FUINN NAN SALM.

GAELIC PSALMODY,

INCLUDING THE

ANCIENT TUNES & PRECENTORS' RECITATIVES:

WITH INTRODUCTION.

By L. MACBEAN,

MUSIC IN BOTH NOTATIONS.

EDINBURGH:

MACLACHLAN & STEWART,

BOOKSELLERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.



HIGHLAND PSALM TUNES.

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THE Psalm Tunes of the Highlands differ widely from those familiar to the English-speaking world, and possess many features of interest. This is especially true of the old tunes that bear the names of Dundee, Elgin, French, London, Martyrs, and Stilt. Of these, London has long been practically obsolete; and it is feared that in many districts Martyrs, Elgin, and Stilt are also falling into disuse. French and Dundee, however, are still general favourites, and likely long to remain so. The origin of the six old tunes is unknown, but two theories have been advanced. One is, that they are relics of the Columban or Roman church services; and the other is, that they were brought into Scotland by devout Highland soldiers returning from the Protestant wars of Gustavus Adolphus (ob. 1632). Against both these theories must be placed the fact that the first portion of the Psalter was published in Gaelic verse not earlier than 1659. It was translated into the present measure for the express purpose of suiting the tunes used in the Lowlands and in England; and the Synod of Argyle, by whom it was published, craved indulgence for literary defects, on the plea that this particular measure had never been used in Gaelic poetry before. Now, the tunes (at least, in their present shape) could not be older than the form of verse to which they are sung, and the Synod of Argyle testifies that that is not older than 1659. Perhaps the truth is that these sacred strains are based on the common Psalm Tunes whose names they bear, and whose principal notes they generally retain; though, in accordance with the sombre and meditative mood of the Gael, the music has been lengthened out and elaborated until its whole spirit and character is changed, and we have in effect new tunes. It may be that this change is partly due to reminiscences of the chanting in the pre-Reformation Church, and to the Swedish sacred airs brought home by Highland pipers in the seventeenth century. but the predominance of local colouring is very marked.

Along with these time-honoured tunes, it has been thought well to publish the Highland versions of some that are of more recent introduction to the north—such as Coleshill, Bangor, &c. These tunes (of which the most generally used are here printed) are sung alongside the old ones, and present in a less advanced form the same process of popular elaboration. The change from the severe simplicity of the original tunes is not due to the precentors; but, as a precentor writes, "The people sing the new tunes with variations of their own"—variations, however, that proceed on definite principles, and are recognised over wide districts.

To a stranger, the most striking feature in the service of praise in a Highland church is the reading or intoning of each line by the precentor before it is sung by the congregation. This reading of the line is a barbarism introduced in obedience to the Westminster Assembly, for the benefit of people who could not read; but, by supplying a simple recitative, the musical genius of the Highland people has almost succeeded in changing it into a thing of beauty.

The present collection is, so far as can be ascertained, the first that includes, along with the six "old" tunes, the Highland forms of modern psalms tunes, but of the former several editions appeared forty or fifty years ago. Somewhere in the third decade of the century, five of the tunes were published by Mr James Fraser, and this collection passed through several editions. In 1837 a band of young Highlanders connected with Duke Street Church, Glasgow (under the guidance of Mr A. Munro, a native of Bonar Bridge), published three old tunes, and, in a second edition, issued in 1848, versions of the whole six were included. In 1844 appeared Joseph Mainzer's "Gaelic Psalmody of Ross-shire and Neighbouring Counties," containing five tunes taken down by Robert Brown in Strathpeffer, and afterwards revised and supplied with accompaniments by Mainzer, who also wrote a dissertation on this species of music. In 1845 the General Assembly of the Free Church met at Inverness, and one result was the publication of a collection of Highland Psalm Tunes (under the auspices of that church), by Mr T. Hately, who noted them down from the singing of Mr Murdo M'Lennan. That collection gave the melody in most cases with great faithfulness; but, in consequence of the undoubted difficulty of reducing the music to regular measure, it was printed without bars. The tunes were also included in an edition of Matheson's Gaelic Psalmody, which is a collection of common Psalm Tunes, with Gaelic words. An examination of these old collections will show that their versions differ from each other more than almost any of them does from the old tunes in the present collection; so that little change can have taken place during the last forty years, except in the direction of assimilating the versions of different districts.

In the preparation of this collection, valuable aid was rendered by Mr Alex. Fraser, Free Church College, Glasgow (who spared no trouble in securing the best readings), and by many clergymen and precentors in different parts of the Highlands, who have kindly supplied or revised tunes. It is hoped that, as a result of the care exercised, this will be found the most perfect, as well as complete, collection of Gaelic psalmody ever published.

The tunes need no word of commendation here. For two centuries they have given musical expression to the devotional feelings of the Highland people; and no one who has heard them sung by thousands on the heath in the day of solemn assembly can help admiring the power with which their wild sweet melody—now rising in a triumphant swell, and anon dying away in plaintive cadences on the summer air—expresses the deepest joys and sorrows of a religious race.





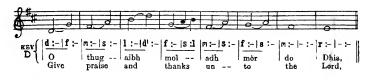
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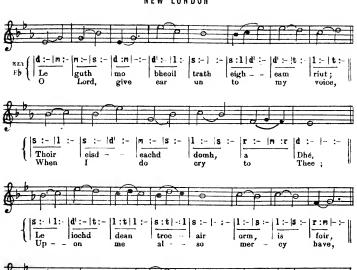


















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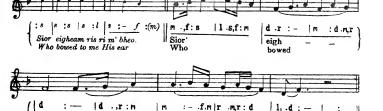












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