NOTES.

Page 6.

Nasturtium officinalis—Water-cress. A curious old superstition respecting the power of this plant as a charm to facilitate milk-stealing was common in Scotland and Ireland. "Not long ago, an old woman was found, on a May morning, at a spring-well cutting the tops of water-cresses with a pair of scissors, muttering strange words, and the names of certain persons who had cows, also the words, "S' liomsa leath do choud sa" (half thine is mine). She repeated these words as often as she cut a sprig, which personated the individual she intended to rob of his milk and cream." "Some women make use of the root of groundsel as an amulet against such charms, by putting it amongst the cream."—MARTIN. Among the poorer classes, water-cress formed a most important auxiliary to their ordinary food. "If they found a plot of water-cresses or Shamrock, there they flocked as to a feast for the time."—SPENCER.

Page 8.

Drosera rotundifolia—Sun-dew. *Lus na fearnaich.* "*Earnach*" was the name given to a distemper among cattle, caused, it is supposed, by eating a poisonous herb. Some say the sun-dew—others, again, aver the sun-dew was an effectual remedy. This plant was much employed among Celtic tribes for dyeing the hair.

Page 8.

Saponaria. The quotation from Pliny may be thus translated: "Soap is good—that invention of the Gauls—for reddening the hair, out of grease and ash."

Page 9.

Linum usitatissimum (*Lìon*).

"Mèirle salainn 's mèirle frois,
Mèirl' o nach fhaigh anam clos;
Gus an teid an t-iasg air tìr,
Cha 'n fhaigh mèirleach an lìn clos."

"This illustrates the great value attached to salt and lint, especially among a fishing population, at a time when the duty on salt was excessive, and lint was cultivated in the Hebrides."—Sheriff NICOLSON.

Page 10.

Hypericum. Martin evidently refers to this plant, and calls it "*Fuga dæmonum*." "John Morrison, who lives in Bernera (Harris), wears the plant called "*Seud*" in the neck of his coat to prevent his seeing of visions, and says he never saw any since he first carried that plant about with him." Children have a saying when they meet this plant—

"Luibh Cholum Chille, gun sireadh gun iarraidh,
'Sa dheòin Dia, cha bhàsaich mi nochd."

St Columbus-wort, unsought, unasked, and, please God, I won't die to-night.

Page 12.

Shamrock—Wood-sorrel and white clover. The shamrock is said to be worn by the Irish upon the anniversary of St Patrick for the following reason: When the Saint preached the Gospel to the pagan Irish, he illustrated the doctrine of the Trinity by showing them a trefoil, which was ever afterwards worn upon the Saint's anniversary. "Between May-day and harvest, butter, new cheese, and curds and shamrock, are the food of the meaner sort all this season."—PIERS's 'West Meath.'

Page 13.

Gaelic Alphabet. Antecedent to the use of the present alphabet, the ancient Celts wrote on the barks of trees. The writing on the bark of trees they called *oghuim*, and sometimes trees, *feadha*, and the present alphabet *litri* or letters.

"Cormac Casil cona churu,
Leir Mumu, cor mela :
Tragaid im righ Ratha Bicli,
Na *Litri* is na *Feadha*."

Cormac of Cashel with his companions
Munster is his, may he long enjoy ;
Around the King of Raith Bicli are cultivated
The LETTERS and the TREES.

The "letters" here signify, of course, our present Gaelic alphabet and writings ; but the "trees" can only signify the *oghuim*, letters, which were named after trees indigenous to the country."—Prof. O'CURRY.

Page 16.

Orobus tuberosus (*Corra meille*, M'Alpin, and *cairmeal*, Armstrong) — Bitter vetch — and sometimes called "wild liquorice"—seems to be the same name as the French "*caramel*," burnt sugar ; and according to Webster, Latin, "*canna mellis*," or sugar-cane. The fermented liquor that was formerly made from it, called *cairm* or *cuirm*, seems to be the same as the "*courmi*" which Dioscorides says the old Britons drank. The root was pounded and infused, and yeast added. It was either drunk by itself, or mixed with their ale—a liquor held in high estimation before the days of whisky ; hence, the word "*cuirm*" signifies a feast. That their drinking gatherings cannot have had the demoralising tendencies which might be expected, is evident, as they were taken as typical of spiritual communion. In the Litany of "Aengus Céilé Dé," dating about the year 798, we have a poem ascribed to St Brigid, now preserved in the Burgundian Library, Brussels.

"Ropadh maith lem corm-lina mor,
Do righ na righ,
Ropadh maith lem muinnter nimhe
Acca hol tre bithe shir."

I should like a great lake of ale
For the King of kings ;
I should like the family of heaven
To be drinking it through time eternal.

To prevent the inebriating effects of ale, "the natives of Mull are very careful to chew a piece of "*charmel*" root, finding it to be aromatic—especially when they intend to have a drinkingbout; for they say this in some measure prevents drunkenness." —MARTIN's 'Western Isles.'

Trees, Thorns. A superstition was common among the Celtic races, that for every tree cut down in any district, one of the inhabitants in that district would die that year. Many ancient forts, and the thorns which surrounded them, were preserved by the veneration, or rather dread, with which the thorns were held; hence, perhaps, the name *sgitheach*, *sgith* (anciently), fear; hence also, *droighionn* (*druidh*), enchantment, witchcraft.

Page 20.

Rubus fruticosus—(*Smearagan*) Blackberries. It was and is, I believe, still a common belief in the Highlands that each blackberry contains a poisonous worm. Another popular belief is—kept up probably to prevent children eating them when unripe—that the fairies defiled them at Michaelmas and Halloween.

Page 24.

Pyrus aucuparia—(*Craobh chaoran*) Mountain-ash. The Highlanders have long believed that good or bad luck is connected with various trees. The *caoran* or *fuinnseach coille* (the wood enchantress) was considered by them as the most propitious of trees; hence, it was planted near every dwelling-house, and even far up in the mountain-glens, still marking the spot of the old shielings. "And in fishing-boats as are rigged with sails, a piece of the tree was fastened to the haul-yard, and held as an indispensable necessity." "Cattle diseases were supposed to have been induced by fairies, or by witchcraft. It is a common belief to bind unto a cow's tail a small piece of mountain-ash, as a charm against witchcraft."—MARTIN. And when malt did not yield its due proportion of spirits, this was a sovereign remedy. In addition to its other virtues, its fruit was supposed to cause longevity. In the Dean of Lismore's Book there occurs a very old poem, ascribed to Caoch O'Cluain (Blind O'Cloan); he described the rowan-tree thus—

"Caorthainn do bhi air Loch Maoibh do chimid an traigh do dheas,
Gach a ré 'us gach a mios toradh abuich do bhi air.
Seasamh bha an caora sin, fa millise no mil a bhlàth,
Do chumadh a caoran dearg fear gun bhiadh gu ceann naoi tràth,
Bleadhna air shaoghal gach fir do chuir sin is sgeul dearbh."

A rowan-tree stood on Loch Mai,
We see its shore there to the south;
Every quarter, every month,
It bore its fair, well-ripened fruit;

There stood the tree alone, erect,
Its fruit than honey sweeter far,
That precious fruit so richly red
Did suffice for a man's nine meals;
A year it added to man's life."
—Translated by Dr M'LAUCHLAN.

Page 26.

Ribes grossularia. The prickles of the gooseberry-bush were used as charms for the cure of warts and the stye. A wedding-ring laid over the wart, and pricked through the ring with a gooseberry thorn, will remove the wart. Ten gooseberry thorns are plucked to cure the stye—nine are pointed at the part affected, and the tenth thrown over the left shoulder.

Page 31.

Meum athamanticum—*Muilceann.* The Inverness local name for this plant, "*Bricin*," is probably named after *St Bricin*, who flourished about the year 637. He had a great establishment at *Tuaim Drecain.* His reputation as a saint and "*ollamh*," or doctor, extended far and wide; to him *Cennfaeladh*, the learned, was carried to be cured after the battle of *Magh Rath.* He had three schools for philosophy, classics, and law. It seems very strange, however, that this local name should be confined to Inverness, and be unknown in Ireland, where St Bricin was residing.

Page 32.

Pastinaca sativa—(*Curran geal*) The white wild carrot, parsnip. The natives of Harris make use of the seeds of the wild white carrot, instead of hops, for brewing their beer, and they say it answers the purpose sufficiently well, and gives the drink a good relish besides.

"There is a large root growing amongst the rocks of this island—the natives call it the '*Curran petris*,' the rock-carrot —of a whitish colour, and upwards of two feet in length, where the ground is deep, and in shape and size like a large carrot." —MARTIN.

Daucus carota—*Curran buidhe.* "The women present the men (on St Michaelmas Day) with a pair of fine garters, of divers colours, and they give them likewise a quantity of wild carrots."—MARTIN.

Page 34.

Sambucus niger—(*Druman*) The elder. "The common people [of the Highlands] keep as a great secret in curing wounds the leaves of the elder, which they have gathered the first day of April, for the purpose of disappointing the charms of witches. They affix them to their doors and windows."—C. DE IRYNGIN, at the Camp of Athole, June 30, 1651.

Misletoe and ivy were credited with similar powers. "The inhabitants cut withies of misletoe and ivy, make circles of them, keep them all the year, and pretend to cure hectic and other troubles by them."—See Appendix to Pennant's 'Tour.'

"The misletoe," says Valancey, in his 'Grammar of the Irish Language,' "was sacred to the Druids, because not only its berries, but its leaves also, grew in clusters of three united to one stock."

Page 38.

Carduus benedictus—*Fothannan beannuichte*, though applied to "*Marianus*," is probably "*Centaurea benedictus*," and was so called from the many medicinal virtues it was thought to possess. It is a native of Spain and the Levant.

C. heterophyllus—Melancholy thistle. Was said to be the badge of James I. of Scotland. A most appropriate badge; but yet it had no connection with the unfortunate and melancholy history of the Stuarts, but was derived from the belief that a decoction of this plant was a sovereign remedy for madness, which, in older times, was called "melancholy."

The plant generally selected to represent the Scotch heraldic thistle is *Onopordon acanthium*, the cotton thistle, and, strange to say, it does not grow wild in Scotland. Achaius, king of Scotland (in the latter part of the eighth century), is said to have been the first to have adopted the thistle for his device. Favine says Achaius assumed the thistle in combination with the rue: the thistle, because it will not endure handling; and the rue, because it would drive away serpents by its smell, and cure their poisonous bites. The thistle was not received into the national arms before the fifteenth century.

Quercus robur—*Darach.* The age of the oak-tree was a matter of much curiosity to the old Gaels:—

"Trì aois coin, aois eich;
Trì aois eich, aois duine;
Trì aois duine, aois féidh;
Trì aois féidh, aois fìrein;
Trì aois fìrein, aois craoibh-dharaich."

Thrice dog's age, age of horse.
Thrice horse's age, age of man;
Thrice man's age, age of deer;
Thrice deer's age, age of eagle;
Thrice eagle's age, age of oak.

"The natives of Tiree preserve their yeast by an oaken wyth, which they twist and put into it, and for future use keep it in barley straw."—MARTIN.

Page 43.

Chrysanthemum leucanthemum — Ox-eye daisy, called in Gaelic "*Breinean brothach.*" *Breinean* or *brainean* also means a king; Welsh, *brenhin.* The word is now obsolete in the Highlands. The plant was a remedy for the king's-evil.

Page 44.

Achillea millefolium—*Earr thalmhainn.* The yarrow, cut by moonlight by a young woman, with a black-handled knife, and certain mystic words, similar to the following, pronounced—

> "Good-morrow, good-morrow, fair yarrow,
> And thrice good-morrow to thee;
> Come, tell me before to-morrow,
> Who my true love shall be."

The yarrow is brought home, put into the right stocking, and placed under the pillow, and the mystic dream is expected; but if she opens her lips after she has pulled the yarrow, the charm is broken. Allusion is made to this superstition in a pretty song quoted in the 'Beauties of Highland Poetry,' p. 381, beginning—

> "Gu'n dh'eirich mi moch, air madainn an dé,
> 'S ghearr mi'n earr-thalmhainn, do bhri mo sgéil;
> An dùil gu'm faicinn-sa rùin mo chléibh;
> Ochòin! gu'm facas, 's a cùl rium féin."
>
> I rose yesterday morning early,
> And cut the yarrow according to my skill,
> Expecting to see the beloved of my heart.
> Alas! I saw him—but his back was towards me.

The superstitious customs described in Burns's "Halloween" were common among the Celtic races, and are more common on the western side of Scotland, from Galloway to Argyle, in consequence of that district having been occupied for centuries by the Dalriade Gaels.

Page 47.

Fraxinus excelsior—*Craobh uinnseann* (the ash-tree) was a most potent charm for cures of diseases of men and animals—*e.g.*, murrain in cattle, caused, it was supposed, by being stung in the mouth, or by being bitten by the larva of some moth. "Bore a hole in an ash-tree, and plug up the caterpillar in it, the leaves of that ash are a sure specific for that disease."

Martin adds, "the chief remedies were 'charms' for the cure of their diseases."

Page 51.

Verbena officinalis—*Trombhod.* Borlase, in his 'Antiquities of Cornwall,' speaking of the Druids, says: "They were excessively fond of the vervain; they used it in casting lots and foretelling events. It was gathered at the rising of the dog-star."

Page 68.

Corylus avellana—*Càlltuinn.* *Còl*, *càl*, in Welsh, signifies loss, also hazel-wood. The Welsh have a custom of presenting a forsaken lover with a stick of hazel, probably in allusion to the double meaning of the word.

Page 78.

Allium porrum—"*Bugha.*" The explanation given by Shaw that this was a name for leek seemed improbable, especially as it was a favourite comparison to the eye "when it is blue or dark." Turning to a passage describing Cormac Mac Airt, I found—

"Cosmail ri *bugha* a shùili,"

which Professor O'Curry renders—

"His eyes were like *slaes*,"—

a far more appropriate comparison. Narcissus, *Lus a chròmchinn* (the bent head), suggests the beautiful lines of Herrick—

"When a daffodill I see
Hanging its head t'wards me,
Guesse I may what I must be:
First, I shall decline my head;
Secondly, I shall be dead;
Lastly, safely burried."

Page 79.

A. ursinum—*Creamh.*

"'Is leigheas air gach tinn
Creamh 'us ìm a' Mhaigh."
Garlic and May butter
Are remedies for every illness.

"Its medicinal virtues were well known; but like many other plants once valued and used by our ancestors, it is now quite superseded by pills and doses prepared by licensed practitioners."—Sheriff Nicolson.

Page 81.

Potamogeton natans—*Duiliasg na h'aibhne.* The broad-leaved pondweed is used in connection with a curious superstition in some parts of Scotland, notably in the West Highlands. "It is gathered in small bundles in summer and autumn, where it is found to be plentiful, and kept until New Year's Day (old style); it is then put for a time into a tub or other dish of hot water, and the infusion is mixed with the first drink given to milch cows on New-Year's Day morning. This is supposed to keep the cows from witchcraft and the evil eye for the remainder of the year! It is also supposed to increase the yield of milk." —Rev. A. STEWART, Nether Lochaber.

Page 87.

Arundo phragmites—*Cruisgiornach* (*cruisigh*, in Irish, music, song). Reeds were said by the Greeks to have tended to subjugate nations by furnishing arrows for war, to soften their manners by means of music, and to lighten their understanding by supplying implements for writing. These modes of employment mark three different stages of civilisation. The great reed mace (*Typha latifolia*) *cuigeal nam bàn sithe*, is usually represented by painters in the hand of our Lord, as supposed to be the reed with which He was smitten by the Roman soldiers, and on which the sponge filled with vinegar was reached to Him.

Oats—*Coirc.* Martin mentions an ancient custom observed on the 2d of February. The mistress and servant of each family take a sheaf of oats and dress it in woman's apparel, put it in a large basket, with a wooden club by it, and this they call *Briid's* bed. They cry three times Briid is come. and welcome. This they do before going to bed, and when they rise in the morning they look at the ashes for the impress of Briid's club there; if seen, a prosperous year will follow.

Algæ—*Feamainn.* The inhabitants of the Isle of Lewis had an ancient custom of sacrificing to a sea-god called "Shony" at Hallowtide. The inhabitants round the island came to the church of St Mulvay, each person having provisions with him. One of their number was selected to wade into the sea up to the middle, and carrying a cup of ale in his hand, standing still in that position, crying out with a loud voice, "Shony, I give you this cup of ale, hoping you will be so kind as to send us plenty of sea-ware for enriching our ground the ensuing year." And he then threw the cup into the sea. This was performed in the night-time; they afterwards returned to spend the night in dancing and singing.

Shony (Sjoni), the Scandinavian Neptune. This offering was a relic of pagan worship introduced into the Western Isles by the Norwegians when they conquered and ruled over these islands centuries ago (*see* footnote, p. 40).

K'Eogh's Works.—The Rev. John K'Eogh wrote a work on the plants of Ireland, 'Botanalogica Universalis Hibernia,' and another on the animals, 'Zoologica Medicinalis Hibernia,' about the year 1739, giving the Irish names as pronounced by the peasantry at that period. They are now rare works, and are of no value save for the names, for they contain no information except the supposed medicinal virtues of the plants and animals given in them.

All creatures, from the biggest mammal to the meanest worm, and all plants, were supposed to have some potent charm or virtue to cure disease. A large number of K'Eogh's prescriptions are compounds of the most disgusting ingredients. We can only now smile at the credulity that would lead any one to imagine that by merely looking at the yellow-hammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) "by any one who has the jaundice, the person is cured, but the bird will die." Or that "the eyes drawn entire out of the head of a hare taken in March, and dried with pepper, and worn by women, will facilitate childbirth."

He gives this singular cure for the jaundice: "A live moth, laid on the navel till it dies, is an excellent remedy! Nine grains of wheat *taken up by a flea*, are esteemed good to cure a chincough—that insect is banished and destroyed by elder leaves, flowers of pennyroyal, rue, mint, and fleabane, celandine, arsmart, mustard, brambles, lupin, and fern-root." For worms: "Take purslane seeds, coralina, and St John's-wort, of each an equal part; boil them in spring water. Or take of the powders of *hiera picra* (*Picris hieracioides*), of the seeds of the bitter apple, of each one dram, mixed with the oil of rue and savin, *spread on leather*, and apply it to the navel; this is an approved remedy." Epilepsy—"The flesh of the moor hen, with rosemary, lemons, lavender, and juniper berries, will cure it." And for children—"Take a whelp (*cullane*), a black sucking puppy (but a bitch whelp for a girl), strangle it, open it, and take out the gall, and give it to the child, and it will cure the falling-sickness." One more example will sufficiently illustrate the value of K'Eogh's books. "'Usnea capitis humani, or the moss growing on a skull that is exposed to the air, is a very good astringent, and stops bleeding if applied to the parts, *or even held in the hand.*"

Ollamh. This was the highest degree, in the ancient Gaelic system of learning, and before universities were established, included the study of law, medicine, poetry, classics, &c. A succession of such an order of *literati*, the Beatons, existed in Mull from time immemorial, until after the middle of last century. Their writings were all in Gaelic, to the amount of a large chestful. Dr Smith says that the remains of this treasure were bought as a literary curiosity for the library of the Duke of Chandos, and perished in the wreck of that nobleman's fortune. If this lost treasure could be recovered, we would have valuable material for a more complete collection of Gaelic names of plants, and information as to the uses to which they were applied, than we now possess.

MEDICINAL PLANTS.—The common belief that a plant grew not far from the locality where the disease prevailed, that would cure that disease, led to many experiments which ultimately resulted in finding out the undoubted virtues of many plants ; but wholesale methods were frequently adopted by gathering all the herbs, or as many as possible, in that particular district and making them into a bath.

At the battle of "Magh Tuireadh," we are informed "that the chief physician prepared a healing bath or fountain with the essences of the principal herbs and plants of Erinn, gathered chiefly in *Lus-Magh*, or the Plain of Herbs ; and on this bath they continued to pronounce incantations during the battle. Such of the men as happened to be wounded in the fight were immediately plunged into the bath, and they were instantly refreshed and made whole, so that they were able to return and fight against the enemy again and again."—Prof. O'CURRY.

INCANTATIONS WITH PLANTS.—Cures by incantations were most common. A large number of plants were thus employed. When John Roy Stewart sprained his ankle, when hiding after the battle of Culloden, he said :—

"Ni mi'n ubhaidh rinn Peadar do Phàl,
'S a lùighean air fàs leum bruaich,
Seachd paidir n' ainm Sagairt a's Pàp
Ga chuir ris na phlàsd mu'n cuairt."

I'll make the incantation that Peter made for Paul,
With the herbs that grew on the ground :
Seven paternosters in the name of priest and pope,
Applied like a plaster around.

"And if the dislocated joints did not at once jump into their proper places during the recitation, the practitioner never failed to augur favourably of the comfort to the patient. There were similar incantations for all the ills that flesh is heir to: the toothache could not withstand the potency of Highland magic; dysentery, gout, &c., had all their appropriate remedies in the never-failing incantations."—M'Kenzie. See 'Beauties of Highland Poetry,' p. 268, where several of the "orations" repeated as incantations are given.

Plants and Fairy Superstitions.—A large number of plant-names in Gaelic have reference to fairy influence. At births many ceremonies were used to baffle the fairy influence over the child (see page 57), otherwise it would be carried off to fairyland. The belief in fairies as well as most of these superstitions, is traceable to the early ages of the British Druids, on whose practices they are founded. The foxglove (*Meuran sithe*), *odhran*, the cow-parsnip, and *copagach*, the docken, were credited with great power in breaking the fairy spell; on the other hand, some plants were supposed to facilitate the fairy spell, and would cause the individual to be fairy "struck" or "*buillite*." The water-lily was supposed to possess this power, hence its names, *Buillite*, and *Rabhagach*, meaning beware, warning. Rushes found a place in fairy mythology: *Schœnus nigricans* (*Seimhean*) furnished the shaft of the elf arrows, which were tipped with white flint, and bathed in the dew that lies on the hemlock.

Nettles.—"They also used the roots of nettles and the roots of reeds as cures for coughs." In some parts of Ireland there is a custom on May eve and May day amongst the children, especially the girls, of running amuck with branches of nettles, stinging every one they meet. They had also a belief that steel made hot and dipped in nettle-juice made it flexible. Camden says "that the Romans cultivated nettles when in Britain in order to rub their benumbed limbs with them, on account of the intense cold they suffered when in Britain." A remedy worse than the disease.