

EVAN MACCOLL.

Age sits with decent grace upon his visage
And worthily becomes his silver locks;
He wears the marks of many years well spent,
Of virtue, truth well tried and wise experience.

EVAN MACCOLL, a poet who, for more than half a century, has charmed the lovers of Gaelic poetry throughout the world, has now reached the venerable age of eighty years. He was born on September 21, 1808, at Kenmore, Lochfyne-side, Argyleshire, and was the youngest but one of a family of six sons and two daughters. His father was a man of many excellent qualities and of considerable learning, but he was especially noted among his neighbors for his rich store of Celtic song. His mother, a descendant from the Camerons of Cowall, was well versed in the legendary and fairy lore pertaining to the Highlands. She was a charitable and kindly-disposed woman, and she infused a moral and religious influence into the hearts and thoughts of her children which has never departed. The MacColl family, although thrifty and industrious, was by no means a rich one, and Evan began at an early age and continued for many years afterward to lend assistance in the labors connected with farming and fishing. At odd times he attended school.

These, however, must have been happy and memorable years to our author, as amidst their toils and hardships many of his most celebrated Gaelic lyrics were composed. Mr. John Mackenzie, in his "Beauties of Gaelic Poetry and lives of the Gaelic Bards," informs us that "at a very early age he displayed an irresistible thirst for legendary lore and Gaelic poetry, but, from the seclusion of his native glen, and other disadvantageous circumstances, he had but scanty means for fanning the latent flame that lay dormant in his breast. He, however, greedily devoured every volume he could procure and when the labors of the day were over would often resort to some favorite haunt where, in the enjoyment of that solitude which his father's fireside denied him, he might be found taking advantage of the very moonlight to pore over

the minstrelsy of his native country until lassitude or the hour of repose compelled him to return home." By the time he had reached his twenty-third year his wonderful Gaelic productions had made his name famous throughout Scotland and in many parts of England.

In 1831 his father, with the unmarried members of the family, emigrated to Canada. Evan, however, could not be induced to accompany them. In 1836 he published his first volume, under the title of "The Mountain Minstrel." It contained poems and songs, both in Gaelic and English, and was warmly received by the public and the press. In 1838 appeared his "Clarsach nam Beann" and a second edition of his first work, which was followed by a third edition in 1849. In 1839 he was appointed to a clerkship in the customs at Liverpool. Ten years later he obtained a six months' leave of absence to enable him to visit his friends in Canada and recuperate his health, and while there was induced to exchange his position at Liverpool for a more remunerative one in the provincial customs of Upper Canada. He settled in Kingston in 1850 and remained at his post until he was superannuated in 1886. His muse has been exceedingly fruitful during his long residence in Canada, and we are not surprised that many of his productions have been inspired by the recollection of the scenes and incidents connected with his boyhood's home. Here is one of his best known lyrical pieces on this subject:

THE HILLS OF THE HEATHER.

Give the swains of Italia 'mong myrtles to rove,
 Give the proud, sullen Spaniard his bright orange grove,
 Give gold-sanded streams to the sons of Chili,
 But, O, give the hills of the heather to me !
 Then, drink we a health to the old Highland Bens,
 Whose heads cleave the welkin, whose feet press the glens;
 What Scot worth the name would not toast them with glee ?
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !

The hills whose wild echoes delight to prolong
 The soul-stirring pibroch, the streams' gushing song,
 Storm-vexed and mist-mantled though often they be,
 Still dear are the hills of heather to me.
 Then, drink we a health to the old Highland Bens,
 That fondly look down on the clan-peopled glens;
 What Scot worth the name would not toast them with glee ?
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !

Your carses may boast of their own fertile farms,
 Yet give me the glens shielding well in their arms
 Blue lakes grandly glassing crag, cliff, tower and tree—
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !
 Then drink we a health to the old Highlands Bens,
 Their deer-haunted corries and hazel-wood dens;
 What Scot worth the name would not toast them with glee ?
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !

'Tis there 'neath the tartan beat hearts the most leal—
 Hearts warm as the sunshine, yet firm as the steel;
 There only this heart can feel happy or free;
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !
 Then, drink we a health to the old Highland Bens;
 Glad leaving to England her flats and her fens;
 What Scot worth the name would not toast them with glee ?
 The red heather hills of the Highlands for me !

Numerous other notable quotations might be made from our author's works, touching the scenes of his boyhood, or showing the genuine warmth of his love for the fatherland. They are grand and impressive at all times, and seldom fail to awaken pleasant memories in the mind of the reader. How grand and realistic for instance is his description of the river Beauuly as it surges from the Highlands down to the Lowlands:

'Tis grand thy crystal flood to view
 Benvaichard's borders leaving,
 Nor less to see the Strath below
 Thy fuller flow receiving;
 But grander far
 To see thee where
 Its narrowing bounds thou'rt cleaving
 Through rocky ridges opening wide
 In very terror of thy tide.

Now through the Druim's dark gorges deep
 Methinks I see thee going,
 Half hid 'mid woods that love to keep
 Fond watch upon thy flowing;
 From rock to rock,
 With flash and shock,
 And fury ever growing—
 A giant fettered, it is true,
 Yet bound all barriers to subdue.

The patriotism with which MacColl is imbued, however, is something altogether apart from his love for Scotland. The land wherein reposes the dust of his ancestors is the most sacred portion of the globe to him, and he stands ever ready, both with pen and voice, to uphold its dignity and honor. A good illustration of this spirit may be found in the reply which he sent one morning to a certain professor who had, in a public speech delivered the previous evening, ventured the assertion that "Scotchmen must admit their country to have been once conquered:'

Scotland, a conquered land! Learned sage,
Pray tell us how, and in what age?
Not so read *I* historic page.

Thou canst not deem a mere invasion—
A brief disputed occupation—
To be the conquest of a nation?

Think'st thou the homage of a knave
Binding on those he would enslave?
Let Baliol answer from his grave!

Scotland a conquered land! Ho, ho!
Proud Edward found it was not so
When dying—vainly still her foe.

No pandering, then, to Saxon pride!
Pretensions by our sires defied
Shall we not also cast aside?

Forget'st thou Carun's crimsoned stream?
Is Bannockburn a myth or dream?
And Wallace a mere minstrel theme?

Thou speak'st of Cromwell? Be it so;
Cromwell was never Scotland's foe—
How then her conqueror, prithee, show?

Her friend and freedom's, north he came;
Her noblest sons backed well his aim,
And scotched misrule in Cromwell's name.

Hold up thy head, then, Scotia! When
Thy sons forget that they are men
Thou may'st be conquered—not till then!

MacColl's language is poetic in every sense of the word. His poetry is a realm of fascinating, intellectual beauties, always bright, and pure, and original. Few, indeed, are the poems which he has written that

are not studded with rare and striking metaphors, thus showing with what a luxuriant, poetic imagination he is endowed. We listen in wonderment while his muse joins in the joyous carol of the lark, or hovers over the roaring cataract, the mighty woods, the shady glens, and the heather-clad hills of his native land. We watch him as he traces with his magic pen the scenes and incidents of his early life, and they become familiar and endeared to us. He conjures up the legends and romances which cling like the ivy to the battlements and crumbling walls of the once famous castles and strongholds of the Highlands, and the grandeur and glory—the victories and defeats—the superstitions and crimes of a by-gone age become vividly portrayed and recalled to our minds. He casts his spell, like Burns, over many of the commonest objects of every-day life, and they assume a new beauty and importance. He pictures to us the various beauties of nature, shows us the brighter side of life, sings to us of mirth, love, patriotism, duty, humanity and piety, and as we wander among his poetical productions we are made to realize that we are for the time being communing with the innermost thoughts of one who is a true poet. The following is a translation by the late Lachlan MacLean (Glasgow) of one of his most renowned poems:

THE CHILD OF PROMISE.

Thy life was like a morning cloud,
 Of rosy hue at break of day;
 The envious sun appears, and soon
 The rival glory melts away.

Thy life was like May's sunny beams
 By shadows brushed o'er field and flower;
 Or like the bow of heaven that sheds
 Its glory in a fleeting shower.

Thy life was like new-fallen snow,
 Gracing some sea-beach lately bared;
 The tide returns with heedless flow—
 The sky-born guest hath disappeared.

Thy life was like some tuneful harp
 Abruptly stopped when sweetest strung;
 Or like "the tale of other years"
 To expectation half unsung.

Thy life was like a passing gleam
 Of moonlight on the troubled main,
 Or like some blissful dream which he
 Who dreams, may never dream again.

O child of promise bright ! although
 'Twere wrong to grudge to heaven its own,
 Our tears, withal, will often flow
 To think thy sun so soon gone down.

Our author reveals to us his intimacy with nature through many of his finest poems. Embodied in his "May Morning in Glen-Shira," for instance, we have the following delightful description of the month of May:

O May ! thou'rt an enchantress rare—
 Thy presence maketh all things fair;
 Thou wavest but thy wand, and joy is everywhere.

Thou comest and the clouds are not—
 Rude Boreas has his wrath forgot,
 The gossamer again is in the air afloat.

The foaming torrent from the hill—
 Thou changest to a gentle rill
 A thread of liquid pearl, that faintly murmurs still.

Thine is the blossom-laden tree,
 The meads that white with lambkins be,
 Thine, too, the nether world that in each lake we see.

Cheer'd by thy smile, the herd-boy gay
 Oft sings the rock-repeated lay,
 And wonders who can be the mocker in his way.

Thou givest fragrance to the breeze,
 A gleaming glory to the seas,
 Nor less thy grace is seen in yonder emerald leas.

Many valuable testimonials of esteem and respect have been tendered to Mr. MacColl during his lifetime, one in particular taking the form of a very fine portrait of himself, presented by his townsmen. The noblest one, however, and the one which will outlast all the others, is a poem by his friend, Mr. Duncan MacGregor Crerar, a gentleman known among his countrymen as the Breadalbane Bard, on account of

the many beautiful poems which he has written on the classical and historical scenes of his native Perthshire. The poem was first published in the *Celtic Magazine*, Inverness, Scotland, and has since been characterized as "a tribute to the genius of the poet which reflects equal lustre on the subject and the singer." We quote it here as we feel confident that it will always be mentioned in connection with MacColl's poems:

TO EVAN MACCOLL.

My greeting to thee, Bard revered,
 Sweet minstrel of Loch Fyne!
 Heaven bless, and shield, and prosper aye,
 Mo charaid! thee and thine.
 May time deal ever tenderly,
 MacColl, with thine and thee!
 Long may thy tuneful Highland harp
 Throb sweetest minstrelsy.

The sterling virtues of the Gael,
 Their deeds of bravery,
 Their guileless hearts so warm and true,
 Who can portray like thee?
 And sweetly dost thou sing the charms,
 The gracefulness divine,
 Of Highland maids, in speech endeared—
 Thy mother tongue and mine.

"Iona" "Staffa," and "Loch Awe,"
 "Loch Lomond" and "Loch Fyne,"
 The "Brander Pass" and "Urquhart's Glen,"
 Thou grandly doth outline.
 Thy "Child of Promise," beautiful gem,
 A plaintive, soothing psalm;
 Thy "Falling Snow" brings to the heart
 A sweet, a holy calm.

Thine own "Glenshira," by thy Muse,
 Is now a classic land:
 Its scenes of grandeur have been limned
 With skill by Royal hand.
 O bless her, princess of our race!
 That rose without a thorn,
 So dearly cherished in our hearts,
 The loved Louise of Lorne.

Thine odes, thy sonnets, and thy songs
 All rich in melodie,
 Shall with delight be read and sung
 While Awe flows to the sea.
 O Bard beloved ! in boyhood's morn
 I sang thy mountain lays:
 With joy perused thy poesie
 'Mong famed Breadalbane's braes.

I dreamed not then the rich delight
 My future had in store—
 Thy noble friendship, treasured dear,
 Within affection's core.
 The happy *ceilidhs* to thy home,
 The charming converse there;
 Thy Highland hospitality,
 How cordial, and how rare !

Though fair Canadia, now thy home,
 Be full of charms to thee;
 Thy heart oft yearns to see Argyll,
 And thine own "Rowan Tree."
 My wishes warm to thee I waft,
 Charmed songster of Loch Fyne;
 And oh, may heaven's blessings rest,
 My friend on thee and thine !

We cannot conclude our sketch of this eminent poet in a more appropriate manner than by repeating the words of his friend and biographer, Mr. Charles Sangster.

"Mr. MacColl," he writes in 1873, "is considerably past the middle of life, but bids fair to weather the storm of existence for many years to come. In private life he is, both by precept and example, all that could be desired. He has an intense love for all that is really good and beautiful, and a true and manly scorn for all that is false, time-serving and hypocritical; there is no narrow-mindedness, no bigotry in his soul. Kind and generous to a fault, he is more than esteemed, and that deservedly, by all who properly know him. In the domestic circle, all the warmth in the man's heart—the full glow of genuine feeling and affection—is ever uppermost. He is a thoroughly earnest man, in whose daily walk and conversation, as well as in his actions, Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life' is acted out in verity. In his friendships, he is sincere; in his dislikes, equally so. He is thoroughly

Scottish in his leanings, his national love burns with intensity. In poetry he is not merely zealous, but enthusiastic, and he carries his natural force of character in all he says and does. Consequently he is not simply a wooer, but a worshiper of the muse. Long may he live, the 'Bard of Lochfyne,' to prostrate his entire heart and soul in the Temple of the Nine."

An English edition of MacColl's poetical works was published by Messrs. Hunter, Rose & Co., Toronto, in 1883. Attached to this volume is an excellent biographical essay by the editor of the Celtic Magazine, Alexander Mackenzie, F. S. A. To the latter we beg to acknowledge our indebtedness for much of the information herein stated in connection with the life of our author. A new edition of his poems with a number of additional pieces has just been published, and to this we would kindly refer such of our readers as may desire to become better acquainted with the writings of the gifted *Eoghan MacColla*.

