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## A Gaelic lament for Thomas Chalmers

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Rev. Duncan Maclean of Glenorchy (1796–1871) was remembered as ‘a Gaelic scholar and preacher of outstanding merit’.<sup>1</sup> He was also an accomplished Gaelic poet. This note examines a lament that he composed for Thomas Chalmers which also briefly commemorated other Church leaders.<sup>2</sup> It sets Maclean’s poem in literary context, translates and paraphrases the larger part of it, and discusses its historical relevance.

### I. Duncan Maclean of Glenorchy

Born in Killin, Perthshire, and educated in Glenorchy School, Maclean went on to study in Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities. He served as a missionary minister in Benbecula from 1823 to 1828, and as pastor of Salen in Mull from 1828 until his translation to Kilbrandon in mid-Argyll in 1835. He was translated to Glenorchy in the same county in 1837. He joined the Free Church in 1843 and was their minister in Glenorchy until his death in 1871. He and his Lewis-born wife Flora (née Macleod) had eight children.<sup>3</sup>

The Gaelic scholar Dr Kenneth D. Macdonald wrote what remains the key paper on Gaelic evangelical elegies.<sup>4</sup> He underlines that the elegy – ‘*marbhrann*’ in Gaelic – was an ancient form of poetry in the language,

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<sup>1</sup> Hew Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 8 vols., Edinburgh, 1915–1950), Vol. 4, p. 87 (hereafter *Fasti*).

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Cheyne, ‘Chalmers, Thomas (1780–1847)’, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology (DSCHT)*, ed. N. M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 158–161.

<sup>3</sup> *Fasti*, Vol. 4, p. 87. Flora, who died 2nd March 1877, was a daughter of Kenneth Macleod of Swordale. One son, John Teed Maclean (1843–1913) was minister of Lorne Street, Campbeltown, North Bute, and St Columba, Govan.

<sup>4</sup> Coinneach D. MacDhòmhnaill, ‘Na Marbhrannan Soisgeulach’, in William Gillies (ed.), *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus a’ Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 175–176. See also MacDonald’s abstract in English at pp. 235–236.

with its own rules and conventions. It praised clan leaders, often for their military prowess. The Sutherland bard Rob Donn<sup>5</sup> composed an intermediate version of the genre, the ‘moral elegy’. In this, he asked whether the person being commemorated had been useful to his fellow-creatures, and if there were qualities in his life which other people should emulate? Rob Donn applied these litmus tests in elegies for both the nobility and the ordinary people. One was for his own minister, Rev. Murdoch Macdonald of Durness.<sup>6</sup> Kenneth D. Macdonald goes on to argue that the evangelical poets in Sutherland, Caithness, and Ross-shire adopted and further modified the form for their own ends.

Rev. Dr John Macinnes compared elegies written in the 1670s and 80s with that of Dr John MacDonald of Ferintosh<sup>7</sup> for his father published in the 1840s:

The secular ‘marbh-rann’ is an expression of personal sorrow. The spiritual ‘marbhrann’ does express bereavement, but develops into a spiritual ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’. The ostensible subject has become less important than the edifying homily which forms the bulk of the poem. It may be said that most of the evangelical poets, Dugald Buchanan<sup>8</sup> being a notable exception, attempted the ‘marbhrann’. The Separatists of the far north<sup>9</sup> made the elegy their chosen poetical mode. Their exaggerated

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<sup>5</sup> Robert ‘Rob Donn’ Mackay (1714–1778) was a leading Gaelic poet of the eighteenth century. Although illiterate, 225 of his poems were published. His works had run to four editions by 1899. See Iain Grimble, *The World of Rob Donn* (Edinburgh, Saltire Society, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Murdoch MacDonald (1696–1793) became minister of Durness parish in 1726, was an accomplished musician, and took part on the Fast-day debate in the Synod of Caithness and Sutherland. *Fasti*, Vol. 7, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> John MacDonald (1779–1849) served in the Achrenie and Halladale mission, and then in Berriedale, in the county of Caithness until 1807. He then spent six years in the Gaelic Chapel in Edinburgh before his translation to the parish of Urquhart with its main church in Ferintosh. He engaged in widespread preaching tours in the Gaelic area, work that was the instrument in revival in places as far apart as Highland Perthshire and Uig, Lewis. See R. Macleod, ‘MacDonald, John (1779–1849)’, *DSCHT*, pp. 510–511.

<sup>8</sup> Buchanan (1716–1768) was a teacher, catechist, and poet and supervised the translation of the New Testament into Gaelic. Using natural images from his native Perthshire, he was influenced by Isaac Watts and the ‘Graveyard School’ of poetry. See D. E. Meek, ‘Buchanan, Dugald (1716–1768)’, *DSCHT*, p. 106. The latest critical edition of his poetry, edited by Professor Meek, was *Laoidhean Spioradail Dhùghail Bhochanain* (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 2015). See also D. E. Meek, *Dugald Buchanan (1716–68): The poet, the translator, and the manuscript evidence* (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The Separatists were a lay-led protest movement against the moderate ministry and occasionally against the evangelicals, in the Church of Scotland. They were to be found in pockets of Caithness, Sutherland, and Inverness-shire. See K. R. Ross, ‘Separatists’, *DSCHT*, p. 768.

panegyric is reminiscent of the old clan bard in his more extravagant moments.<sup>10</sup>

Macinnes then goes on to quote Principal John Macleod: ‘The Separatist brethren were in danger of being lost in admiration of one another’.<sup>11</sup>

The chief characteristics of the Gaelic evangelical elegy are listed by Kenneth D. MacDonald. They are: expressions of praise for the person who had died; pity for their family and community, with symbolical Biblical language woven throughout; an emphasis on their loyalty to Scripture and God; and references to the opposition they faced from the ‘moderate’ ministry and influences. Dr MacDonald of Ferintosh consolidated these features but added a sermonising element and biographical detail, perhaps reminiscent of the *Memoirs* genre of biography.<sup>12</sup> A 1990s writer noted that MacDonald’s elegies ‘contain some memorable lines which are still quoted’.<sup>13</sup>

The most recent sustained body of research on the Gaelic spiritual song tradition, by Dr Anne Macleod Hill, dates to 2016 and focuses on the work of women.<sup>14</sup> It gives some attention to the elegy and brings previous scholarship into greater perspective. Dr Hill states that the evangelical *marbhrannan* could be seen as ‘peculiar to the Gàidhealtachd’ as they give insights into social and spiritual conditions in specific times and places.<sup>15</sup>

Dr Hill also draws a sharp contrast between the *marbhrann* (elegy) and the *cumha spioradail*, (spiritual lament). The majority of the former tend to commemorate public figures like ministers who died in old age, while the *cumha* genre are more likely to be for close relatives, have a context of sudden death, and sound a note of uncertainty about the salvation of the dead person. However, Dr Hill underlines that there are features common to both categories.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Macinnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688–1800* (Aberdeen University Press, 1951), p. 275.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. John Macleod, D.D., *The North Country Separatists* (Inverness, 1930), p. 68. G. N. M. Collins omitted this section in his reprinting of *The North Country Separatists* with other material by Principal John Macleod as *Bypaths of Highland Church History* in 1965.

<sup>12</sup> MacDhòmhnail, ‘Na Marbhrannan Soisgeulach’, pp. 177–179.

<sup>13</sup> Macleod, ‘MacDonald, John (1779–1849)’, p. 511. Reformation Press has republished previous translations into English of some of MacDonald’s elegies as well as the first known full translation into English of his famous ‘Cholera Sermon’ under the title *Do Thyself no Harm* (Stornoway, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Anne Macleod Hill, ‘The Pelican in the Wilderness: Symbolism and Allegory in women’s evangelical songs of the Gàidhealtachd’ (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

## II. Chalmers lamented

Interestingly, Maclean's poem for the Disruption leader is entitled *Cumha Dhotair Chalmers* – literally 'Dr Chalmers' Lament' – although tending in content to the elegy end of the spectrum. It runs to fifty-one verses of eight lines each. It was published in 1848 with two 'spiritual songs'.<sup>17</sup>

Maclean compares the Free Church leadership to a crew who had 'lost their confidence for a moment' at the loss of 'their heroic helmsman'. As a result they had lost their map and support. It was no wonder that they were 'confounded, dismal,/And in hard gloomy perplexity'.<sup>18</sup>

The bard then moves to the pulpit ministrations of Chalmers, stressing the 'radiance' in his eye and the 'flush' in his cheeks. As his doctrine came 'with power' and his voice made its 'impact' with 'power', the effect was that 'Sinners would tremble/In their hearts there would be strong exercise'.<sup>19</sup> Chalmers had wide knowledge of the Lord's 'glorious works' and had reflected on them 'with joy'. His observation of the Lord's works had been like 'an eagle' which 'climbs to the breast of the sun,/With a sharp eye,/Looking at the beauty of the skies'.<sup>20</sup>

Chalmers' love of astronomy and communicating it to the people is praised. Part of a wider observation of the Creator's 'power/And Majesty', the knowledge he gathered was 'a treasure you received' and was 'gifted as an offering,/Completely and willingly' to the Creator.<sup>21</sup>

His interest in human nature was 'deep' and based on 'self-examination,/Self-searching to the depths and intensely', all of this done while nursing a 'spirit of prayer' and a 'spirit of obedience, constantly'.<sup>22</sup>

The focus then returns to his public qualities. 'That was the noble countenance –/Beauty shone in your cheek/That was the head that spoke,/That more than exceeded every speaker;/Intense speech.../Like a whirlwind in the mountain corrie,/Like the flaming burst of light,/And the harsh thundering in the glen'.<sup>23</sup>

The effects of grace on a person who is already talented is then examined. He was 'upright' and he was 'single-minded', godliness 'inhabited'

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<sup>17</sup> Duncan Maclean, *Cumha an Diadhair Urramaich Dr. Thomas Chalmers, a Chaochail anns a' Bhliadhna 1847 agus Da Dhan Spioradail Eile, Le Donnchadh Mac Gilleadhain, Ministear na h-Eaglaise Saoire ann an Gleann-urchaidh* (Glasgow, 1848). Hereafter *Lament*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6, octuplet 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7, octuplet 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7, octuplet 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, octuplets 14, 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, octuplet 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, octuplet 17.

that mind. It also 'subdued' and 'overpowered the flesh'. His honesty was such that he was free with people like a child, innocent of twisty or crooked behaviour, and disliking and regarding as 'contemptible' those who indulged in agile trickery.<sup>24</sup>

The traditional imagery of Gaelic elegy with a heroic warrior undertone comes to the fore as Maclean casts Chalmers as a 'soldier and hero' who had 'not learned or known timidity'. Instead he had 'defended the truth and asserted it'. 'You grasped the standard, spread the banner,/ Tightly and heroically in your fist;/It wasn't folded in your hand/In the battles of heroes and champions'.<sup>25</sup>

His ability to connect with different strata of society in his own day is described in terms of being 'a friend of the nobility,/If they'd learn from you to profit/You were friend of the lowly,/Who'd lift them from the ashes to esteem;/You looked on them as brothers,/Nurturing lasting love for them;/And little wonder they are grieving/Storing, and leaving you, in the grave'.<sup>26</sup>

When the hour of testing came, many strong people were in 'panic' but Chalmers was 'Like a rock on the shore,/challenging the dashing of waves,/You stood, hero,/And did not move, and did not shift from the base'.<sup>27</sup>

Maclean highlights how Chalmers was not to be moved from his purpose by half-measures. 'It was in vain for the company,/Who spread their nets to snare you,/With sweet flattering mouth,/You neither stumbled or bent from your loyalty./It wasn't an owl's eye,/That sat in the clean countenance of the soldier;/But the marrow of the eagle's eye,/That saw the net from afar'.<sup>28</sup>

Maclean also states that Chalmers was reluctant to cause controversy. He found trouble 'hateful' and only 'necessity' had moved him 'to strife'. He challenged the status quo but 'laboured long for peace'. However, despite his 'esteem' for peace 'And the disruption that close approached you,/You loved the truth,/And Christ's rights and crown'.<sup>29</sup>

He also stresses Chalmers' confidence and that his trust was in the Lord who had 'constantly supported' him. 'You took hold of the strength –/

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 8/9, octuplet 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 9, octuplet 19. The imagery is from Psalm 60:4: 'Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.'

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 9, octuplet 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 9, octuplet 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 9, octuplet 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 10, octuplet 23.

Found refuge under the shadow of his wings,/And directed by his wisdom,  
You took Sion to still waters'.<sup>30</sup> The biblical quotations and imagery are compounded in three examples found in these last four lines of the octuplet.<sup>31</sup> Maclean goes on to sympathise with the immediate family and the wider Church in their mourning. The cause of Christ has seen a star darkened and it is little wonder that they are gloomy as a result.<sup>32</sup>

Although stating that the Church feels that Chalmers' death was 'early' and that it feels like the darkness of night for her, nevertheless for Chalmers himself it has ushered in better things: 'It is a bright day, without doubts, without lies/That now shines,/With warmth and kindness on you.'<sup>33</sup> He adds: 'Your day has no night –/Your lantern is an everlasting brightness –/O it is always sunny –/Yours is the companionship and conversation of the Lamb./On your brow is that crown/Which you viewed and expected often,/And the garland that's fresh,/As withering is not native to it.'<sup>34</sup>

The generosity of Chalmers is the next focus for the poet, noting that he 'kept not one atom/Of the resources you had from others.' He had not hidden any of it in a cloth or buried it in the ground,<sup>35</sup> but 'With the generosity of the sun,/That traverses the high skies,/You were a light and a joy/To the church of God in each place.'<sup>36</sup> Chalmers' legacy of evangelistic preaching is then highlighted: 'Though silent is your tongue/Under the bands and bars of the grave;/It still speaks/With a marching fluency,/Warning the worldly,/With the command and love for them as ever.'<sup>37</sup>

Not only was the world indebted to Chalmers for his knowledge, zeal, labours, theology, godliness, and love but his name would be fragrant in every generation.<sup>38</sup> The period since the Disruption battles had been marked by the death of many 'shining lights'.<sup>39</sup> Zion often has 'a tear on her cheek' while 'She mourns the heroes who were not soft or weak,/In time of trial were unblemished,/And unnerved in time of drawing swords.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, octuplet 24.

<sup>31</sup> See Isaiah 27:5, Psalm 63:7 (metrical Psalms in Gaelic) and Psalm 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Lament*, p. 10, octuplet 25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, octuplet 26.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11, octuplet 27.

<sup>35</sup> The reference is to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

<sup>36</sup> *Lament*, p. 11, octuplet 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11, octuplet 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11, octuplet 30.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11, octuplet 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, octuplet 32.



### III. A widened focus

Specific praise for various other Church heroes now follows in the *Lament*. The first to be described after Chalmers in the mini-pantheon is Doctor David Welsh. Welsh was a Disruption ‘father’ having been moderator at the Church of Scotland Assembly of 1842, which adopted the non-intrusionist ‘Claim of Right’. He signed the Act of Separation and Deed of Demission at the May 1843 General Assembly after which he and Chalmers led the commissioners out of the building and down to Tanfield Hall to form the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>41</sup> Maclean’s *Lament* focusses on Welsh’s leadership and alludes to the Church in feminine terms: ‘She misses, and no wonder that she does./The stalwart who was scrupulous, not foolish,/The ruling head of the association,/When they escaped out of captivity;/Doctor Welsh you were an excellent man,/You acted in a way suitable and native to you,/You walked in the footsteps of your name-sake,<sup>42</sup>/And did not shame the honour placed on you.’<sup>43</sup>

The poet then says that the Church is missing ‘a’ Bhrùnich’ – ‘the Brown’. A footnote clarifies that his is ‘Dr. Brown, late of St John’s, Glasgow’.<sup>44</sup> Dr Thomas Brown (1776–1847) was the ‘mildest, the meekest’ of divines, ‘the strongest in prayer, and in love’. He freely spoke the truth and ‘Stood for the church of his forefathers,/And did not falter from the path of loyalty’.<sup>45</sup>

The next octuplet says that the Church mourns Peter MacBride of Rothesay (1797–1846).<sup>46</sup> MacBride was born in North Knapdale, ordained to the New Parish in Rothesay in 1825, joined the Free Church in 1843 and remained as minister of their Rothesay charge, dying during a preaching tour in mid-Argyll in 1846.<sup>47</sup> In 1840 he had edited a collection of two

<sup>41</sup> D. F. Wright ‘Welsh, David (1793–1845)’, *DSCHT*, p. 860. See also W. Ewing (ed.), *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843–1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1914), Vol. 1, p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> This may be a reference to John Welsh of Ayr or to his grandson, the conventicle-preacher, John Welsh of Irongray. See J. Kirk, ‘Welsh, John (c. 1570–1622)’ and D. C. Lachman, ‘Welsh (Welch), John (of Irongray) (c. 1624–1681)’, *DSCHT*, p. 861. David Welsh’s own ancestors in Tweedsmuir were covenanters.

<sup>43</sup> *Lament*, p. 12, octuplet 33.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Brown was minister at Tongland from 1807 until his translation to St John’s Glasgow in 1826. He was minister of the Free St John’s congregation from the Disruption. He served as moderator of the Free Church General Assembly of October 1843 in Glasgow. Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church*, Vol. 1, p. 105. He was awarded his doctorate in 1830 by the University of Glasgow. *Fasti*, Vol. 3, p. 447.

<sup>45</sup> *Lament*, p. 12, octuplet 34.

<sup>46</sup> The ‘MhicBhridein’ of the verse is defined in a footnote as ‘Mr. Peter M’Bride, late of Rothesay’.

<sup>47</sup> *Fasti*, Vol. 4, p. 42, ‘The New Parish, Rothesay’.

hundred letters by Dr John Love, with a Recommendation by Dr MacDonald of Ferintosh.<sup>48</sup> Sermons preached consecutively by MacBride on the themes of the new creature and the priesthood of Christ were published in 1848.<sup>49</sup>

Maclean says that he was ‘an excellent champion, with certainty’. Maclean praises him for having been ‘large-hearted’ and for his intelligence. ‘He was great in the truth –/Great in loyalty to virtue –/Great, but peaceful;/ Fierce, but gentle was the great man.’<sup>50</sup> The poet adds: ‘He was not mild in times of trial,/He was not mild when blows were struck;/Although mild to the poor –/Although mild to the lambs of the flock;/The bruised reed,/The heart hurt with wounds;/The smoking flax –/He’d not willingly quench’.<sup>51</sup>

In what is perhaps the most personal section of the poem, Maclean turns to Rev. Alexander Stewart of Cromarty. Stewart (1794–1847) was a son of the Moulin manse in Perthshire, who had ministered in Cromarty and briefly in Free St George’s Edinburgh. He had written books on the typology of the Old Testament sacrifices.<sup>52</sup> His father’s conversation in 1796 with the Anglican evangelical Charles Simeon<sup>53</sup> had been blessed to Stewart senior’s conversion.<sup>54</sup>

Maclean recalls: ‘Your death hurt me sharply –/In youth you followed your forebears,/And did not go aside from it all our time and duration;/ Good son of the good father,/Of the most benevolent, princely practice –/ The best of orators –/The divine who was rich in grace.’<sup>55</sup> Maclean adds that he knew Mr Stewart’s character when they were both ‘very young’,<sup>56</sup> knew his faculties of mind, and ‘various glorious abilities’. He adds: ‘A broad mind, very clear,/An honest heart, that knew no fraudulent act,/And your doctrine and character,/Were consistent in every way.’<sup>57</sup>

Despite his high profile, says Maclean, Stewart of Cromarty had the biblical perspective on fame: ‘To win the glory of people/You did not seek,

<sup>48</sup> *Letters of the late John Love D.D., Minister of Anderston, Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1840).

<sup>49</sup> A. MacBride (ed.), *Remains of the Rev. Peter MacBride, of the Free West Church Rothesay* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1848). The latter section was republished in 2020 by the Scottish Highlands Reformed Book Trust under the title *The Priesthood of Christ*.

<sup>50</sup> *Lament*, p. 12, octuplet 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, octuplet 36.

<sup>52</sup> D. A. Currie, ‘Stewart, Alexander (1794–1847)’, *DSCHT*, p. 793. His *Tree of Promise* (1864) was republished by Free Presbyterian Publications (Glasgow, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> D. F. Wright, ‘Simeon, Charles (1759–1836)’, *DSCHT*, p. 773.

<sup>54</sup> D. E. Meek, ‘Stewart, Alexander (1764–1821)’, *DSCHT*, pp. 792-793.

<sup>55</sup> *Lament*, p. 13, octuplet 37.

<sup>56</sup> Moulin is around 37 miles from Killin. Maclean was educated at Glenorchy school, so the acquaintance when both were very young was not necessarily in Perthshire.

<sup>57</sup> *Lament*, p. 13, octuplet 38.



though you got it and enjoyed it;/O it was vain to you as a reward,/For you knew that it tends not to last:/Your expectation and hope/was towards the welcome and salutation you received./“Take rest from all your labours,/Enjoy the fellowship and joy of the Lamb.”<sup>58</sup> The cries of Stewart’s bereaved congregation at his burial do not surprise him, says Maclean. They are ‘like lambs snatched/From the teat that gave milk and nourishment –/From the company of their mother,/Who was warmth, shade and guide to them.’<sup>59</sup> He then changes the analogy to that of bees. Like a swarm of bees ‘raided and plundered of their treasure,/With no defence for their home/Which had given no mean refuge and shelter;/Their summer has passed,/And the winter approaches them./With no knowing where they can consider/to have the honey stored up in their store-house.’<sup>60</sup>

The next fallen hero that Maclean mourns is ‘the precious Macdonald’ – John MacDonald, the son of Rev. Dr John Macdonald of Ferintosh.<sup>61</sup> MacDonald junior (1807–1847) had been born in Edinburgh, studied in Aberdeen, served in the Scots Kirk, Chadwell Street in London in 1830 and was appointed as Church of Scotland missionary to Calcutta in 1838. He became acting Free Church minister in the city at the Disruption.<sup>62</sup> Maclean states that MacDonald junior had ‘followed his heritage and forebears,/And did not go aside from their footsteps’. Buried in India, ‘he sleeps in Jesus,/Whom he followed faithfully, and closely’.<sup>63</sup> His missionary efforts are described thus: ‘He was plenteous in labours./Rich in love, and in grace;/A lantern without flaw,/An unfearing lion with no dread./His heart was roomy,/He was gentle, manly and warm;/Britain and India/Will tell my poem is true’.<sup>64</sup>

John MacDonald had felt the call to India when the missionary Alexander Duff<sup>65</sup> visited London in 1835.<sup>66</sup> Maclean comments: ‘You understood the voice that came to you;/The voice of your beloved and

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13, octuplet 39.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14, octuplet 40.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14, octuplet 41.

<sup>61</sup> This is stated in a footnote.

<sup>62</sup> D. F. Wright, ‘MacDonald, John (1807–1847)’, *DSCHT*, p. 511.

<sup>63</sup> *Lament*, p. 14, octuplet 42.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14, octuplet 43.

<sup>65</sup> Duff studied at St Andrew’s University and was an ‘impassioned educator’ as a result of Thomas Chalmers’ ideas about knowledge. In 1830 he began work in Calcutta. The children of the local elite were offered English-medium grounding in the Bible, as well as western science and literature. He was moderator of the Free Church General Assembly in 1851 and became Professor of Missions at New College, Edinburgh in 1867. See S. Piggin, ‘Duff, Alexander (1806–78)’, *DSCHT*, pp. 259-260.

<sup>66</sup> Wright, ‘MacDonald, John (1807–47)’, p. 511.

dear one;/ Nor did you seek advice or guidance./From blood or flesh in the matter;/And you left a grieving congregation,/To which you were a light for a while'.<sup>67</sup>

The Church had recognised his call and suitability for the mission field too, according to Maclean. 'It was clear to the Church/That you read your duty as was right,/That your abilities matched/The cause which long was your desire;/And your labour was countenanced,/It was your prayer, and your longing constantly;/But the number of your seal,<sup>68</sup>/Will not be counted until the day of judgement'.<sup>69</sup> This may have been the ultimate mind of the Church but not the initial reaction of his congregation and immediate colleagues to the invitation he received from the Church of Scotland General Assembly's Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. In fact, his own congregation had presented a Memorial to the Scotch Presbytery in London opposing his translation to India. The Presbytery had been of the mind that if it was the Lord's will, they would wish for him to be 'continued among them'. Mr MacDonald had made clear his acceptance of the call to the Presbytery on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1837.<sup>70</sup>

Maclean then admits that there were many other champions of the faith: 'But, oh! When would I stop/My lamenting, my sorrow, and my poem,/If I named absolutely/Each champion pruned to the ground?/Some were youths,/With the dew of the youth on their countenance,/Under the most heavily laden foliage,/And the most beautiful, and fragrant fruit.'<sup>71</sup> He contrasts this with others: 'Some others were aged,/Bending to the ground with fruit,/Waiting for the time,/Without fear or horror of death;/With their lamps lit,/Intensely burning and shining;/Waiting, with patience,/Until called home to God.'<sup>72</sup> He proceeds to admit that it would be 'sin for us' to allow grief to go beyond what is right in mourning heroes 'buried for a little while under the turf'. Although they have faded and withered, 'The sun, dew and day will come on them' and 'their wakening will be joyful,/When called from the soil to the gathering.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Lament*, pp. 14-15, octuplet 44.

<sup>68</sup> 'Seal' in the sense of seals to his ministry, i.e. converts.

<sup>69</sup> *Lament*, p. 14, octuplet 45.

<sup>70</sup> John MacDonald, *Statement of Reasons for Accepting a Call to Go to India as a Missionary* (London, 1837), pp. 3-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Lament*, p. 15, octuplet 46.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15, octuplet 47.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15, octuplet 48. The word for gathering is 'mòd', once a common literary term for an assembly of people but the meaning has narrowed to the local and national annual Gaelic music festivals.

A call to arms follows as Maclean insists that although the Church can no longer hear and see their praise, speech and witness (in which they shone like stars), nevertheless ‘Our confidence will not fail,/Although it weakened briefly for a time,/When we were shaken,/And had many of the hardest breaches;/Our anchor is sure,/Our refuge sure and true;/See Jesus, our offering,/Our head and fortress who will not forsake.’<sup>74</sup> Rising to a note of triumph, Maclean says that in Christ’s hand is a fortress, and that with his banners there is certain victory, and that before his majesty every land and people will submit in their due time. Before his feet every knee will bow in honour. The general confession will be that he has gloriously won the crown.<sup>75</sup>

#### IV. Discussion

Professor Donald E. Meek has described Maclean’s poetry as ‘one of the forgotten jewels of the nineteenth century’. Professor Meek also noted that although ‘evangelical composers, on the whole, tended to see the present world as a hostile place’, nevertheless Maclean was among the group who ‘produced verse which weaves both sacred and secular strands, and breathes an earthly wistfulness which is intensely moving’.<sup>76</sup>

Maclean’s heroes in the *Lament* were Lowland leaders such as Chalmers, Welsh, and Brown, as well as southern and eastern Highland figures such as Peter MacBride, Stewart of Cromarty, and Rev. John MacDonald the son of the Ferintosh manse in Easter Ross. Maclean’s perspective cannot be explained as totally southern and eastern in orientation, however.

One fascinating historical key to the *Lament* is the network of connections between Rev. Peter MacBride and the others mourned in it. In a letter to MacBride’s congregation as they mourned their pastor’s death, Chalmers had described it as ‘one of the most affecting events, and also severest losses to the country and the Church that has occurred for many years’ and as ‘this great public calamity’. MacBride had been unanimously elected by the Rothesay congregation after the translation to Cromarty of Rev. Alexander Stewart. MacBride had written a preface to Rev. John MacDonald’s book *Reasons for Accepting a Call to India as*

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 16, octuplets 49, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 16, octuplet 51.

<sup>76</sup> Donald E. Meek, ‘Gaelic Literature in the Nineteenth Century’, in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Vol. 2, Enlightenment, Britain and Empire, 1707–1918*, ed. Ian Brown (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 265–266.

*a Missionary*.<sup>77</sup> The precise connections of these men to Maclean is more difficult to tease out. However, MacBride ‘left no parish between Bute and Barra unvisited’ in the itinerating role arranged to supply Free Church groups in the immediate aftermath of the Disruption. Accompanied by Rev. Peter Maclean of Tobermory,<sup>78</sup> he had conducted evangelistic tours in Mull and as far north as Lewis.<sup>79</sup> Duncan Maclean’s wife Flora, whom he married in 1828, was from Swordale in Lewis. He spent five years in Benbecula and seven in the Salen area of Mull.<sup>80</sup> It is clear that his earlier ministry and experiences had been in places which MacBride was targeting to bolster the Free Church support and that his advice may well have been part of the preparation for MacBride and Peter Maclean’s joint tours. Maclean must have followed the two men’s efforts with prayerful interest and his heart must have already yearned for the souls of some of the people to whom they preached.

It is also clear that there was a Highland Perthshire element to the *Lament*. Alexander Duff who inspired John MacDonald junior to Indian mission was from Moulin, as was Alexander Stewart.<sup>81</sup>

Another point of interest is the brevity with which Maclean treats Dr David Welsh. As noted, he highlighted Welsh’s leadership skills and similarity to his ancestor. However, the breadth of Welsh’s contribution to Church life – lecturing in Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University from 1831 and as Professor of Church History for the Free Church; his being instrumental in collecting £21,000 in the space of two months for the building of New College; his interest in philosophy and authorship of a book on Thomas Brown – are not mentioned. Maclean does not refer to the legacy of his academic teaching which saw a ‘reinvigoration’ of Church history and emphasis on the study of original sources. Nor are his efforts to establish elementary and secondary schools recorded.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Alexander Duff (ed.), *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands* (J. Greig and Son, 1877), pp. 160-1, 168.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Maclean (1800–1868) became parish schoolmaster of his native Uig, Lewis in 1832 and was ordained a missionary to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in 1836. For health reasons he returned to Scotland in 1842. He was inducted as Free Church minister in Tobermory, Isle of Mull in 1843. He was translated to Stornoway in 1855, serving there until 1866 (with a two-year gap from 1861 to 1863). He returned to Canada for a third period in 1866. *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 1, p. 245.

<sup>79</sup> *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*, pp. 163, 165-166.

<sup>80</sup> *Fasti*, Vol. 4, p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> Piggan, ‘Duff, Alexander (1806–78)’, pp. 259-260.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, ‘Welsh, David (1793–1845)’, p. 860. See also George Stronach (rev. by H. C. G. Matthew), ‘Welsh, David (1793–1845)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online,

For the Disruption generation, Welsh's achievement par excellence was leadership in the steps leading up to the Disruption and the event itself. Maclean's aim may simply have been to reflect that peak period of service but his single octuplet each on Welsh and Brown stand in sharp contrast to his thirty-three on Chalmers, five on Stewart, four on John MacDonald junior, and two on MacBride.

The flavour of the last six octuplets with their widening out of the focus to gain context and proportion, along with the call to arms, is significant too. The deaths of Dr Welsh in 1845, and Peter Macbride in 1846, as well as those of Chalmers, Dr Brown, Alexander Stewart, and John MacDonald junior in 1847, were all challenging as well as sad moments for the new denomination. Duncan Maclean's publication of the *Lament* in 1848 may have been a traditional Gaelic evangelical elegiac reflection of the losses incurred, but also an attempt to bolster morale.

The *Lament* was republished in a collection of Gaelic hymns by Maclean in 1868.<sup>83</sup> The later collection included 22 original compositions including the *Lament* and a number of translations from English into Gaelic of hymns and psalms.<sup>84</sup> In the foreword he states that he believed their publication could, with God's blessing, 'be a means of enlivening and strengthening a spirit of devotion in the hearts of our beloved countrymen'. Spiritual poems and hymns were 'countenanced' by the Most High since the beginning of the world 'and each step of the history of his people' and that it was for their 'benefit' that the spirit of poetry was gifted on people from time to time despite others misusing the gift.<sup>85</sup>

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retrieved 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021; Robin Gray, 'The New College: the birth of a theological institution, 1843–1850', *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 9 (2019), pp. 172-195.

<sup>83</sup> Duncan Maclean, *Laoidhean agus Dain le Donnchadh Mac-Gilleadhain, Ministear na h-Eaglaise Saoire ann an Gleannurchaidh* (Glasgow: G. Sinclair, 1868).

<sup>84</sup> Those translated include Augustus Toplady's 'Rock of Ages'. They also include one entitled 'Prayer for the Youth of Iona' by Legh Richmond (1772–1827) – better known for his Isle of Wight ministry and tract-writing including *The Dairyman's Daughter* (Religious Tract Society, 1814). Richmond had preached through an interpreter to the people of Iona during a tour of Scotland for Jewish missions. He subsequently raised money through his network of contacts for education of the island children. See Rev. T. S. Grimshawe, *A Memoir of the Rev. Legh Richmond AM, of Trinity College, Cambridge* (London, 1828), pp. 375-382, 440-479.

<sup>85</sup> *Laoidhean agus Dain le Donnchadh Mac-Gilleadhain, Ministear na h-Eaglaise Saoire ann an Gleannurchaidh*, p. 5.



Maclean added that ‘many still alive, and many who are dead, enjoyed great benefit and pleasure from spiritual hymns written by no small number of godly poets in our own country, such as Dugald Buchanan, Rev. James MacGregor,<sup>86</sup> Dr MacDonald and John Morrison the Harris blacksmith<sup>87</sup> and many more whom I could name. Thousands of my fellow countrymen can confess that the work of the bards and divines who I named was as sweet as the honeycomb to their mouths, and the breath of poetry as the mild breath from the south-west.’<sup>88</sup> He goes on to deny emphatically that he is comparing himself to these poets but adds that the lesser flowers of the garden do not need to ‘hang their heads in shame’ for not matching ‘the beauty, shapeliness and hue’ of the best flowers.<sup>89</sup>

The 1868 book of Gaelic Hymns by Maclean is noteworthy in many ways but one poignant point of contrast for the Chalmers *Lament* is the elegy for his daughter Maggie.<sup>90</sup> Maggie Sarah Rose – wife of Dr Robert D. Rose of Wigtown – had died on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1863.<sup>91</sup> The elegy for his daughter makes clear that the newborn baby died around the same time: ‘Young as a wife, young as a mother, –/Young when death called you together.’<sup>92</sup> Here in contrast to the corporate public sadness and rallying call of the lament for Chalmers is the intense, personal anguish of a bereaved father and grandfather: ‘Without your knowledge you were a mother for a moment, –/Hardly were you so when taken from me.’<sup>93</sup>

Rev. Duncan Maclean’s lament for Chalmers could also be contrasted with another Gaelic elegy for a lost Free Church leader: that by Donald Munro in 1886 for Dr James Begg<sup>94</sup> and published with laments

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<sup>86</sup> MacGregor was a Gaelic-speaker from Comrie parish in Perthshire. As an Anti-Burgher minister, he emigrated to Nova Scotia, providing services there and in Cape Breton Island and Prince Edward Island. His hymns were published in 1819 and republished seven times. J. R. McIntosh and D. E. Meek, ‘MacGregor, James (1759–1830)’, *DSCHT*, p. 515.

<sup>87</sup> K. D. MacDonald, ‘Morrison (or Morison), John (c. 1796–1852)’, *DSCHT*, p. 609.

<sup>88</sup> *Laoidhean agus Dain le Donnchadh Mac-Gilleadhain, Ministear na h-Eaglaise Saoire ann an Gleannurchaidh*, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Disease of the Kidneys with General Infection’ (i.e. sepsis) was given as the cause of Margaret’s death. National Records of Scotland, Statutory Registers, Deaths 901/48. ‘1863, Deaths in the Parish of Wigtown in the County of Wigtown’, p. 16. A brief introductory sentence in the elegy wrongly states that she died in 1864.

<sup>92</sup> *Laoidhean agus Dain le Donnchadh Mac-Gilleadhain, Ministear na h-Eaglaise Saoire ann an Gleannurchaidh*, p. 111, stanza 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, stanza 6.

<sup>94</sup> K. R. Ross, ‘Begg, James (1808–1853)’, *DSCHT*, p. 68.



for Dr John Kennedy<sup>95</sup> and other leaders of the later generation.<sup>96</sup> Munro states that Begg was mourned from the south to the Mackay country of Sutherland. However, he sees internal opposition to Free Church principles rather than the external pre-Disruption ones to which Maclean refers.<sup>97</sup> Post-Begg, the remaining Church heroes for Munro are all Highlanders, although a Glasgow-based Highland minister, Rev. Alexander Urquhart (1821–1886) does feature.<sup>98</sup> Urquhart (1821–1886) was minister from 1856–1865 in Tarbat, Easter Ross, and then served the important Hope Street congregation of the Free Church.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps it could be argued that Maclean composed in 1848 when the Highlands and Lowland elements of the Free Church were effectively one body divided only by language; but that Munro composed in an era when the two regions were drifting apart over the inspiration of Scripture, worship, and creedal subscription, leaving Begg and like-minded men as notable exceptions in its Lowlands wing.

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<sup>95</sup> Kennedy (1819–1884) studied at Aberdeen University and was ordained to the sole charge of his career, Dingwall, in 1844. A powerful preacher and leader of the Constitutionalist party in the Free Church of Scotland, he also translated some of Dr Macdonald of Ferintosh's Gaelic poetry. A. P. F. Sell, 'Kennedy, John (1819–84)', *DSCHT*, pp. 455–456.

<sup>96</sup> Donald Munro, *Marbhrainn air Dr Begg, bha'n Dun-eidin; 's Air Dr Ceanadaidh Bha'n Inbhirfeorathain; agus air Daoine Diadhaidh Bh'anns an Airde-tuath* (Lairg, 1886).

<sup>97</sup> Munro states of Begg: 'Plentiful were the blows and smiting he got/From many of the professing people'. *Ibid.*, p. 4, stanza 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

<sup>99</sup> See Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church*, Vol. 1, p. 348.