an entertaining, lively discourse, telling of the trip taken by the writer and three other ladies; whether or not they are also "ladies of importance," the reader is not told specifically; but they doubtless are. Mrs. Benlow occupies herself light-heartedly

with descriptions of birds found on the Islands of Troda and Lewis: the sea-pye, the sea-pheasant, and the rare flamingo; then, tiring of ornithology, she turns to her favorite theology, and describes two sharply contrasting nuns that she found in a convent on the island of Troda. The more rational, less mystical of the two she leads away with her, back into the world, so easily that the reader again wonders about the veracity of someone, Thomas Amory, or even the lady herself. Theology, diatribes against Catholicism, and pious celebration of protestantism, occupy most of the diary. Mrs. Benlow has the ability to discover secluded pious hermits such as Alvarez Durour, living on a rocky isle near the Flannan group; or the learned old woman on Lewis, who wrote a manuscript, Advice to the Ladys of Great Britain."

One is forced to question, somewhat, the existence of such interesting Hebridean characters as Mr. Bannerman with his collection of Roman relics on Lewis, as well as the realistic basis for ascribing an undue love of music to the inhabitants of that same island; but one may enjoy fully the eagerness with which the writer tells of these places and people; and the appreciation, probably authentic, of the beauty of natural caves and storms, which she accuses Martin of neglecting woefully; but on the whole, this diary is too amphibian, too little either fact or imagination, to be of much importance as information or as literature. At most, it may be said to be part of the "Crimson streak on the gray surface of the eighteenth century," as Gosse describes Amory's life.

The next important contributions to this body of Hebridean literature arrive

simultaneously from the pens of two well-known writers of the Eighteenth Century, of whom the more famous has left, in this instance, a work less celebrated than that of his satellite. It is more generally known that James Boswell wrote a Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides than that Samuel Johnson, on whose account the trip was made, wrote his version, also, under the title of A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and such comment as G. H. Mair in his critical work on Modern English Literature makes of the latter is not unique: that "The Journey to the Western Hebrides (which is, indidentally, not the correct title) has been utterly eclipsed by Boswell's livelier and more human chronicle of the same events." Boswell's diary is far longer than his beloved Doctor Johnson's: far more personal, as one would expect anything

Boswell wrote to be; and far more concerned with immediate facts, conversation, and action, than with ideas. Dr. Johnson writes in a more lofty and philosophical tone; and views natives and islands and sea with a detachment bred in part by dislike; although almost unknown to himself, he grows away from the dislike, of the islands and natives at least. We could not expect him to grow out of his deep-laid distrust of the sea; but we are gratified to find him casting aside pre-conceptions and prejudices against everything Scotch, and uttering eloquent un-studied praise of Iona. It is true that Boswell's diary is more human than Dr. Johnson's; but at times, as the discussion will endeavor to show, it is Dr. Johnson, not Boswell, who manifests a flash of appreciation for some un-obvious characteristic of the islands, in a passage of prose which deserves to be called poetic.

Aside from their respective merits, both of these journals deserve a distinguished place in literature. The works of two other traveler-diarists scarcely deserve the honor, although it is true that Dr. Johnson carried with him a copy of Description of the Western Islands, by Martin, to whom he refers with better humor than to James Pennant. A difference of opinion on the Ossian poems would seem to account for the occasional spleen of the style, no matter how many reservations Dr. Johnson may have to himself. However, the diaries of both Johnson and Boswell are incontestably works of literature; both are written in polished English through which ideas colored and moulded by humanistic knowledge shine luminous; both are pieces of purposive writing for a critical public represented at high points by such men as Garrick and Goldsmith, Gibbon and Reynolds.

As we have observed before,
 it is interesting enough to watch Dr.
 Johnson moving his classic erudition
 through the isolated western islands:
 writing a Latin Ode to Mrs. Thrale on
 the Island of Skye, and writing another
 ode on Inchkenneth; being reminded of
 Homer on the Island of Raasay: "Without
 is the rough ocean and the rocky land,
 the beating billows and the howling
 storm; within is plenty and elegance,
 beauty and gaiety, the song and the dance.
 In Raasay, if I could have found an
 Ulysses, I had fancied a Phaeacia." 5.

Equally worthy of notice is the
 fact that he makes careful report of actual
 conditions on the islands; of the tacks-
 men, or stewards,^{6.} of industries, roads, life
 of inhabitants, and education, and that he

5. Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland
 P. 59, R. W. Chapman, Ed., Oxford University
 Press. (Further references will be made to
 this edition).

6. Ibid., P. 78.

becomes increasingly engrossed in his material, so that he can write with feeling on the subject of legal government:

"Legal government has yet something of novelty to which they (the islanders) cannot conform. The ancient spirit, that appealed only to the sword, is yet among them. The tenant of Scalpa, an island belonging to Macdonald, took no care to bring his rent; when the landlord talked of exacting payment, he declared his resolution to keep his ground, and drive all intruders from the Island, and continued to feed his cattle as on his own land, till it became necessary for the Sheriff to dislodge him by violence." 7.

Again in giving his views of the Hebridean Second Sight, Dr. Johnson writes with an eloquence centred on the immediate subject and not interfered with by preconceptions: his stern faith helps him accept, if not understand, some of the phenomena at which the more materialistic Boswell shrugs a skeptical shoulder. Even in the penumbra of the Second Sight,

7. Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, P. 96.

in discussing fairies, Dr. Johnson shows surprising geniality:

"Of Brownny, mentioned by Martin, nothing has been heard for many years. Brownny was a sturdy Fairy; who, if he was fed, and kindly treated, would as they said, do a great deal of work. They now pay him no wages, and are content to labour for themselves.

"In Troda, within these three-and-thirty years, milk was put every Saturday for Greogach or the Old Man with the Long Beard. Whether Greogach was courted as kind, or dreaded as terrible, whether they meant, by giving him the milk, to obtain good, or avert evil, I was not informed. The Minister is now living by whom the practice was abolished."

From this subject, he continues, to speak of Second Sight:

"By the term Second Sight seems to be meant a mode of seeing, superadded to that which Nature generally bestows. In the Earse it is called Taisch; which signifies likewise a spectre, or a vision. I know not, nor is it likely that the Highlanders ever examined, whether by Taisch used for second Sight, they mean the power of seeing, or the thing seen.

"I do not find it to be true, as it is reported, that to the Second Sight nothing is presented but phantoms of evil. Good seems to have the same proportion in those visionary scenes, as it obtains in real life: almost all remarkable events have evil for their basis; and are either miseries incurred, or miseries escaped. Our sense is so much stronger of what we suffer, than of what we enjoy, that the ideas of pain predominate in almost every mind. What is recollection but a revival of vexations, or history but a record of wars, treasons, and calamities? Death, which is considered as the greatest evil, happens to all. The greatest good, be what it will, is the lot but of a part." 8.

The author of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* may be seen here not to have changed his sombre convictions; certainly, the Western Islands would not be the place for him or for another to make such an alteration. In his dark, and yet reverent mood, he examines further his subject:

"Strong reasons for incredulity (in second sight) will readily occur.

This faculty of seeing things out of sight is local, and commonly useless. It is a breach of the common order of things, without any visible reason or perceptible benefit. It is ascribed only to a people very little enlightened; and among them, for the most part, to the mean and the ignorant.

"To the confidence of these objections it may be replied, that by presuming to determine what is fair, and what is beneficial, they presuppose more knowledge of the universal system than man has attained; and therefore depend upon principles too complicated and extensive for our comprehension; and that there can be no security in the consequence, when the premises are not understood; that the Second Sight is only wonderful because it is rare, for, considered in itself, it involves no more difficulty than dreams, or perhaps than the regular exercises of the cogitative faculty; that a general opinion of communicative impulses, or visionary representations, has prevailed in all ages and all nations; that particular instances have been given, with such evidence, as neither Bacon nor Bayle has been able to resist; that sudden impressions, which the event has verified, have been felt by more than own or publish them; that the Second Sight of the Hebrides implies only the local frequency of a power, which is nowhere totally unknown; and that where we are unable to decide by antecedent reason, we must be content to yield to the force of testimony." 9.

This passage shows a fine tolerance for the individual and for the activities of individual minds and spirits, which Dr. Johnson sustains until the end of the discussion, where, perhaps a trifle ashamed of his enthusiasm, he reverts to his usual attitude regarding the Scotch, and says, "A Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist, who does not love Scotland better than the truth." 10.

Another passage in which Dr. Johnson expresses himself with vigor and freedom, and a good deal of appreciation, is his description of Coriatachan, in Skye:

"In our way to Armidel was Coriatachan, where we had already been, and to which therefore we were very willing to return. We staid however so long at Talisker, that a great part of our journey was performed in the gloom of the evening. In travelling even thus without light thro' naked solitude, when there is a guide whose conduct may be trusted, a mind not naturally too much disposed to fear, may preserve some degree of cheerfulness; but what must be the solicitude of him who should be wandering, among crags and hollows, benighted, ignorant, and alone?

"The fictions of the Gothick romances were not so remote from credibility as they are now thought. In the full prevalence of the feudal institution, when violence desolated the world, and every baron lived in a fortress, forests and castles were regularly succeeded by each other, and the adventurer might very suddenly pass from the gloom of woods, or the ruggedness of moors, to seats of plenty, gaiety, and magnificence. Whatever is imaged in the wildest tale, if giants, dragons, and enchantments be expected, would be felt by him, who, wandering in the mountains without a guide, or upon the sea without a pilot, should be carried amidst his terror and uncertainty, to the hospitality and elegance of Raasay or Dunvegan." 11.

Subtracting the polite ending of this paragraph, we have a fair idea of what even a classicist feels in the face of a nature which would have sent Wordsworth or Gray into less definable and more deeply-trenched moods. Similarly, of the island of Ulva, Dr. Johnson speaks feelingly:

"Romance does not more often exhibit a scene that strikes the imagination more than this little desert in these depths of Western obscurity, occupied not by gross herdsmen, or amphibious fisherman, but by a gentleman and two ladies, of high birth, polished manners, and elegant conversation..." 12.

11. Ibid., p. 69.

12. Ibid., p. 129.

Possibly the most interesting of all Dr. Johnson's comments are those made upon Iona:

"We were now treading that illustrious Island, which was once the luminary of the Caldeonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. (Italics mine.) Far from me and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferently and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona!" 13.

The idea particularly to be remarked upon in this passage is the elevating power of subjects which strengthen the imagination and sunder attention from the present and the obvious; and it is just this sundering

that can be noticed in almost all of the writings which concern the Hebrides.

In his version of the trip to the Hebrides, James Boswell, it is true, gives greater attention to the narrative, to incidental characters, and lodgings and meals, all of which add animation and a conviction of reality to his account. He surpasses Dr. Johnson, definitely, it seems, in his appreciation of the sea, and in his humorous view of the vicissitudes of the journey. On the other hand, he is as definitely surpassed in larger appreciations and in poetic expressions of idea. One of the best passages to illustrate his lively portrayal of action and his immediate occupation in enjoying the trip is that in which he tells of the sail from Skye to Raasay:

"We got into Rasay's carriage, which was a good strong open boat made in Norway. The wind had now risen pretty high, and was against us; but we had four stout rowers, particularly a Macleod, a robust, black-haired fellow, half naked, and bare-headed, something

between a wild Indian and an English tar. Dr. Johnson sat high in the stern, like a magnificent Triton. Malcolm sung an Erse song, the chorus of which was, (Hattin foam foam eri), with words of his own. The tune resembled (Owr the muir amang the heather). The boatmen and Mr. M'Queen chorused, and all went well. At length Malcolm himself took an oar, and rowed vigorously. We sailed along the coast of Scalpa, a rugged island about four miles in length. Dr. Johnson proposed that he and I should buy it, and found a good school, and an episcopal church, (Malcolm said he would come to it), and have a printing-press, where he would print all the Erse that could be found." 14.

Shortly afterward on this sail, which becomes so boisterous that even Boswell objects to it, Dr. Johnson's spurs fall overboard.

"Dr. Johnson was a little angry at first, observing that there was something wild in letting a pair of spurs he carried into the sea out of a boat; but when he remarked, 'that, as James the naturalist had said upon losing his pocket-book, it was rather an inconvenience than a loss.' He told us, he now recollected that he dreamt the night before, that he put his staff into a river, and chanced to let it go, and it was carried down the stream and lost. 'So now you see, (said he,) that I have lost my spurs; and this story is better than many of those which we have concerning the second sight and dreams!" 15.

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14. Journal of the Tour to the Hebrides, R. W. Chapman, Ed., Oxford University Press. (further references will be to this edition.)
15. Ibid., p. 272.

Boswell and Dr. Johnson together give a thorough picture of Dr. Johnson viewing the Western Islands, although both have as their ostensible purpose the description of the islands and islanders themselves. They accomplish this purpose, too, in a secondary fashion: but if the sea is to be described, we are more interested in Dr. Johnson's shudder, and his comparison of a man at sea to a man in jail - with the difference that the latter has the chance of being drowned. And if the rocky caves of Rasay are to be described, we find our attention directed to Boswell's echo of Dr. Johnson at the end of the description:

"The north end of Rasay is as rocky as the south end. From it I saw the little isle of Fladda, belonging to Rasay, all fine green ground; - and Rona, which is of so rocky a soil that it appears to be a pavement. I was told however that it has a great deal of grass, in the interstices. At this end of the island of Rasay is a cave in a striking situation. It is in a recess of a great cleft, a good way up from the sea. Before it the ocean roars, being dashed against monstrous broken rocks; grand

and awful propugnacula. On the right hand of it is a longitudinal cave, very low at the entrance, but higher as you advance. The sea having scooped it out, it seems strange and unaccountable that the interior part, where the water must have operated with less force, should be loftier than that which is more immediately exposed to its violence. The roof of it is all covered with a kind of petrifications formed by drops, which perpetually distill from it. The first cave has been a place of much safety. - I find a great difficulty in describing visible objects. I must own too that the old castle and cave, like many other things, of which one hears much, did not answer my expectations. People are everywhere apt to magnify the curiosities of their country." 16,

The last sentence is written in the style of Boswell's master: and it contains a suggestion of peevishness, perhaps because he can not more easily describe "visible objects." Again, we find our interest shifted from the Hebrides to the personalities of their visitors, that become of final importance. Of the two men, Dr. Johnson is much more impressed than Boswell with natural scenery and with the essential characteristics of the people whom he

he meets on the islands.

After these journals in the eighteenth century there is apparently no literary treatment of the Hebrides until the early part of the next century, in the collection known as Wilson's Tales of the Borders. Four tales in the twelve volume edition contain reference to the Hebrides, of which the most extensive is in The Recluse of the Hebrides, by Walter Logan in the fifth volume. The scene of this narrative is the island of Tyree, or Tiree, where the recluse lives and tells his sorrowful story of intrigue in Italy to the traveller. The recluse himself is an Italian; consequently the Hebridean part of the story is limited to the setting: Ben Chinevarah, "whose rugged and sterile appearance impresses the mind with a sickening sadness;" "the angry roar of the waves;" and "the rugged rocks and inclement skies."

The Rothesay Fisherman, by Oliver Richardson in Volume III. is more convincing at

the outset, than The Recluse; although it, too, discloses a character haunted by a past which he attempts to forget in the Islands. In the two other tales in Volume VII., The Skean Dhu by Alexander Campbell and The Enthusiast by Thomas Gillespie, a slight mention is made of the Isle of Skye. In the former, that island is the home of the principal character, M'Intyre, the owner of the skean dhu, or knife, which causes his disaster. His friend goes to Skye, as exciseman, and meets the former fiancee of M'Intyre, who has rescued him from prison. She is characterized as a courageous woman who saves her lover's life, but rejects him as a murderer, with what seems an easily-summoned rigor. The tale is the most interesting of the four for its characterization of M'Intyre, with his inseparable knife, and of Eliza Stewart. The fourth story is of much less importance here, than the third, for the only reference to the

Hebrides is in a trivial verse from an old song about the Isle of Skye:

"Last night, on my late rambles,
All in the Isle of Skye,
I met a lovely creature
Up in the mountains high!"

To this same period belongs Sir Walter Scott, whose references to the Hebrides are slight in his prose: his main contribution to Hebridean literature is The Lord of the Isles. (1815) In several letters he mentions the islands, both before and after his journey in 1810; and he makes several allusions to the Hebrides in The Pirate; (1821), at the time when Cleveland has the chance of escaping to the islands.

Over fifty years elapsed between the publication of The Pirate and the appearance of A Princess of Thule (1873) the first of the novels of William Black to be laid in the Hebrides, and with the possible exception of Macleod of Dare, (1878) the most impressive of the nine or ten narratives connected with the

17. Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott,
Vol. 1., Pp. 180, 181, 184, 186-8, 190.

Islands. In these novels are represented both the type of treatment in which Hebridean characters and scenes are used for their own sake, and that in which they are used merely as a setting for the situations brought by extraneous characters.

In all of the novels of the group, however slight the use of the islands, they are made important; they are constantly characterized: the dark hills of Arran, the purple hills of Mull, the peace of Iona, the beauty of the harbor of Ornsay, the violet and lemon twilights on Lewis, the lighthouse at Rona, and the greenness of Lismore, are fixed part of an otherwise shifting world. The Hebridean characters themselves often have a substantiality and a steadfastness: Sheila, in A Princess of Thule; Macleod in Macleod of Dare; John of Skye, the captain of the yacht, in White Wings.

In A Princess of Thule the character

of Sheila is the principal concern of both writer and reader: her inexplicable strength and dignity which prevent her more volatile husband from understanding her in any other setting than her native Lewis, and her impetuous alertness to nature, to the sea, to animals, and to all humble creatures, make her a memorable figure, even under the occasionally facile treatment of William Black. She impresses Frank Lavender as a majestic creature. He thinks that: "She would carry with her the mystery of the sea in the depths of her eyes, and the music of the far hills would be heard in her voice...." ^{18.} even away from such a home as is described in this passage:

"And again it was Lavender's good fortune to walk with Sheila across the moorland path they had traversed some little time before. And now the moon was still higher in the heavens, and the yellow lane of light that crosses the violet waters of Loch Roag quivered in a deeper gold. The night air was scented with the Dutch clover growing down by the shore. They could hear the curlew whistling and the plover calling amid that monotonous plash of the waves that murmured all around the coast.

When they returned to the house, the darker waters of the Atlantic and the purple clouds of the west were shut from sight; and before them was only the liquid plain of Loch Roag, with its pathway of yellow fire, and far away on the other side the shoulders, and peaks of the southern mountains, that had grown gray and clear and sharp in the beautiful twilight. And this was Sheila's home." 19.

Another passage that represents very well the kind of scenery which William Black does not tire of describing and which he describes far more feelingly and successfully than he writes conversation, whether Hebridean or English, is the view over the Bay of Uig, where the hosts of Thule and their guests make an expedition:

"It was certainly a strange and impressive scene. They stood on the top of a lofty range of hill, and underneath them lay a vast semicircle, miles in extent, of gleaming white sand, that had in bygone ages been washed in by the Atlantic. Into this vast plain of silver whiteness the sea, entering by a somewhat narrow portal, stretched in long arms of pale blue. Elsewhere the great crescent of sand was surrounded by a low line of rocky hill, showing a thousand tints of olive-green and gray and heather-purple; and beyond that

again rose the giant bulk of Mealasabhal -- grown purple in the heat -- into the southern sky. There was not a ship visible along the blue plain of the Atlantic. The only human habitation to be seen in the strange world beneath them was a solitary manse. But away toward the summit of Mealasabhal two specks slowly circled in the air, which Sheila thought were eagles; and far out on the western sea, lying like dusky whales in the vague blue, were the Flannen Islands - the remote and unvisited Seven Hunters, whose only inhabitants are certain flocks of sheep belonging to dwellers on the mainland of Lewis." 20.

The same intense consciousness of the sea and remoteness manifests itself in Macleod of Dare, (1878) a less consistent but more vigorous work than a Princess of Thule. The Hebridean character is the young scion of the house of Macleod on the island of Mull; the story follows his love for an English actress, whose instable character wavers against the sternness and substantiality of her lover's. The difference between the two appears sharply on Gertrude White's visit to Mull.

She arrives on a day when "the wind is as soft as the winnowing of a seagull's wing; and greengreen are the laughing shores of Ulva:"^{21.} but she cannot appreciate the skirling of the pipes in welcome to her; and the rain and the roar of the sea in the night make her shudder:

"Through the bewilderment of the running water on the panes she looked abroad on the tempest-riven sea - a slate-colored waste of hurrying waves with wind-swept streaks of foam on them - and on the lowering and ever-changing clouds. The fuchsia-bushes on the lawn tossed and bent before the wind; the few orange-lilies, wet as they were, burned like fire in this world of cold greens and grays. And then, as she stood and gazed, she made out the only sign of life that was visible. There was a cornfield below the larch plantation; and although the corn was all laid flat by the wet and the wind, a cow and her calf that had strayed into the field seemed to have no difficulty in finding a rich, moist breakfast. Then a small girl appeared, vainly trying with one hand to keep her kerchief on her head, while with the other she threw stones at the marauders. By-and-by even these disappeared; and there was nothing visible outside but that hurrying

21. Macleod of Dare, p. 266.

and desolate sea, and the wet,
bedraggled, comfortless shore.
She turned away with a shudder." 22.

Even the ruins of Iona cannot comfort the stranger; she goes away, and later word comes of her change of feeling. Keith Macleod, after a vain trip to England, goes back to Mull to brood; once earlier in his life he had caught a glimpse of himself as he must look to another; ".very clearly indeed he could see himself standing there in the early light, looking out on the shining waters of the river. They say that when you see yourself too vividly- when you imagine that you are yourself standing before yourself - that is one of the signs of madness;"²³ and now, as he broods with his whole unpliant nature, this madness comes on him: with the aid of Hamish, his servant, he goes to London in his yacht, and steals away his lost pride, just before her marriage to someone else. On the way to the Hebrides, a storm catches the yacht, the crew are ordered ashore on rocks opposite

22. Macleod of Dare, P. 2-74.

23. Ibid., P. 219.

Iona; but Macleod and his captive stay on the yacht:

"Another white sheet of flame quivered all around them, just as this black figure was descending into the gig; and then the fierce hell of sounds broke loose once more. Sea and sky together seemed to shudder at the wild uproar, and far away the sounds went thundering through the hollow night. How could one hear if there was any sobbing in that departing boat, or any last cry of farewell? it was Ulva calling now, and Fladda answering from over the black water, and the Dutchman is surely awake at last!" 24.

The boat reaches the rocks; but the yacht and its two occupants disappear in the storm.

In spite of the melodramatic tones of much of this book, William Black has put more genuine feeling into his characters than in most of his other writing, and has given expression to unrestrained admiration and awe of the wild nature of the islands, which seems, on the whole, more suited to the tragid ending of this novel than to the peaceful reconciliation of A Princess of Thule.

These two novels have considerably more power than any other of these which deal with the islands; and both show more fully perhaps than any other, the traits of island scenery and disposition which Black remarked: the somewhat primitive although occasionally super-fine strength and determination of human character, and the equally immovable, untamed manifestation of nature in forms of great beauty and of savage splendor.

Written at a later date than these two novels, are several others, which contain passages of interesting description: White Wings, (1879) for example, and Madcap Violet; (1876) Donald Rose of Heimra, (1891) Highland Cousins, (1894) White Heather, (1883) and a short story, A Hallowe'en Wraith (1892). White Wings, or as Black calls it alternately, A Yachting Romance, is valuable mainly as a holiday study of the islands in

their most friendly moods: of panorama such as the following:

"And now, John of Skye,.....clap on all sail now, and take us right royally down through these far islands of the west. Ah! do we not know them of old? Soon as we get around the Cailleach Point we descry the nearest of them amidst the loneliness of the wide Atlantic Sea. For there is Carnaburg, with her spurs of rock; and Fladda, long and rugged, and bare; and Lunga, with her peak; and the Dutchman's Cap -- a pale blue in the south. How bravely the White Dove swings on her way - springing like a bird over the western Swell! And as we get past Ru-Treshnish, behold! another group of islands -- Gometra and the green-shored Ulva, that guard the entrance to Loch Tua; and Colonsay, the haunt of the sea-birds; and the rock of Erisgeir -- all shining in the sun." 25.

John of Skye, mentioned in this passage, is addressed in the form of apostrophe, as are all the characters in this book; the narrator never appears except as a gap in the stencil of the action, or as an occasional recipient of a remark. However, the method does not interfere with the reader's distinct

impression of John of Skye, a determined old sailor, a stickler for the form of his accustomed action, and a passionate lover of the Atlantic.

In White Wings the islands are used as a setting for the story of a group of people from outside; in Highland Cousins, one of the three principal characters is a girl from the Island of Mull, who goes to the mainland opposite Lismore and Kerrera; in Donald Ross of Heimra, one of the two central characters lives on a solitary little isle; in Madcap Violet and White Heather, the Hebrides serve as an extension of an English or Scotch setting; and in the tale, A Hallowe'en Wraith, Hector MacIntyre sails on the Clansman, the island steamer which figures largely in all stories of the Hebrides, from his home in the North, past Skye, Rasay and Scalpa and Ornsay, to Greenock; where the sweetheart, whose wraith has appeared, is living.

Not far from Greenock is Oban, the port from which travelers most frequently embark for the Hebrides; and the port from which another writer, an American, three years before the death of William Black, sailed out to visit the Hebrides. The account of this visit appears in a small book called Brown Heath and Blue Bells, (1895) by William Winter. The Island of Iona receives particular attention, in prose and in verse in this account, and causes such passages as this:

"At a late hour of the night, I went to St. Oran's chapel, among the graves of the Scottish kings and to the cathedral ruins which then were partly in shadow and partly illuminated by the faint light of a gibbous moon. The winds were hushed. The sea was like glass. The sky was covered with thin clouds of silver fleece, through which the moonlight struggled, commingling with the faint, doubtful radiance of a few uncertain stars. Upon the grassy plain that surrounds the ancient church the spectral crosses - of St. Martin, St. Matthew, and St. John, each casting a long weird shadow - glimmered like ghosts. Within the ruins the awful silence was broken

only by a low sighing of the air through crevices of the mouldering walls, and by the fluttering of birds, in the dark hollow heights of the great tower.....I stood long upon the place of the altar, with those strange, rude, effigies of kings and warriors and priests around me, and the stone pillar of St. Columba close by, and I listened to the faint murmur of the sea..." Amid such scenes as these the human spirit is purified and exalted, because amid such scenes as these the best of our present life may be enjoyed, while our humble and reverent hope of the life to come is strengthened and confirmed." 26.

Mull also appears in the sketches by Winter; and Mull is of further importance in a well-known work of a slightly later author, Robert Louis Stevenson. David Balfour is marooned on the "little isle they call Erraid,"^{27.} "under the southwest end of Mull" after the ship has floundered among the stormy islands, past the "great stone hills of Skye...and.. the strange isle of Rum." Here, on this small island, opposite the Ross of Mull David spends four miserable

26. William Winter, Brown Heath and Blue Bells, P. 48.

27. R. L. Stevenson, Kidnapped, (1886) Scribner's 1921, P. 119. (Further references are to this edition.)

days, starving on shell fish, shivering in the cold and rain: watching the smoke and roofs of Iona, a sight which cheered him a little:

"I say it kept hope alive; and indeed it seemed impossible that I should be left to die on the shores of my own country, and within view of a church tower and the smoke of men's houses. But the second day passed; and though as long as the light lasted I kept a bright look-out for boats on the Sound or men passing on the Ross, no help came near me. 28. Finally, after the fourth day, passing sailors bring advice: in broken English, in which David catches the word *Whateffer*, a familiar part of Hebridean English, in which all v's are f's - they tell him that he is on a tidal islet, and that at low tide he can reach the mainland of Mull.

Thankfully, reaching Mull, David makes his way to Torosay. On the way he is impressed with the poverty of the inhabitants, and with a sinister blindman who poses as catechist, or religious teacher. The unholy atmosphere that surrounds this man reminds one of the blind Pew, in Treasure Island. On the whole, David's sojourn in the Hebrides is full of horror.

Again Stevenson uses the Island of Mull as the setting for a narrative, this time in The Merry Men, (1882) ^{which} notwithstanding its cheerful title, contains as much darkness, certainly, as the Hebridean part of Kidnapped. (1886). The whole story takes place on another tidal islet, called Aros, or the Roost. The hero of the tale comes from the University of Edinburgh to visit his uncle and cousin who live on this islet; also to search for a lost ship of the Armada. His uncle is becoming demented after a crime and pillage committed on the survivors of a shipwreck; through the stages of his madness, until the final tragedy, the breakers, or The Merry Men, make a chorus:

"All round the isle of Aros the surf,
 with an incessant, hammering thunder,
 beat upon the reefs and beaches.
 Now louder in one place, now louder
 in another, like the combinations of
 orchestral music, the constant
 mass of sound was hardly varied for
 a moment. And loud above all this
 hurly-burly I could hear the changeful

voices of the Roost~~s~~ and the intermittent Roaring of the Merry Men. At that hour, there flashed into my mind the reason of the name that they were called. For the noise of them seemed almost mirthful, as it out-topped the other noises of the night; or if not mirthful, yet instinct with a portentous joviality. Nay, and it seems even human. As when savage men have drunk away their reason, and discarding speech, bawl together in their madness by the hour; so to my ears, these deadly breakers shouted by Aros in the night." 29.

At a more silent part of the coast the phenomenon of sea-runes is visible:

"When there is any swell, nothing can be seen at all; but when it is calm, as it often is, there appear certain strange, undecipherable marks - sea-runes, as we may name them - on the grassy surface of the bay. The like is common in a thousand places on the coast; and many a boy must have amused himself as I did, seeking to read in them some reference to himself or those he loved." 30.

The character, the mad uncle, is not indigenous to the islands; but his madness may well have been brought to a climax by the very voices of the Merry Men themselves

29. The Merry Men, p. 54.

30. Ibid., P. 25.

as well as by his conscience. Wild solitudes may help wear away grief, but they can not calm a sense of guilt.

A study of Stevenson brings one next to the work of another Celtic writer who, in prose as well as in poetry, is the most important of all those who have written of the Hebrides: Fiona Macleod, or William Sharp; although in this consideration, the former name should be used, since it was this name that represented the more purely Celtic self, and the creative rather than the critical self, of William Sharp.

It would be difficult to estimate the value of the eight volumes of writing of Fiona Macleod; certainly no competent critic has done so up to the present; nor has the supposed dual personality received sufficiently appreciative comment. In fact, that the idea of a dual personality still exists at all testifies to an unimaginative

reception of the work of Fiona Macleod, and to an inability to perceive the need for the privacy of a pen name to shelter the beginning of the rare intimate work of Fiona Macleod from hostile incomprehension. Why should it be necessary to theorize to this extent? So far as his writing is concerned, even the explanation made by Elizabeth Sharp in her Memoir seems superfluous: a writer may discover differences within himself without being accused of a double nature: ~~in-fact~~, to account for complete differences, many a writer might be accused of being a veritable Proteus. The use of the pseudonym has apparently caused the complication in this instance. Elizabeth Sharp has not thrown much light on the subject, if light is needed; the eight volumes exist:

"..So, for a time, he stilled the critical, intellectual mood of William Sharp, to give play to the development of this new found expression of subtler emotions,

towards which he had been moving with all the ardour of his nature.

"From then till the end of his life there was a continual play of the two forces in him, or of the two sides of his nature: of the intellectually observant, reasoning mind - the actor - and of the intuitively spiritual mind - the dreamer, which differentiated more and more one from the other, and required different conditions, different environment, different stimuli, until he seemed to be two personalities in one." 31.

The whole matter which has caused so much bewilderment is of slight value beside the writings of Fiona Macleod; and particularly in this discussion, the fact that these eight volumes, and the additional novel not reprinted, deal almost entirely with the Hebrides, is the fact of primary importance.

The first work published by Fiona Macleod was Pharais, which appears in the edition of 1910 with The Mountain Lovers;

1. E. Sharp: William Sharp, A Memoir, P. 222.

32.

the first of a series of stories and sketches infused with Celtic beauty and mysticism.

Pharais is a narrative, almost the length of a novel, which takes place first on the island of Innisron, and later on the remote isle of Ithona, "--solitary even among the outer isles of which it was one of the most far-set in ocean." ^{33.} The second volume in this series contains The Sin Eater, The Washer of the Ford, and Other Legendary Moralities, almost all of which concern the Hebrides; the third, The Dominion of Dreams and Under the Dark Star, two groups of tales, again with most of their settings in the Hebrides; the fourth, The Divine Adventure, which has no earthly setting, and Iona and Studies in Spiritual History; the fifth and sixth are composed of more legendary tales and prose poems dealing with intangible phases of nature, still chiefly in the Islands; and the seventh contains poems and dramas, of which mention has been

32. Works of Fiona Macleod, 7 Vols. Heinemann, London, 1910. (Future references will be made by volume numbers.)

33. Volume I. p. 162.

made elsewhere. Another work, not ^wthis edition, is the novel Green Fire, published in 1896, and reissued in part as The Herdsman, in the fourth volume of this edition.

Many of the tales deal with historical subjects, as I have said before; and many others deal with characters living contemporary with the writer; others have no definable boundaries except those of the spirit; but in all, there is manifest an almost objective sense of spiritual life. It is no mere hazy visioning, but a profound conviction of a reality greater and more beautiful than anything perceptible; a reality that embraces what one calls religion, but which extends farther: in a region which one may find most surely by attuning oneself to what is most fine of the perceptible world: to the strength and courage of human actions; to the "green ^{34.} fire" of the spring, the "amber surge of ³⁵ the hill stream" or "the sharp briny splash

34. Volume IV. P. 283.

35. Volume VI., P. 196.

of the blue wave tossing its white crest, or of the green billow, falling like a tower of jade in a seething flood." ^{36.}

Among the historical tales Fiona Macleod would include those which do not record years and external events, for he says, in Iona: "History may be written in many ways, but I think that in days to come the method of spiritual history will be found more suggestive than the method of statistical history. The one will, in its own way, reveal inward life, and hidden significance, and palpable destiny: as the other, in the good but narrow way of convention, does with exactitude delineate features, narrate facts, and relate events. The true interpreter will as little despise the one ^{37.} as he will claim all for the other."

This dissatisfaction with objective

36. Volume VI., page 218.

37. Volume IV., Page 95.

chronicle explains partly why Fiona Macleod is able to penetrate so deeply into the strange tempers of the islands and their inhabitants; and why he can write of his own wanderings as a child with this clear intensity:

"I was in a more wild and rocky isle than Iona then, and when I went into a solitary place close by my home, it was to a stony wilderness so desolate that in many moods I could not bear it. But that day, though there were no sheep lying beside boulders as grey and still, no whinnying goats (creatures that have always seemed to me strangely homeless, so that as a child, it was often my noon-fancy on hot days to play to them on a little reed flute I was skilled in making, thwarting the hill-wind at the small holes to the fashioning of a rude furtive music, which I believed comforted the goats, though why I did not know, and probably did not try to know): and though I could hear nothing but the soft, swift, slipping feet of the wind among the rocks and grass and a noise of the tide crawling up from a shore hidden among crags (beloved of swallows for the small honey-flies which feed upon the thyme): still, on that day, I was not ill at ease, nor in any way disquieted. But before me I saw a white rock-dove, and followed it gladly. It flew circling among the crags, and

once I thought it had passed seaward;
but it came again, and alit on a boulder.

"I went upon my knees, and prayed to
it, and, as nearly as I can remember, in
these words:-

"O Dove of the Eternal, I want to love
you, and you to love me: and if you
live on Iona, I want you to show me,
when I go there again the place where
Colum the Holy talked with an angel..."³⁸.

On this island of Iona the writer
records instances of the strange mingling of
Pagan and Christian faith, or, the life of
Colum, and of the memories of incidents in this
life: of Colum's address to the fly, the "little
black beast"³⁹; and of the second sight of
Columba, of which he speaks thus:

"There is something strangely beauti-
ful in most of these 'second-sight'
stories of Columba. The faculty
itself is so apt to the spiritual
law that one wonders why it is so
set apart in doubt. It would, I
think, be far stranger if there were
no such faculty.

"That I believe, it were needless to
say, were it not that these words
may be read by many to whom this
quicken'd inward vision is a super-
stition, or a fantastic glorifica-
tion of insight. I believe, not
only because there is nothing too
strange for the soul, whose vision

38. Vol. Iv., p. 108.

39. Vol. IV., P. 219.

surely I will not deny, while I accept what is lesser, the mind's prescience, and what is least, the testimony of the eyes. That I have cause to believe is perhaps too personal a statement, and is of little account; but in that interior wisdom, which is no longer the flicker of one little green leaf but the light and sound of a forest, of which the leaf is a part, I know that to be true, which I should as soon doubt as that the tide returns or that the sap rises or that dawn is a ceaseless flashing light beneath the circuit of the stars. Spiritual logic demands it." 40.

The island of Iona seems to serve as the centre of the Hebridean world of strangeness, second sight, sea-madness, seal-enchantment, and spiritual sensitiveness of all kinds, so intense as to be painful. It is from an Iona fisherman that the tale called The Sight, (1896)^{41,} originates: a true record, similar to the vision of Ian in Pharais (1893).^{42.} It is also in Iona that Fiona Macleod writes, in the dedication of The Sin Eater to George Meredith, of the expression, "Tha mi Dubhachas" - which means, "I have the gloom;"^{43.}

40. Vol. IV., P. 139.

42. Vol. III., Page 86.

42. Vol. I., Page 31.

43. Vol. VI., Dedication., pp. 4-5.

and of the strangeness of hearing those words from the lips of a little girl in Iona; and in Iona the action of the Sin Eater (1897) takes place, as bitter and dramatic a story as Synge's The Well of the Saints; and deserving of dramatization. The constant allusions to Greek tragedy and to Greek conceptions of art which appear in Fiona Macleod's essays^{44.} are not far in the background in this story; a Fury of a sort is certainly present. Also from Iona comes the tale of The Ninth Wave,^{45.} or the summons of the sea which takes its prey relentlessly from the islands; and likewise, the Iona fisherman tells the story of the enchantment put upon an islander in Eilanmore, by a seal, in The Judgment of God^{46.} (1897).

Next in importance to this island, is the island of Rona, which is the setting for

44. The Winged Destiny, for example, Vol. V., P. 367 ff.

45. Vol. II., p. 63.

46. Vol. II., p. 78.

half of the novel, Green Fire (1896.) Of this work William Butler Yeats writes in a letter to William Sharp:

"I have read Green Fire since I saw you. I do not think it is one of your well-built stories, and I am certain that the writing is constantly self-consciously picturesque; but the atmosphere, the romance of much of it, of The Herdsman part in particular haunts me ever since I laid it down.

"Fiona Macleod has certainly discovered the romance of the remote Gaelic places as no one else has ever done. She has made the earth by so much the more beautiful."⁴⁷

Concerning the same novel, A. E.

(George Russel) wrote in a letter to Fiona Macleod:

"...I read Green Fire a few weeks ago and have fallen in love with your haunted seas. Your nature spirit is a little tragic. You love the Mother as I do but you seem forever to expect some revelation of awe from her lips where I would hide my head in her bosom....I may have met you indeed and not known you. We are so different behind the veil."⁴⁸

The Herdsman part of the novel, which was reissued in the edition of 1910, is the part of

47. William Sharp (Fiona Macleod) A Memoir, p. 276.

48. Ibid., p. 277.

the story which takes place on Rona, where Alan and Ynys, his Breton bride, come to live, and encounter the mysterious Herdsman in the green caves. The hint of a second sight which affects a whole community is one of the most haunting ideas in this novel; and another memorable part is the description of the caves, of which this is an example:

"Some of them reach to an immense height. These are filled with a pale green gloom which in fine weather, and at noon or toward sundown, becomes almost radiant. But most have only a dusky green obscurity, and some are at all times dark with a darkness that has seen neither sun nor moon nor star for unknown ages. Sometimes, there, a phosphorescent wave will spill a livid or a cold blue flame, and for a moment a vast gulf of dripping basalt be revealed; but day and night, night and day, from year to year, from age to age, that awful wave-clamant darkness prevails unbroken." 49.

Another characteristic of Rona is a stillness in the summer that fills all who hear it with a foreboding:

"For sure, there is sometimes in the quiet beauty of summer an air of meance, a breath, a suspicion, a dream-premonition, of suspended force-- a force antagonistic and

terrible. All who have lived in these lonely isles know the peculiar intensity of this summer melancholy. No clamor of tempestuous wind, no prolonged sojourn of untimely rains, and no long baffling of mists in all the drear inclemencies of that remote region, can produce the same ominous and even paralyzing gloom which sometimes can be born of ineffable peace and beauty. Is it that in the human soul there is mysterious kinship with that outer soul which we call Nature; and that in these few supreme hours which come at the full of the year we are, sometimes, suddenly aware of the tremendous forces beneath and behind us, momentarily quiescent?" 50.

Such silence and such awareness of kinship with the "outer soul" come more than once to Fiona Macleod and to the characters whom he creates; as they seem to come to the most sensitive writers who have written of the Hebrides.

After Iona and Rona, the island of Innisron is memorable for the characters of Alastair and Lora, and their bravery in the face of Alastair's madness; of the sea-cave beyond the "sloping hollow filled

with moonflowers;"^{51.} and for the equally tragic bravery of Mary Macleod, in The White Heron (1898).

"For three nights hereafter she saw the white heron. On the third she had no fear. She followed the foam-white bird; and when she could not see it, then she followed its wild, plaintive cry. At dawn she was still at Ardfeulan, on the western side of Innisron; but her arms were round the drowned heart whose pulse she heard leap so swift in joy, and her lips put a vain warmth against the dear face that was wan as spent foam, and as chill as that." 52.

In the South Isles, Oronsay and Colonsay, is the impressive figure of still another Macleod, Manus, the wandering poet, who joined a gypsy tribe: and in Barra, farther north, is Maeve, the girl who "has the wave of the sea in her heart;"^{54.} tragic figures, all of these, scarcely relieved by the occasional appearance of a child like Elsie in A Sorrow of the Wind. (1897)

51. Pharais, Vol. I., p. 95.

52. Vol. IV., P. 276.

53. Vol. III., Lost, p. 35.

54. Vol. V., p. 138.

Other groups of tragic characters are to be found in the tales of Under the
 Dark Star,^{55.} (1897) which deals with the family of Achanna, accursed in an almost Oedipœan way: and the tales in Seanachas (1897) of Scathach, the legendary amazon Queen of Skye, who watched over Cuchulain's youth, and loved him despairingly;^{56.} and still another,^{57.} to return to Iona, is the group of young monks of Colum whose lives turn bare in sanctity or are transformed by ancient pagan claims: as was the life of the priest of later times, in The Book of the Opal.^{58.} (1898.)

The first paragraph in this last work shows that Fiona Macleod is the possessor of a combination of insight and tolerance rarely found together, a combination which would justify any claim to having understood the relation of the "outer soul" to the inner:

"He (Ambrose Stuart) left his birth-isle

55. Vol. III., p. 291 ff.

56. Vol. II., p. 369 ff.

57. Vol. II., The Woman with the Net and Cathal of the Woods.

58. Vol. III.

in the Hebrides because he could no longer be a priest, having found a wisdom older than that he professes, and gods more ancient than his own, and a vision of beauty, that was not greater than that which dreaming souls see through the incense of the Church - because there is no greater or lesser beauty in the domain of the spirit, but only Beauty - that was to him higher in its heights and deeper in its depths." 59.

From this brief survey of the work of Fiona Macleod one may derive some conception not only of the quality and range of his work, but also of the most significant characteristics of all Hebridean narrative. The ideas and impulses which find expression in the writing of others before him pass through a more profound and artistic development in the writing of Fiona Macleod: he weaves the floating material furnished by the typical attitude toward nature, for example, into a consistent and harmonious whole, and he relates this attitude to the underlying philosophy, which becomes in his hands, a Celtic Platonism.

CHAPTER III.

The Hebrides in English Drama.

A tale of character or a story woven around a myth or legend may be written in any setting where characters have lived and legends been made about them. Melville or Conrad may narrate the adventures of men living in some distant island in the South Seas; or Turgenev may give an account of the complexities of society in Moscow: in either case the mingling of setting and character constitutes the value of the result. In narrative poetry, also, the setting has a similar relation to the final effect in that it is subordinate to character and to action.

In the drama, however, unless the setting is used as a thing in itself, with particular emphasis, it must be inconspicuous and easily understood for the purpose of economy. It must not, for example,

be a remote bare island, unless the point of the play is that on this island and nowhere else the action could have materialized.

The obscurity of the Hebrides and their apparently slight connection with the rest of the world have no doubt limited their use as a setting for plays to the three examples which follow in this discussion and which depend for their effect largely upon natural environment.

Of these three plays, the first in artistic importance, is Mary Rose (1924) by James M. Barrie. Although the theme of this play is inseparable from a Hebridean tradition, it is not improbable that Barrie might have chosen the Islands even if the tradition had not motivated the choice, for apart from the legend, the play requires a remote and un-worldly atmosphere, which may leave the mind free from too marked associations, and ready to appreciate the ideas with which the author is concerned. Ideas are of primary

importance in Mary Rose: the conception of a human nature too intimately attuned to the forces of external nature and consequently the victim of what Mary Rose calls the "Bad dogs": and the resulting situation in which return from death makes a sharp question to the customary longings for such return.

The first idea Barrie develops through Mary Rose's relation to "The Island that likes to be visited": the sinister island where Mary Rose is stolen away as a child, and where she and her husband go on their ill-fated visit five years after their marriage. Mary Rose's slight difference from other people, a distance that sometimes slips between her and the nearest person, and allows her to speak as Barrie says, "senselessly" of a "little old woman" where there is no one, is felt increasingly, in spite of her playfulness and her bright naturalness ^{or} of all-but naturalness. In the scene which takes place on the island,

the difference becomes the more noticeable the nearer Mary Rose comes to the old influence. Cameron, the grim, intellectual guide, a student at Aberdeen in the winter, furnishes another apparent contradiction in his mingled skepticism and credulity; he points ahead toward Mary Rose's fate when he tells her about the reputation of the island:

"Mark you, Mistress Blake, an island that had visitors would not need to want to be visited. And why has it not visitors? Because they are afraid to visit it..."

A little farther on in the play such panic as the unexpected flapping of bird's wings may cause in a silent barn comes in Cameron's cryptic words: "The birds like this island more than is seemly." At such times, Cameron speaks like an ancient spirit of the Islands with a gnomic wisdom and a grave fear.

Through his words and through Mary Rose's fascination, the island assumes a definite personality. The mossy seat and the old rowan tree to which Mary Rose bids farewell

are more than moss and tree: they are animate elemental forces like the creatures in Hauptmann's Sunken Bell; and a few minutes after the Farewell, when the island calls, and tears Mary Rose away from her husband, who is gathering stones but a few paces distant, the moss and the tree have had their share in the summons.

The bewitchment of Mary Rose in the Hebrides suggests the traditional stealing away of young brides, which Yeats used as the theme of The Land of the Heart's Desire: the idea is not uncommon among the Celts and in fact, in the second of the three plays concerned with the Hebrides, a variation of the ^{same} idea appears. In A Family Legend, (1810) by Joanna Baillie, a young wife is the principal character. The scene of the play is largely the Island of Mull in the Inner Hebrides; and the basis of the story is a legend told to the author by a friend among whose ancestors it had originated.

In this play, as in Mary Rose, a girl comes near a tragic destiny in the Hebrides: Helen of the Campbells is another Mary Rose in her subjection to the fate that lurks on the island: but the fate in A Family Legend is the intrigue directed against Helen on account of the animosity toward her clan, and also the weakness of her husband's character, which renders him a malleable object for Benlora's manipulation. Perhaps a more tangible enemy such as a husband - and this weakling, like Posthumus in Cymbeline acts from fear, not from malice toward his wife, - or such as an unscrupulous lieutenant like Benlora, who distorts the opinions of the Campbells and plain Helen's death, is more easily faced than the subtler destruction of such unseen hands and voices as lured away Mary Rose. The actual development of the danger in A Family Legend is more obvious than that in Mary Rose.

The scene of the former play is laid definitely on the Island of Mull, with its "sea-beaten rocks"^{60.} and its "rocky cavern,"^{61.}

60. The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie (1853) Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, P. 483.
61. Ibid. p. 487.

and the gloomy castle of the MacLeans, and later, on a small rocky island, covered by the sea at high tide. The play ends on the ^{62.} ~~mountain~~ ^{mainland}, in the domain of Lorn.

The action is well suited to this grim setting. The conspiracy in "Irba's rocky cavern" develops naturally into the capture of Helen and her abandonment on the rock to wait until the tide closes over her head. From another conveniently placed small island, she is observed by De Grey and by her brother, who first think her a bird:

"Some wounded bird that there hath dropped its wing,
And cannot make its way." 63.

After the rescue of Helen by this fortunate coincidence, the action of the play moves from the gloomy Isle of Mull to the mainland; but even there, in the stronghold of the Campbells, the sinister influence of the Campbells persists. A messenger comes to announce Helen's supposed death: and shortly after his arrival, come Maclean himself, and

62. Scott, The Lore of the Isles.

63. Works of Joanna Baillie, P. 494.

Benlora, and all the other dissembling enemies, who walk, as a Campbell servant observes,

".....as if her pallid coffin
They followed still."

Finally, however, the islanders are punished, and Helen united with her lover, De Grey.

The atmosphere of this play is consistently gloomy; the setting is rugged and rocky; and the characters for the most part show little more flexibility than the surface of the island, although the character of Helen reveals some animation and a fairly convincing generosity and courage. The other characters are not individualized sufficiently to make them significant in their setting. A character who might repay acquaintance, but who does not appear directly, is "John of the Isles" "the sighted awful man" who pretends that he has a vision of the destruction to be caused by Helen's presence on the island. The author does not explain whether this man has merely histrionic second sight, which may be commercialized, or whether he possesses the true faculty. Probably

he was so gifted; for with such a power, he would fit readily into the rest of the play.

In both this play and the preceding one, the principal character has been a young woman threatened by danger, both physical and spiritual: to the company of these two belongs a third unhappy lady of the Highlands, Ida, the daughter of the Countess of Arran, in The Scottish History of James the Fourth (1594) by Robert Greene.

Ida of Arran is not the central character of the play: that position is occupied by the Queen; but ^{she} ~~Ida~~ is an important figure.

The play is more realistic than either of the other two: and the contradiction of Ida's emotions by her sense of honor is shown convincingly. It would be agreeable to think her character related to a certain set of causes, perhaps to a setting, because of the chance of its repetition. However, one hesitates to lay claim, for the Hebrides, either to Ida's charm and intelligence at court, or to

her staunch courage, on the island of Arran when she returns after the king's marriage.

The setting of the play has slight importance. Ida's courage may be attributed in part to the fact that she has not spent her whole life in the contaminating atmosphere of the Court of Scotland: but such an assertion is rendered invalid by the similar courage of the Queen. It is probable that Robert Greene chose this western isle because in the source play⁶⁴ on which he based James IV., the king is shipwrecked upon the island of Mona (~~Fona~~), where he falls in love with the daughter of his host, Arran was no doubt a convenient substitute for Mona.

Consequently, there are few individualizations of the islands, or of its inhabitants, with the exception of Ida and her mother. One of the rare descriptions of the island is the hospitality mentioned as traditional by the King's messenger.

In the play, as in the other two

64. Arrenopia.

which deal with the Hebrides, runs a sombreness in nature and in human nature. The most impressive use of the Hebrides, and the most sombre, is to be found in the characterization, almost impersonation of natural forces, in Mary Rose; and the other two plays furnish a background of a steady grayness.

CHAPTER IV.

General Treatments of the Hebrides.

65

"Sunt autem XXV. Haebudes," Pliny says in his account of the region west of Britain; and even before his century, which was the first after Christ, these islands were known by historians and geographers, among whom were the doubtful Pytheas, mentioned by Strabo, and Mela, a geographer of the age of Claudius, who wrote a superficial survey of the Orkney Islands and the Aemodæ, or Shetland Isles. Pliny seems to be the first writer of antiquity actually to mention the Hebrides by name. A later geographer, Solinus, admits of knowing only five "Haebudes," and five is the number recorded by Ptolemy, who speaks of the "Eboudai" north of Ibernia.

Notwithstanding the discrepancies in these early accounts, and the scantiness of the facts known about them, the Hebrides were known by their present name,

or at least its parent form, by the beginning of the Christian era. From the time of the first known geographers down to the period in which Christianity began to spread to the West, little increase seems to be made in the knowledge which the rest of the world had concerning the Hebrides. They may be supposed to have lain in their stormy seas known to Strabo around Thule; one island in particular destined for a celebrated part in the Christianization of the West.

Of all the Hebrides, Iona is signally blessed by having been chosen by Saint Columba as his dwelling place, when he came from Ireland in 595 to teach the Picts and Culdees in the north. Columba was a gracious saint for whom any island might wait patiently for centuries. The immediate cause of his departure from Ireland, and his choice of Iona are matters of dispute, but James Pennant in his Tour of the Hebrides says with authority, apparently, that Columba had quarreled with his native land, and vowed to live where he could

not even see it. On Iona the pile of stones that he erected to test the distance from Ireland, is called in Gaelic, "Carman-chulrich Eirean" - "the eminence of the back turned to Ireland."

Nothing in Columba's later life seems to correspond to his angry leaving of Ireland, for he is known chiefly through his Christianization of the ungentle Picts in the north, and his benevolence to seals and birds on his own island. One of the scenes best to remember in his life is his preaching on the shore to the seals, who no doubt sat attentively with raised heads in a half-circle in the water, their red eyes blazing with zeal, for Columba, in spite of his name of Dove, had vigor and eloquence.

In several ways Columba is a peculiarly appropriate saint for the Hebrides. He fitted himself to the ruggedness of the Island, and at the same time kept himself alert and sensitive to the voices of nature that the remote wilderness allowed him to hear. He loved the wild

bees and the birds, and considered no worship complete that disregarded these creatures. His belief embraced a good deal of pantheism, which pointed forward to the continually alternating tides of paganism and Christianity not yet settled in that western country.

An incident not quite in keeping with Columba's tolerance, if it is true⁶⁶ and Fiona Macleod doubts that it is true, is his treatment of Oran, one of the Culdee priests who was converted. Oran returned from death to open his eyes and cry out ^{that} what he had seen of the next world was like nothing that Columba had taught, whereupon Columba commanded that earth be put on Oran's eyes.

The life of Saint Columba was written in Latin by Adamnan, Abbot of Iona, in the second part of the seventh century: "the most notable of the literary productions of the Celtic Church in Britain."⁶⁷ Columba is mentioned also in Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England; and in the Anglo-Saxon

66. Iona, Vol. IV., p. 148.

67. G. H. Gerould: Saints' Legends, P. 95.

Chronicle for the year 595 A.D. he receives the following notice:

"In this year Aethelberht succeeded to the kingdom of the Kentish people, and held it fifty-three winters. In his day the holy pope Gregory sent us baptism; that was in the two and thirtieth year of his reign and Columba the mass-priest came to the Picts and converted them to the faith of Christ. They are dwellers in the northern mountains, and their king gave him the island which is named Ii (Iona); where there are five hides, from what men say. There Columba built a monastery; and he was abbot there thirty-two winters, and then died when he was sixty-seven winters..."

In addition to these treatments, the life of Columba has been written by five other writers, according to Douglas Hyde, in his Literary History of Ireland. Of all the saints who have borne the name of Columba, Columba of Iona is the most important; and the account of his work and of his life in the Hebrides will be found in any complete study of hagiology, monastic history, or history of Christianity, for from the island of Iona "proceeds the Christianization of Scotland."^{68.}

68. P. Schaff: A History of the Christian Church, Vol.IV. P. 67.

From the time of Columba until the middle of the sixteenth century nothing of importance seems to have been written about the Hebrides, but at this time, Hector Boethius included a summary of their history in his history of Scotland. Other less known historians treated the Hebrides, also, but of them Martin, in the preface to his Description of the Western Islands of Scotland, says slightly: "But none of these authors were ever there in person: so that what they wrote concerning them was upon trust with others."

Martin himself, possibly to compensate for the inadequate treatment which the Hebrides had received up to his time, made a journey and wrote his report of it, which was published in 1703: the book which accompanied the more famous diarist, Samuel Johnson, on his journey in 1773. Martin's Description is an anomaly, far on the one hand from the literary strength of Johnson's Journal, and more important, on the other hand, than a mere history of the

Islands. The aim of the Description is informative rather than aesthetic. Martin has a plan to render the Islands valuable to the empire through the development of such resources as the fish industry, or the supply of marble on the island of Skye. Before he arrives at this concluding treatise, the author surveys the most important islands and pauses occasionally to discuss general characteristics of them all. He spends some time, for example, in a discussion of the sea-plants on Skye, and in an explanation of "the Second Sight, called Taisch." The transitions from one part to another are inferred questions from a public unfamiliar with the Hebrides; there is little evidence of any unifying principle, even in the personal observations of the author.

Notwithstanding the expository nature of Martin's work, it includes material which at times all but glows into literature. The instances of second sight have dramatic value and make intimate revelations of the character of the islanders. The following

account is typical:

"A man living thre miles to the north of the said John Morrison, is much haunted by a spirit, appearing in all points like himself; and he asks many impertinent questions of the man when in the fields, but speaks not a word to him at home, though he seldom misses to appear to him every night in the house, but to no other person, He told this to one of the neighbors, who advised him to cast a live coal at the face of the vision the next time he appeared: the man did so next night, and all the family saw the action; but the following day the same spirit appeared to him in the fields, and beat him severely, so as to oblige him to keep his bed for the space of fourteen days after. Mr. Morrison, minister of the parish, and several of his friends came to see the man and joined in prayer that he might be freed from this trouble, but he was still haunted by that spirit a year after I left Lewis." 69.

The sombre tone of this tale, which suggests Poe's William Wilson (1839) is similar to the tone of another example which Martin gives of the famed theory of Celtic Second sight:

"Four men of the village of Flodging in Skie being at supper, one of them did suddenly let fall his knife on the table, and looked with an angry countenance; the company observing it, inquired the reason, but he returned them no answer until they had supped, and then he told them

that when he let fall his knife, he saw a corpse with the shroud about it laid on the table, which surprised him, and that a little time would accomplish the vision. It fell out accordingly, for in a few days after one of the family died, and happened to be laid on that very table. This was told me by the master of the family."70.

At other times, Martin achieves a completeness of incident and feeling which rises to literature, as in his description of Fladda:

"The monk O'Gorgon is buried near to this chapel, and there is a stone at each end of his grave. There is abundance of sea-trout that come to hatch their young in the isle; the coulters-nebs are very numerous here, it comes in the middle of March, and goes away in the middle of August; it makes a tour around the isle --which ceremony is much approved by the tenant of the isle, and is one of the chief arguments he made use of for making the like round, as he sets out with his boat.

"There is a great flock of plovers that come to this isle from Skie, in the beginning of September; they return again in April, and are said to be near two thousand in all. I told the tenant he might have a couple of them at every meal during the winter and spring, but my notion seemed very disagreeable to him; for he declared

that he had never once attempted to take any of them, though he might if he would: and at the same time told me, he wondered how I could imagine that he would be so barbarous as to take the lives of such innocent creatures as came to him for self-preservation." 71.

Notwithstanding the occasional excellence of this work, it must be admitted that M. Martin, Gentleman, although well informed and ready to share his knowledge, is too much engrossed with the material to give sufficient attention to other aspects of the Western Islands. His successor in the same kind of work, James Pennant, in his Second Tour in Scotland, (1772) wrote with a less practical motive than Martin's, and consequently was free to record facts of no economic value. He shows more appreciation of the color of objects that Martin would have recorded dutifully in black and white, for example in his description of mountains on Jura:

"The stones of this mountain are white (a few red) quartz, and composed of

small grams; but some are brecciated or filled with crystalline kernels of an amethystine color. The other stones of the island that fell under my observation, were a cinereous slate, veined with red..." 72.

Again, Pennant shows appreciation of rugged stormy beauty when he describes a scene in Ross-Shire:

"To the west is a view where the awful, or rather the horrible, predominates. A chain of rocky mountains, some conoid, but united by links of a height equal to most in North Britain, with sides dark, deep, and precipitous, with summits broken, sharp, serrated and spiring into all terrific forms; with snowy glaciers lodged in the deep shaded apertures. These crags are called Scur-fein, or hills of wine; they rather merit the title of Squifhain, or rocks of wind; for here Aeolus may be said to make his residence, and ever employed in fabricating blasts, squalls and hurricanes, which he scatters with no sparing hand over the subjacent vales and locks." 73.

More descriptive power of the kind shown in the foregoing passage is shown again in an account of certain fish familiar to the Islands:

"In a fine day, when the fish appear near the surface, they exhibit an

72. Ibid., p. 281.

73. Ibid., p. 339.

amazing brilliancy of colours: all the various coruscations that dart from the diamond, sapphire, and emerald, enrich their tract; but during night, if they...play on the surface, the sea appears on fire, luminous as the brightest phosphorus." 74.

Apart from the descriptive passages in his work, Pennant, like Martin, wrote a brief historical survey of the islands, including the names of Scottish historians who have treated them with the mainland: Bishop Lesly, the Reverend Dr. John Macpherson of Slate, and Dean Monro, whom Pennant quotes frequently.

One of these quoted passages from Dean Monro appears also in a work of another type, which touches upon the Hebrides, a Norse history, called An Account of the Danes and Northmen in England, Scotland, and Ireland, (1852) by J. J. A. Worsaae. The Norse influence on the Hebrides, which is manifest in the language is explained fully in this book, partly through allusion to the Norse Sagas in which the Islands play some part. In turning to some of these, to The Story of Grettir the Strong, for example, one finds two vikings sailing to the south

isles, to the island of Bute; and the same places are mentioned in the Story of Burnt Njal.

It is interesting to find that the Hebrides are connected, even if slightly, with another body of legendary material, the Celtic, which includes the Welsh as well as the Irish cycles. In A Literary History of Ireland, Douglas Hyde states that the Tuatha De Danann of the first cycle of Irish mythology, drove their enemies, the Firbolg, out of the mainland to the Hebrides, where they were later known as Picts. In the second, or Red Branch Cycle, Cuchulain, the versatile hero, learned the elements of his heroism from Queen Scathach of the Island of Skye, the "misty isle" to which Ossian refers. A further connection with one of the most beautiful tales of the Red Branch Cycle is suggested by Hyde's reference to Alban, where Cuchulain finds the sons of Naisi at school; it may be that Alban means the island of Skye; Hyde does not locate it

definitely. According to Eleanor Hull, whose Cuchulain, the Hound of Ulster (1913) is an adequate treatment of the hero's life, Cuchulain went to an island "where Scath or Shadow, daughter of Ages, lived." Here "Cuchulain saw....the sons of Naisi and many others."

The third or Fenian Cycle is distinguished by the wanderings of Oisín, of which William Butler Yeats has written in the poem by that title; and by the exploits of Finn and his followers. According to some sources, it was from the island of Arran that he returned to find the gloom of St. Patrick and his monks. Also on Arran were the favorite hunting grounds of Finn.

The connection of these Islands with the Welsh legends is suggested by an allusion in Malory's Mort d'Arthur, in the Book of Launcelot, to the "Quene" of the Out Yles." In the absence of contradictory evidence, these out-isles may very well be the Hebrides. Launcelot has been

discovered sleeping by four ladies who ride on "foure whyte mules." The famous sister of Arthur speaks:

"I am Morgan le Fay - Quene of the land of Gorri, and here is the Quene of Northgalys, and the Quene of Elfland and the Quene of the oute yles."

On leaving this speculative connection with mythology, it is possible to find a more definite account of the tradition and beliefs of the islanders themselves, in many of the publications of the Folk Lore Society. Frequent articles treat not only past mysteries, but such present phenomena as ghost lights, or the significance of the first song of the cuckoo. The following passage from an article by Miss A. Goodrich-Freer gives some general account of the conflicting tempers:

"Nothing strikes one as more strange in these Islands than the curious mixture of religion and superstition; and one realises as in perhaps few other places, what life must have been in early days when Christianity was first superinduced upon Paganism. Here there has been, moreover, the curious complication of a Christianity rooted in the hearts of a people, who were then left without teachers, without books, without practically any written

language, for nearly three centuries. The realization of the forces of nature and the powers of evil was strong in a land wholly without trees, without the conveniences of wood for any purposes of shelter or manufacture; where the soil is so shallow and ungrateful that few things will even take root; where, so wind-swept is the land, that even when rooted they have but a precarious hold upon the soil; where man and beast alike have to make a struggle for life, of which we happily know little." 75.

In contrast with the brooding and introspective nature of most of the folk-beliefs recorded, there are a few which show a side of the Hebridean nature less driven to morbid fear by an oppressive consciousness of nature. One of these is the belief that an idiot can not drown; and the theory is supported by the example of an idiot who was carried out to sea and later found "stretched at ease, singing songs," with "sea gulls hovering over him." This belief suggests the attitude regarding the bedlamites in England during several past centuries; and perhaps, more specifically, the song of Tom of Bedlam, with his "host of furious fancies."

75. Folk Lore, Vol. X. (1899) p. 260.

Still more poetic is the conception of the Aurora Borealis, which is called in Gaelic Firchlisneach, or "the darling ones."

"When the lights are seen flashing about the sky, they are fighting among themselves, and their blood is found upon the rocks in the form of a lichen known as 'the blood of the darling ones!'" 76.

Still in a fanciful vein is the affectionate regard for the cat, and the proverb, "No house ever dies but that the wren frequents;" but more sombre is the conception of Hell as a place of bitter coldness: a commentary on the rigor of the Hebridean climate, as is likewise the belief that apparitions surround a boat from which a person is to drown.

In addition to their appearance in these publications, the Hebrides are mentioned in such works as The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries (1911) by W. Y. Evans-Wentz: Folk Memory (1908) by Walter Johnson: and Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Scottish Highlands (1902) by a Hebridean, John A. Campbell.

One of the most recent treatments of the Islands was made shortly after the end of the war, in a form which is difficult to classify. At first sight, The Isle of Sheep (1920) by Cadmus and Harmonia, would seem to be a novel: and it is true that the work contains certain elements of a novel, characters, dialogue, the development of an idea, and a strain of romance. However, the purpose of the work is sociological: the characters voice a wide number of opinions about the British Empire: the narrative element is so slight as to be negligible: "Cadmus" and "Harmonia" are bent upon giving a thorough survey of a formidable mass of post-war evils, and upon smoothing the criticism with a suggestion of faith in human nature. The characters give their opinions at a house-party on an Island near Rona: the remoteness of the location serves to encourage the free utterance of their thoughts.

The authors of The Island of Sheep make use of the Hebrides as a starting point for explorations of thought, instead of for geographical explorations; ^{but} they have

something in common, it seems, with many others who have left general treatments of the Islands. Exploration of unknown lands caused a large part of this writing to be done; innovations, such as Columba's conversions, motivated another considerable amount; and a third extensive collection of material is the record of spiritual or supernatural discoveries. It may be said that almost all of these general treatments of the Hebrides proceed from the desire to replace ignorance by knowledge, and strange remoteness by explicable fact.

CHAPTER V.

The Hebrides in English Verse.

"There is a wind that has no name."-Gaelic Proverb.

A wind from the Hebrides started to blow across the foreheads of English poets at least as early as the sixteenth century, and has continued with varying intensity ever since that time, from Shakespeare to W. W. Gibson. The poetry affected by this wind shows common characteristics explicable partly by the natural bond of climatic and physical conditions portrayed, and partly explicable only as the result of the nameless part of the wind. In the earlier poets, the first cause is almost alone; in the later ones, the second.

The slight references to the Hebrides made by Shakespeare in Macbeth can scarcely be classed as a use of these Islands in poetry. The first reference concerns the bringing of troops from the

Western Isles to aid Macbeth,⁷⁷ and the second, equally brief, mentions Duncan's burial on "Colmkill," which is Iona.^{77a.}

Neither of these allusions contains any characterization of the Hebrides, nor does the equally slight mention of the "scattered Eubrides" in the Polyolbion, the long geographical poem of Michael Drayton.

The next poetic work in which one finds reference to the Hebrides is the Lycidas of Milton:

"Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
 Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled;
 Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
 Where the great vision of the guarded mount
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold." 77b.

77. Macbeth, I., ii. 13.

77a. Ibid., II., iv., 33.

77b. Milton, Lycidas, line 154.

78.

region where 'beneath the showery West' the buried Kings stalk forth at midnight....Here we see several of the leading traits of romanticism; interest in the mysterious and supernatural, in strange and remote conditions of human life, and in the Middle Ages as they appeared in vague chiaroscuro through a veil of dream." 79.

About twenty years after the publication of this ode another work in which some of the most distant and mystical passages concern the Hebrides, appeared: a work which was promptly the cause of a controversy not yet concluded. The prose-poems of Ossian (1763) have a great deal to say about Cuthullin, the "chief of the Isle of Mist,"^{80.} which is the island of Skye, in the Hebrides; and frequent occasions to mention Connal, the ruler of Togorman, "the islands of the blue waves." In an introduction to Ossian, George Eyre-Todd mentions the portrayal of nature in the work, and makes the following statements concerning its questioned origin:

"The late Alexander Smith argued for the authenticity of these poems from their faithfulness to the character

78. Iona.

79. Moody and Lovett, A History of English Literature, p. 241.

80. Poems of Ossian, translated by James Macpherson. G. Eyre-Todd, editor (Canterbury Poets edition), p. 174.

of West Highland landscape. "Wordsworth's verse," he wrote, "does not more completely mirror the Lake Country than do the poems of Ossian the terrible scenery of the Isles'." 81.

The terrible scenery of the Isles is perhaps most clearly realized in The Death of Cuthullin, the last poem in the book, for the opening passage adds to the gloominess of nature the sense of fright and sorrow that surrounds the death of an epic figure:

"It is the white wave of the rock, and not Cuthullin's sails. Often do the mists deceive me for the ship of my love! When they rise round some ghost, and spread their grey skirts on the wind. Why dost thou delay thy coming, son of the generous Semo? Four times has autumn returned with its winds, and raised the seas of Togorma, since thou hast been in the roar of battles, and Bragela distant far! Hills of the Isle of Mist! When will ye answer to his hounds? But ye are dark in your clouds. Sad Bragela calls in vain! Night comes rolling down. The face of ocean fails. The heath-cock's head is beneath his wing. The hind sleeps, with the hart of the desert. They shall rise with morning's light, and feed by the mossy stream. But my tears return with the sun. My sighs come on with the night. When wilt thou come in thine arms, O chief of Erin's wars? 82.

81. Ibid., pp. 289-290.

The "hills of the isle of Mist" are generally considered ^{To, k} as the Cuchullin Hills on the Island of Skye, where Cuchulain, or as Ossian has it, Cuthullin, spent his apprenticeship in the trade of arms, taught by the warrior Scatath, and where Bragela lamented his absence. The reference to Togorma are usually less sombre than those to Skye, for the Isle of Mist, which is the meaning of Ski in the Norse: on Togorma young Connal the "soft-voiced" or the "mighty" ruled, and served Cuchulain with his spontaneous friendship; but the fact that Connal was on this island "of the blue waves" at the hour of his friend's need brought about the death of Cuchulain; so that by the end of Ossian, the blue waves have something sinister about them, which reminds one of the small island that liked to be visited.⁸².

It is interesting to observe that one of the most savage detractors from the fame of Macpherson experienced to some degree, the same fascination of the island scenery which Macpherson knew in his work, whether translated or composed; that Dr. Johnson moved his ponderous bulk and his hatred of Scotland across from the

82. J. M. Barrie, Mary Rose.

mainland to spend almost two months in the Western Islands, where he evinced more pleasure in wild imagination-stirring cliffs and gloomy seas than might have been expected from his taste and temper. In spite of his famous scorn of the sea, he was able to realize its worth in walling "skia nebulosa" - the same misty Skye of Ossian - and to write a Latin Ode upon the Island of Skye, which, Boswell says proudly, "a few days afterwards he showed me to Rasay." On the same misty island Dr. Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale an ode in which the last stanza echoes the sound of the shore:

"Sit memor nostri, fideique merces,
Stet fides constans, meritoque blandum
Thraliae discant resonare nomen
Littora Skiae" 83.

Still a third ode is one written on the island of Inchkenneth, in tribute to Saint Kenneth and the Macleans who were hosts of Boswell and Dr. Johnson, as well as an appreciation of the individual character of the "Parva quidem regio," with its "secura quies" and its place

83. Journal of the Tour to the Hebrides, p. 261

"inter Caledonias aquas."

The next important reference to the Hebrides seems to occur in Wordsworth's The Solitary Reaper, one of the poems written after his trip to the Highlands. In describing the reaper's song, Wordsworth writes these lines:

"A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
 In Spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
 Breaking the silence of the seas
 Among the farthest Hebrides."

These lines give a distinct impression of distance and mystery.

The same isle of mist and the same hills of Cuchulain as appeared in Ossian appear in The Lord of the Isles (1815, by Sir Walter Scott; and this narrative poem, strangely, is similar to the three plays dealing with the Hebrides in that once more a bride is brought to tragedy in the grim western highlands; Edith of Lorn braves a wandering martial life, disguised as a page, rather than be forced into a marriage with anyone but the Lord of the Isles, who has temporarily proved unworthy; she flees from the Castle of Abtonnish, overlooking "dark Mull" to the

"Winged Skye": where also, Bruce and Ronald of
the Isles flee:

"Till Mull's dark headlands scarce they knew,
And Ardnamurchan's hills were blue.
And then the squalls blew close and hard,
And, fain to strike the galley's yard,
And take them to the oar,
With these rude seas, in weary plight,
They strove the livelong day and night,
Nor till the dawning had a sight
Of Skye's romantic shore.
Where Coolin stoops him to the west,
They saw upon his shivered crest
The sun's arising gleam;
But such the labour and delay,
Ere they were moored in Scavigh bay,
(For calmer Heaven compelled to stay)
He shot a western beam.
Then Ronald said, "If true mine eye,
These are the savage wilds that lie
North of Strathnardill and Dunskey;
No human foot comes here,
And, since these adverse breezes blow,
If my good-liege love hunter's bow,
What hinders that on land we go,
And strike a mountain deer?"

A little later on the island, Bruce
cries out at the scene "so sublime in barrenness";
and the author continues:

"No marvel thus the Monarch spake;
For rarely human eye has known
A scene so stern as that dread lake,
With its dark ledge of barren stone.
Seems that a primeval earthquake 's sway
Hath rent a strange and shattered way
Through the rude bosom of the hill."

The stern scene becomes more terrible to the fugitives, after the murder of a young page, Allan, by ruffians: then the tone of the narrative is more peaceful when the action changes to the Island of Arran, where the Bruces' sister Isabel has taken refuge in a monastery. The journey to Arran from Skye is marked by such sights as the columns of Staffa, and "Old Iona's holy fane," where "pealed the bells from holy pile" and at one place they "wakened the men of the wild Tiree,"

The Island of Arran is pictured as a mountainous spot, often full of the sound of the convent bells; somewhat lonely, because the "inland bay and circling mountains sever" it "from the world. Little more treatment of individual islanders occurs on this island than on the Island of Skye; in fact, Scott goes beyond a type conception such as the aged Sister, Mona, only once, in the character of the Abbot who decides the fate of the Bruces at Artonnish Castle:

"The holy man, whose favour'd glance
 Hath sainted visions known;
 Angels have met him on the way,
 Beside the blessed martyr's bay,
 And by Columba's stone."

The Abbot's individuality consists in his emotional susceptibility to the appeal made by the Bruce; from pronouncing excommunication, he suddenly pronounces a benediction, with a fine fervor and a disregard for rationality. Possibly he, like Ronald of the Isles, had been in sympathy with the insurrection, but one thinks, rather, that he merely yielded in that moment.

The character of Ronald of the Isles may be pieced together from a series of externals, and a few indications of honor; he is not individualized, even so much as Edith of Lorn, and she, indeed, is far from a compelling figure. Aside from its historical value, it is for descriptions of sea and rock and the color of atmosphere that The Lord of the Isles is important and not for characterization.

In the Lord of the Isles there is mention of "Corrivrekin's whirlpool rude," a perilous gulf between the islands of Scarba and Jura, haunted traditionally by mermaids, and sung about in an old ballad which appears in Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. The traditional mermaid gives the title to the ballad, and furnishes the plot, by capturing "the brave Macphail," as he parts from the lovely maid of Colonsay. In vain does the maid give him a ruby ring which will tell by its color her life and fidelity; and in vain she sings a charm against the wiles of sea snakes: for the sea-maid captures him and carries him down to her coral cave:

"This yellow sand, this sparry cave,
Shall bend thy soul to beauty's sway;
Canst thou the maiden of the wave
Compare to her of Colonsay?"

The mermaid describes further the joys of living below the wave:

"To trace, with tranquil step, the deep,
Where pearly drops of frozen dew
In concave shells, unconscious, sleep,
Or shine with lustre, silvery blue."

Macphail answers that though her locks are bright gold, her life-blood is "the water

cold"; and her eyes are not so mild as the eyes of the maid of Colonsay. In anger, the mermaid abandons him in the cave for seven long months, during which the ruby ring comforts him by its brightness; finally the mermaid returns and asks for the ring, which Macphail promises to give her if she will bear him up to hear once more the song of the Maid of Colonsay. Consenting, she carries him to the island, where Macphail springs ashore and is reunited to his love: no mention is made of the ring; but the mermaid goes back to her sea lamenting.

A little farther south in this same sea is the island of Iona, from which comes another character in the Border Minstrelsy, the prophetic figure of Moy, in Glenfinlas. The action of the ballad takes place on the mainland, on a night of mist in a green vale in "grey Glenfinlas' deepest nook," where Lord Ronald, and Moy, his visiting kinsman, rest from hunting. Moy deploras the power

of vision granted him at the death of his love: more keenly on this night because he sees into the future of his cousin:

"I see the death-damps chill thy brow;
I hear thy warning spirit cry;
The corpse-lights dance - they're gone and now...
No more is given to gifted eye."

In spite of the warning, Ronald goes into the wood to search for a lady, whose pretended sister comes to Moy, but is denounced as a sinister denizen of faerie; Ronald does not return, for the other lady, whom he has found, is no harmless maid hunting, but like the other, a malevolent spirit. Moy lives through the storm:

"Rain beats, hail rattles, whirlwinds tear;
The slender hut in fragments flew;
But not a lock of Moy's loose hair
Was waved by wind or wet by dew."

Like Glenfinlas, on Lord Ronald's Coronach as it is alternately named, the ballad of Ellandonan Castle concerns mainly the death of a heroic figure, this time through open warfare instead of dark supernatural powers. The ballad contains a good deal of simple action in the attack led by a descendant of the MacDonald

Lords of Skye on Ellandonan castle; but there is little description, and no characterization of the small island on which the fighting occurs.

The Hebridean poems in which Sir Walter Scott had a hand are meritorious for their occasionally feeling presentation of nature, and for their vigor and freedom, although they leave no particularly sharp single impressions with the possible exception of the abbot in the Lord of the Isles. Much more widely known are the three characters of Lord Ullin's Daughter, (1804) by Thomas Campbell, Scott's contemporary and co-worker in the work of the romantic movement. The chieftain of Ulva who cries "Boatman, do not tarry;" the "winsome lady," and Lord Ullin himself; even the boatman, the fourth figure, are definite people who emerge from the shadowy costuming of Ballads. The lord of Ulva speaks with an individual impetuosity in his great desire to reach the safety of his island; the boatman promises to face the storm and the

"water-wraith" not for silver - "but for your winsome lady;" and the lady herself admits very simply her natural fear of the sea, but prefers even this fear to her father's anger. After the boat has set forth into the storm, Lord Ullin reaches the shore, all his wrath turning suddenly to sorrow and forgiveness:

"T'was vain: the loud waves lashed the shore,
Return or aid preventing;
The waters wild went over his child,
And he was left lamenting."

This poem is not great in music or thought, but it shows four real people behaving unaffectedly in a situation which might have tempted another author to use many more conventionalisms than Thomas Campbell has been tempted to use. The briefness and lucidity of his description mark clear impressions of the shore and the sound of the wind, and the unattainable shape of the distant Ulva.

In the poem called Glenara, (1809)

written on the Island of Mull, Campbell utilizes the same legend on which Joanna Baillie based The Family Tragedy, and writes of the rescue of Ellen of Lorn by her own clan from the machinations of her husband. The ballad has much less individuality than Lord Ullin's Daughter, and beyond a passing reference to "a heath where the oak-tree grew lonely and hoar" and to "the grey stone of her cairn," it contains no landmarks.

In a third poem dealing with the Hebrides, Thomas Campbell shows himself very slightly hampered by the conventional treatment of historical and legendary subjects. Although Reullura and her husband, Aodh the Culdee, are not quite so convincing as the characters in Lord Ullin's Daughter, they are picturesque figures woven into a dramatic episode: the invading men of Lochlin punished for their capture of the Culdee and for Reullura's drawing, by the appearance of the saint, whose image Reullura had prophesied would avenge them. The vision of the approaching Danes is well described;

"The sun, now about to set,
 Was burning o'er Tirree,
 And no gathering cry rose yet
 O'er the isles of Albyn's sea,
 Whilst Reullura saw far rowers dip
 Their oars beneath the sun,
 And the phantom of many a Danish ship
 Where ship there yet was none.
 And the shield of alarm was dumb;
 Nor yet did their warning till midnight come,
 When watch-fires burst from across the main,
 From Rona and Uist and Skye,
 To tell that the ships of the Dane 84
 And the red-haired slayers were nigh."

Three stanzas later, after the
 destruction has been wrought, and the
 Norsemen are torturing Aodh for the dis-
 covery of the church treasure, the bell strikes
 three and the torches grow dim:

"But the torches again burned bright,
 And brighter than before,
 When an aged man of majestic height
 Entered the temple door.

 The Saint before his own image stood
 And grasped Ulvfagre's arm.

 And the tottering image was dashed
 Down from its lofty pedestal.
 On Ulvfagre's helm it crashed!
 Helmet and skull, and flesh and brain,
 It crushed, as millstones crush the grain."

In a later poem, The Pilgrim of Glencoe,

84. Cf. Lord of the Isles, Canto IV., Stanza XIX.:

"Whose swords and axes bore a stain
 From life-blood of the red-haired Dane."

(1842) Campbell alludes to the Hebrides

in a more peaceful time:

"The sunset sheds a horizontal smile
 O'er Highland frith and Hebridean isle;
 While, gay with gambols of its finny shoals,
 The glancing wave rejoices as it rolls,
 With streamered busses that distinctly shine
 All downward pictured in the glassy brine;
 Whose crews, with faces brightening in the sun,
 Keep measure with their oars, and all in one
 Strike up the old Gaelic song, "Sweep, rowers, sweep!
 The fisher's glorious spoils are in the deep!"

A similar sense of peace is to be found
 in another poem written at the end of the nine-
 teenth century by William Winter, *An American*,
 and affixed to his essay on Iona. The poem
 is called Farewell to Iona; to which euphonious
 title the twenty-six trochaic couplets correspond
 musically. The poem begins with a bright image:

"Shrined among their crystal seas
 Thus I saw the Hebrides:"

and moves on to a reminiscence of Columba and
 the high fame of Iona; and ends with a group
 of lines which leave the final impression of
 the islands:

"Slowly fades the sunset light,
 Slowly round me falls the night:

Gone the Isle, and distant far
 All its loves and glories are:

Yet forever in my mind,
 Still will sight the wand'ring wind,

And the music of the seas,
 Mid the lonely Hebrides." 85.

85. Brown Heath and Blue Bells, by William Winter,
 London, 1895, P. 55.

The lonely Hebrides, then, are the islands as William Winter finally remembers them.

Another American writer, contemporary with Winter, has left in one line of a poem an arousing suggestion of an atmosphere which he himself must have understood. Edgar Allen Poe in The Valley of Unrest describes a mysterious land like that of the Lotos-Eaters, where

"...By no wind are stirred those trees
That palpitate like the chill seas
Around the misty Hebrides."

In the early years of the twentieth century, not long after the publication of William Winter's verses on Iona, appeared the complete works of Robert Buchanan⁸⁶ which include a series of thirty-four sonnets written near Lake Coruisk on the Island of Skye. The theme of most of these sonnets is recurring and finally prevailing reassurance. The forbidding landscape repeatedly makes the poet question the order of the universe; and again, the sun making the "still peaks glisten"

86. Complete Poetical Works of Robert Buchanan, Chatto and Windus, London, 190 I.

brings comfort to him; and the sound of the brook lessens the sombreness of the "Warning murmur of the white-hair'd Deep." The ninth sonnet gives a characteristic picture of Skye:

"...Flowing and fading, do the high Mists lower
Amid the gorges of the Mountains bare.
Some weary breathing never ceases there-
The barren peaks can feel it hour by hour;
The purple depths are darkened by its power;
A soundless breath, a trouble all things share
That feel it come and go. See! Onward swim
The ghostly Mists, from silent land to land,
From gulf to gulf; now the whole air grows dim."

The next sonnet, Coruisk, pictures more of the clouds that Cuchulain must have seen, and brings more perplexity and foreboding:

"I think this is the very stillest place
On all God's earth, and yet no rest is here.
The Vapours mirror'd in the black loch's face
Drift on like frantic shapes and disappear;
Annever-ceasing murmur in mine ear
Tells me of waters wild that flow and flow.
There is no rest at all afar or near,
Only a sense of things that moan and go."

In The Book of Orm Buchanan mentions lake Coruisk again, when he compares his soul to the still air "that broods on Meres Coruisken on dead days of frost." Definitely the atmosphere of the verses on Skye is dark and solemn, no matter how much assurance the poet finds in the brighter aspects of the island.

Less personal than the sonnets
 is The Highland Lament, uttered supposedly
 by the wife of a boatman, who went "From
 Uist to Barra at dead of night" and did not
 return:

"O mar tha mi! is it weed out yonder?
 Is it drifting weed or tangled sail?"

.....
 O mar tha mi! 'tis a corpse that's sleeping,
 Floating there on the slippery sands;
 His face is drawn and his locks are dreeping,
 His arms are stiff and he's clench'd his hands.
 Turn him up on his slimy bed,
 Clean his face from the weed o' the sea.
 O mar tha mi! 'tis my boatman dead!
 O gillie dubh! Won't you look at me?"

The realism of this poem is note-
 worthy because it substantiates through actual
 observance and experience the impressions which
 poets at a distance have gained from the Western
 Islands.

The most important of all writers of
 verse about the Hebrides is Fiona Mcleod, for under
 that name, William Sharp wrote a body of litera-
 ture, both prose and poetry, which treats of the
 Celtic spirit, particularly as it exists in
 the Hebrides. All of the other poets who have

written of the islands have written of them among other subjects, often from an external or scenic point of view, no matter how much underlying truth they might grasp: Fiona Macleod turns his full attention to the Hebrides; he has lived there as a child, and as a man, he sees in the Islands the remaining stronghold of Celtdom, the home of all that is rarest and most unearthly in the genius of a remote and passing race. He would not use this word passing in a final sense, for he would say that the Celtic spirit can never pass. In Iona (1900) he speaks thus of the race:

"A doomed and passing race. I have been taken to task for these words. But they are true, in the deep reality where they obtain. Yes, but true only in one sense, however vital that is. The Breton's eyes are slowly turning from the enchanted West, and slowly his ears are forgetting the whisper of the wind around menhir and dolmen. The Manxman has ever been the mere yeoman of the Celtic chivalry; but even his rude dialect perishes year by year. In Wales, a great tradition survives; in Ireland, a supreme tradition fades through sunset-hued horizons; in Celtic Scotland, a passionate regret, a despairing love and longing, narrows yearly before a dull and incredibly selfish alienism. The Celt has

at last reached his horizon. There is no shore beyond. He knows it. This has been the burden of his song since Malvina led the blind Oisín to his grave by the sea: 'Even the Children of Light must go down into darkness.' But this apparition of a passing race is no more than a fulfillment of a glorious resurrection before our very eyes. For the genius of the Celtic race stands out now with averted torch, and the light of it is a glory before the eyes, and the flame of it is blown into the hearts of the stronger people. The Celt fades, but his spirit rises in the heart and mind of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of generations to come." 87.

"I stop, and look seaward from this hill-slope of Dun-I. Yes, even in this Isle of Joy, as it seems in this dazzle of golden light and splashing wave, there is the like mortal gloom and immortal mystery which moved the minds of the old seers and bards. Yonder, where that thin spray quivers against the thyme-set cliff, is the spouting Cave, where to this day the Mar-tabh, dread creature of the sea, swims at the full of the tide. Beyond, out of sight behind those craggy steeps, is Port-Churaich, where, a thousand years ago, Columba landed in his coracle. Here, eastward, is the landing-place, for the dead of old, brought hence out of Christendom for sacred burial in the Isle of Saints. All the story of the Gael is here. Iona is the microcosm of the Gaelic world." 87.

It is little to be wondered at, then, that Fiona Macleod with this apprehension of the metaphysical (in the Aristotelian sense) importance of the Hebrides, should have written the

1. Works of Fiona Macleod, Vol. IV.

finest and most profound poetry about the islands; his insight into the history of the inner as well as the outer life of his race insures one half of the excellence which his artistry completes.

The actual number of poems in which the Hebrides are named is slight, some nine or ten; but since these are almost the only poems associated at all with a definite place, and since these differ from the rest in no respect, other than being placed in the Islands, explicitly, there is no reason to believe that many of the other poems were not written on subjects connected with the Hebrides.

In one group of poems Fiona Macleod shows the same fondness for the ideas and characters associated with the island of Iona that he shows in his narratives and essays. The Chant of Ardan the Pict, the Lamentation of Balva the Monk, and the Last Night of Artan the Culdee are three poems which tell of paganistic regrets in the secret hearts of Colum's followers; The Meditation of Colum and the Cross of the Dumb present not only incidents in the life of Columba, but also the most profound poetry in the depth of insight both moral and aesthetic. The same

searching power of appreciation appears in the poem On A Redbreast Singing at the Grave of Plata, a work in some respects the equal, it seems, of the famous bird poems of Wordsworth and Keats. A similar idea is to be found in The Exile, although no mention is made of the Hebrides; and some of the same haunting suggestion of sorrow runs through the song from the Gaelic on the Island of Tiree, called Dead Love. Of the three poems dealing with Colum's conversions, the first, or the Chant of Ardan the Pict, is the most serene: Ardan has the same tolerance for all creeds that Colum has for all living creatures:

"O Colum and monks of Christ
It is peace we are having this night:
Sure, peace is a good thing,
And I am glad with the gladness.

We worship one God,
Though ye call him De
And I say not, O Dia!
But cry Bea'uil!

For it is one faith for man,
And one for the living world,
And no man is wiser than another -
And none knoweth much.

None knoweth a better thing than this:
The sword, Love, Song, Honour, Sleep.
None knoweth a surer thing than this:
Birth, Sorrow, Pain, Weariness, Death."

Ardan voices strongly his idea of tolerance, a weary tolerance, that has suffered

more than it can explain, and he sees all life massed loyally, if futilely, against inevitabilities. His faith is not glowing or ardent; nor is the faith of Columba himself, for that matter. The Isles seemed to breed no ardor, although they might foster determination and resignation, and a deep conviction of mysteries not wholly to be solved by the new faith or the old.

In the songs of Balva the Monk and Artan the Culdee, resignation has come and gone; and at the end of their lives, the holy men console themselves against dark cold dawns and death by remembering the two women whom they have loved.

Balva speaks thus in the last stanza:

"Balva the old monk I am called: ugh! Ugh!
 the cold bell of the matins -- 'tis dawn!
 Sure it's a dream I have had that I was in a
 warm wood with the sun ashine,
 And that against me in the pleasant greenness
 was a soft fawn,
 And a voice that whispered "Balva Honey -"
 nouth, drink, I am thy wine!"

The lament of Artan the Culdee is wearier and less urgent, perhaps because Artan is near death:

"So it is a little thing to sit here, hearing
 nought, seeing nought:
 When the dawn breaks they will hurry me
 hence to the new-dug grave;
 It will be quiet there, if it be true that the
 good Colum has taught,
 And I shall hear Oona's voice as a sleeping
 seal hears the moving wave."

A kindred sorrow to these three

laments, but simpler and perhaps more bitter, is the song from the Gaelic of Tiree, Dead Love, in which an old woman looks at her age and the past:

"It is the grey rock I am,
And grey rain on the rock;
It is the grey wave...
That grey hound.

What (is it) to be old:
(It is to be as) the grey moss in winter:
Alasdair-mo-ghaol,
It is long since my laughter.

Alasdair-mo-ghaol,
The breast is shrivelled
That you said was white
As canna in wind."

The quiet intensity of this poem, strengthened by the constantly recurring idea of grayness, the figure of the grey hound, and the force of its implication, carry it beyond the personal complaint of one inhabitant of Tiree and make it a universal truth, shaped and colored by the rocks and rain of the Hebrides.

Even when Fiona Macleod is writing of particular characters, such as Colum or Artan, he surrounds the figures and the action with a distinct atmosphere: in St. Christopher of the Gael, for example, these two stanzas have significance beyond their immediate meaning:

"At times a wild and plaintive air
 Made delicate music far away:
 A hill-fox harked before its lair:
 The white owl hawked its shadowy prey.

But at the rising of the moon
 The druids came from grove and glen,
 And to the chanting of a rune
 Crucified St. Columba's men."

The rest of this poem gives the story of
 Nial the Pict, who received the faith from
 one spare monk, and gained everlasting blessed-
 ness by ferrying the Christ across a river.

Earlier than this in the history of
 Iona is the Meditation of Colum, which reveals
 the most charming and not the least holy of
 the saint's virtues: his pantheistic sympathy:

"Sure he hath put his benison, too, on milch-
 cow and bullock,
 On the fowls of the air, and the man-eyes
 seals, and the otter.

.....

And this is the thought that moves in His
 brain, as a cloud filled with thunder
 Moves through the vast hollow sky filled with
 the dust of the stars:
 What boots it the glory of Colum, since he
 maketh a Sabbath to bless me
 And hath no thought of my sons in the deeps
 of the air and the sea?"

Surely Colum took all needed thought of these
 "sons" in the deeps of the air and the sea."

Although we are not told whether or not the isle mentioned in "On a Redbird singing at the Grave of Plato" is Colum's isle, we might think that it is; but of more importance than identity is the weight of love for the distant island, and the breath-taking loneliness of the memory and of the present for the poet: a loneliness, which in the memory, is requisite to the love of the island:

"The rose of gloaming everywhere!
 And through the silence cool and sweet
 A song falls through the golden air
 And stays my feet...
 For there!- - - -
 This very moment surely I have heard
 The sudden, swift, incalculable word
 That takes me o'er the foam
 Of these empurpling dim Ionian seas,
 That takes me home
 To where
 Far on an isle of the far Hebrides
 Sits on a spray of gorse a little home-sweet bird.

The great white Attic poplars rise,
 And down their tremulous stairs I hear
 Light airs and delicate sighs.
 Even here
 Outside this grove of ancient olive-trees,
 Close by this trickling murmuring stream,
 Was laid long, long ago, men say,
 That lordly Prince of Peace
 Who loved to wander here from day to day,
 Plato, who from this Academe
 Sent radiant dreams sublime
 Across the troubled seas of time,
 Dreams that not yet are passed away,
 Nor faded grown, nor gray,
 But white, immortal are
 As that great star
 That yonder hangs above Hymettos' brow.

But now
 It is not he, the Dreamer of the Dream,
 That holds my thought.
 Greece, Plato, Academe
 Are all forgot:
 It is as though I am unloosed by hands:
 My heart aches for the grey-green seas
 That hold a lonely isle
 Far in the Hebrides,
 An isle where all day long
 The redbreast's song
 Goes fluting on the wind o'er lonely sands.

So beautiful, so Beautiful
 Is Hellas, here.
 Divinely clear
 The mellow golden air,
 Filled, as a rose is full,
 Of delicate flame:
 And on the secret tides of thought and dream
 That haunt this slow Kephisian stream!
 But yet more sweet, more beautiful, more dear
 The secret tides of memory and thought
 That link me to the far-off shore
 For which I long--
 Greece, Plato, and the Academe forgot
 For a robin's song!"

This poem speaks eloquently for
 itself, and for all of the seas and islands
 that could inspire it; and shows perhaps most
 clearly the beauty and depth of Fiona Macleod's
 poetry. In it there is the implicit belief
 in an unseen universe which hovers always over
 a reverence for Plato, and a sharper feeling for
 the mysterious lonely beauty that the poet has
 known first of all in his own land, and that he

remembers, building around his first love for birds and sea a later consciousness of the relation that exists among these and between these and himself: and making from the whole, a faith half religious and half aesthetic. In this faith there is ample provision for all forms of life and nature: for the robin at Plato's grave and for Colum's birds and "sons of the deep"; and for a serene if brooding sense of unsolvable wonders.

Almost twenty years after Fiona Macleod, Wilfred Wilson Gibson has carried on a few of the traditional ideas about the Hebrides in two narrative poems, Flannan Isle and The Dancing Seal. This island, which is one of a group in the northernmost Hebrides, has as sinister a reputation as the Island that likes to be Visited: the three lighthouse keepers have disappeared, and the search party, on approaching, catch "No glimmer through the night.":

"And as we neared the lonely isle,
 And looked up at the naked heights,
 And saw the lighthouse towering white,
 With blinded lantern, that all night
 Had never shot a spark
 Of comfort through the dark,

So ghostly in the cold sunlight,
 It seemed, that we were struck the while
 With wonder all too dread for words.
 And as into the tiny creek
 We stole beneath the hanging crag,
 We saw three queer, black, ugly birds-
 Too big, by far, in my belief,
 For cormorant or shag -
 Like seamen sitting bolt upright
 Upon a half-tide reef:
 But as we neared, they plunged from sight,
 Without a sound, or spurt of white."

The searchers look in vain through
 the whole island:

"Ay: though we hunted high and low,
 And hunted everywhere,
 Of the three men's fate we found no trace
 Of any kind in any place,
 But a door ajar, an untouched meal,
 And an overtoppled chair.
 And as we listened in the gloom
 Of that forsaken living-room-
 A chill clutch on our breath-
 We thought how ill chance came to all
 Who kept the Flannan Light."

The consistent tone of this poem is
 the horror that the three black ugly birds
 picture, and the mystery that they suggest
 as they disappear; Gibson has no time for beauty
 beyond what he sees by a realistic treatment of
 a subject which has no realistic explanation.

In The Dancing Seal Gibson weaves a
 legend concerning the supposed change of seals
 to human beings, into a poem of much lighter mood

than Flannan Isle.

It may be said that most of the poems dealing with the Hebrides are grave or even dark in mood. The four characteristics of Hebridean literature in general seem to be manifested most clearly in the form of poetry: Scott's observation of nature, Gibson's realization of the gloom of Flannan Isle; Campbell's picture of the helplessness of humanity ~~was~~ in a storm; and Fiona Macleod's profound sense of the reality of the spirit or will as of its external manifestations, represent at different times, the most impressive points of the body of literature. Certainly, Fiona Macleod, here as well as in narrative, is ^{of} the greatest importance; for in the work of Fiona Macleod is expressed all that belongs to the Hebrides.

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