

## Appendix 10 - Gaelic and Comunn na Feinne.

### Appendix 10 (a) Examples from Comunn na Feinne's Gaelic Poetry Competitions

The new secretary, George R. King, who had been appointed 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1894, was responsible for restoring the Comunn na Feinne Literary Competitions which, for 1895, included some sections dealing with Gaelic. For example, a Gaelic Essay on Comunn na Feinne was set. There was also a competition to translate the famous 'Mercy' speech from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* into Gaelic. A third category of competition was to write in Gaelic from Gaelic Dictation, "during the luncheon hour on the Society's Oval." (*Geelong Advertiser* 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1894, p3) The ensuing Gaelic poetry competitions brought forth a number of entries which were judged by impartial Gaelic scholars in Scotland. The winning entries were published in the *Oban Times*, a Highland newspaper. The test was to translate a Scottish poem into Gaelic.

#### "An Australian Gaelic Competition

We recently received from Mr Geo. R. King, secretary of the Comunn na Feinne society, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, an interesting communication inviting us to judge the contributions in a Gaelic translation competition held by the Society during their last annual gathering. In the course of his letter Mr King writes:-

"At the last meeting of the directors of the above society it was decided to request to ask you to act as judges in connection with the Translation Competition held by the society during their annual gathering.

I may state that the Comunn na Feinne, while originally a Fingalian Society, is at present a Scottish Association ... the oldest in Victoria, it having been established since 1856 and since then has continued to exist with varying success. During the year we hold Scottish concerts and our last concert was held on the occasion of the Burns' birthday night. To come to the matter of this letter, the competitions I am enclosing the entries received, and I trust you will find time to judge them. The subject of the translation is Robert Burns "O', a' the airts the win' can blow." You will, of course, judge the translations on your own standards. By way of recognition my Directors would be glad if you would publish in your journal the successful translation. ... By complying with the above requests, you will not only confer a favour on the society and on the Sons of Scotia, who are greatly interested in these Gaelic competitions, but you will help to form the chain - golden in its opportunities and advantages - which binds the mother country to colonies whose people link their tenderest associations with the brother (sic) country."

We need scarcely state that it has given us pleasure to examine and adjudicate the translations entered for competition, and held in this small way the Australian Highland Society which is so creditably fostering and maintaining in the far-off Colony the

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sentiments and traditions of Scotland and the Scottish Highlands. The competition itself is characteristic in an eminent degree, and is a striking evidence of how successfully the Gaelic language may flourish and be perpetuated in surroundings where it might most readily lapse. The contributions do credit to the translators, but we have awarded the first place to that signed "Dunvegan" (Mr A. MacDonald, Geelong) which in our opinion is the best and which we publish below:-

Competition for 1896: Translation of a Scottish poem into Gaelic.

Poem Set for translation into Gaelic: 'O' a' the Airts the Wind Can Blaw' by Robert Burns.

O' a' the Airts the Wind Can Blaw

Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,  
I dearly love the west,  
For there the bonnie lassie lives,  
The lassie I lo'ed best;  
There's wild-woods grow, and rivers row,  
And mony a hill between:  
But day and night my fancy's flight  
Is ever wi' my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flowers,  
I see her sweet and fair:  
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,  
I hear her charm the air:  
There's not a bonnie flower that springs,  
By fountain, shaw, or green;  
There's not a bonnie bird that sings,  
But minds me o' my Jean.

...

O, blaw ye westlin winds, blaw soft  
Amang the leafy trees,  
Wi' balmy gales, frae hill and dale  
Bring hame the laden bees;  
And bring the lassie back to me  
That's aye sae neat and clean;  
Ae smile o' her wad banish care,  
Sae charming is my Jean.

What sighs and vows amang the knowes  
Hae passed atween us twa!  
How fond to meet how wae to part,  
That night she gaed awa!

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The powers aboon can only ken,  
To whom the heart is seen,  
That nane can be sae dear to me  
As my sweet lovely Jean!

Translated into Gaelic by Alexander MacDonald (Geelong)

Dhe'n h-uile h-àird

Trsl. By Alasdair Mac Dhomhnuill

Dhe'n h-uile h-àird bho sèid a ghaoth  
'S ann thug mi gaol don iar  
Si sin an àird far bheil a tàmh  
Mo ghràdh is àillidh fiamh  
'M bheil coiltean-fàs is sruthan làn  
Is cnocan àrd cuir dìon  
Ach tha mo mhiannsa ghnàth air sgiath  
A la sa dh' oidhche le Sìne.

Chì mi i 's gach blàth fo dhriùchd  
'S geal milis ùrar snuadh  
Gun cluinn mi ceòl aig èoin nam craobh  
Dha bheil a ghaoth toirt luaidh  
Chan fhaic mi flùr an doire dlùth  
Ri bùrn, na leànag mhìn  
Cha chluinn mi eunan binn a seinn  
Nach d' thoir na'm chuimhne Sìne.

Sèid fòill a ghaoth an iar sèid fòill  
Feadh duilleach ghorm nan craobh  
Le oiteag thlàth, bho chnoc's bho bhlàr  
Na beachaibh làn na sgaoth  
Thoir dhachaidh; - 's dhoms' an caillin òg  
Tha glan sa n' còmhnaidh grinn  
Fiamh-gàire beoil mo churam mòr  
Le bòichead fhògradh Sìne.

A liùghad osna feadh nan cnoc  
Is bòid bha eadarainn  
Air còdhail miann, a falbh fo thiamh  
An oidhch' a thriall bhuam i  
Aig Dia gu h-àrd tha fios a-mhàin  
Da lèir mar tha gach cridh'  
Nach urra h-aon bhi leam cho caomh

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‘Sa tha mo ghaolsa, Sine.

#### Notes

Source: The *Oban Times* October 10, 1896, p.2.

Fonn: Original tune of Burns’ song ‘Miss Admiral Gordon’s Strathspey’

Context: The Comunn na Feinne (q.v.) held Gaelic poetry and writing competitions throughout its history. This was the prize winning entry for 1896. The poems were sent for adjudication to Scotland and, in this case, involved the translation into Gaelic of a Burns’ poem .

#### Appendix 10 (b) Competition for 1898: Translation of a Scottish poem into Gaelic.

Poem Set for translation into Gaelic: Annie Laurie

Annie Laurie

Maxwelton’s braes are bonnie  
Where early fa’s the dew  
And ‘twas there that Annie Laurie  
Gave me her promise true;  
Gave me her promise true,  
Which ne’er forgot will be.  
And for bonnie Annie Laurie  
I’d lay me doon and dee.

Her brow is like the snowdrift  
Her throat is like the swan  
Her face it is the fairest  
That e’er the sun shone on;  
That e’er the sun shone on,  
And dark blue is her e’e  
And for bonnie Annie Laurie  
I’d lay me doon and dee.

Like dew on th’ gowan lying  
Is th’ fa’ o’ her fairy feet  
And like the winds in summer sighing  
Her voice is low and sweet;  
Her voice is low and sweet,  
And she’s a’ the world to me,  
And for bonnie Annie Laurie  
I’d lay me doon and dee.

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Alasdair Mac Dhomhnuill's Translation into Gaelic.

Bruth' chean Mhaxwellton 's bòidheach,  
Far an trà an dòirt an driùchd,  
Far 'n d'thug Anna Laurie dhomhsa  
Fìor-ghealladh pòsaidh 'n tùs;  
Fìor-ghealladh pòsaidh 'n tùs;  
Air di-chuimhn' chaoidh nach bi  
'S airson Anna bhòidheach Laurie  
Gun rachainn fèin a dhìth.

Mar shneachd nam beann bha mala,  
Mar eala muineal maoth,  
Air gnùis cho flathail aoidh,  
Cho do dheàrrs riamh grian an adhair;  
Cho do dheàrrs riamh grian an adhair,  
'S a sùil gur dubh-ghorm lì,  
'S airson Anna bhòidheach Laurie  
Gun rachainn fèin a dhìth.

'S mar dhriùchd air neònein laidhe  
Bha ceum a troidhe grinn  
Mar osnaich gaoith san t-samhradh  
Bha guth cho fann 's cho binn;  
Bha guth cho fann 's cho binn,  
'S mo chuid de 'n t-saoghal i,  
'S airson Anna bhòidheach Laurie  
Gun rachainn fèin a dhìth.

Notes

Source: The *Oban Times* January 15, 1898, p.6.

Fonn: The traditional tune.

Context: This was the 1898 Geelong Comunn na Feinne prizewinning entry in the Gaelic language section.

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Appendix 10 (c)

Ossian Macpherson, wrote in reply to the disappointment that he had not submitted a Gaelic poem for the 1859 Competition. His reply to this comment appeared in a letter to the Geelong Advertiser on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1859.

Comunn na Feinne

To the Editor of the Geelong Advertiser.

Sir, I have just seen a paragraph in your Current Topics of 4<sup>th</sup> inst., in which regret appears to have been evinced at my not competing for the prize for the English poem at the recent gathering

Did you know, sir,- did all those who expressed such regret, know the actual unfortunate circumstances under which I have been for some time placed, they would readily understand “How sma’s a heart hae I to sing.”

I had, however, composed three parts of a poem, which I think would not have disgraced Geelong literature. I had this latter object in view principally. The poem consisted of one thousand lines; and when I tell you that when I began my poetical career, twenty years ago, when Thomas Campbell, the Bard of Hope, shed tears over my first volume and vowed friendship for life – (I followed him to the grave a month afterwards) – when my two volumes of poems brought me into social contact with many of the leading literary celebrities, living and departed, and underwent the severe ordeal of London criticism – I think I may venture to express an opinion that the poem in question is genuine poetry, and not merely rhyme. The same unfortunate circumstances, known to many members of the Comunn, prevented my completing and forwarding the same to the competition.

This is my explanation – Spero meliora

I am etc

OSSIAN MACPHERSON

Golden Eagle Store, Main Colac Road,  
January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1859.”