

# Makers of Gaelic Literature

## 2. ALASDAIR MACMHAIGHSTIR ALASDAIR.

Alexander Macdonald, known in Gaelic as Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair, was born sometime about the year 1700, and he took an active and significant part in the events which make the 18th century an interesting, if at times a sadly interesting era for the Gaels of Scotland. His interest for us is twofold, historical and literary, and on both political and literary issues he showed virtues of independence and leadership which mark him out as a man apart among the Gaelic poets of the 18th century.

An early marriage is traditionally supposed to have curtailed his course at Glasgow University. But his stay at the university may have helped to broaden his literary outlook. The Rev. T. M. Murchison has recently suggested that the airs to which some of Macdonald's songs were composed may have been heard by him from the chimes in the Tolbooth Steeple at Glasgow Cross, as he walked to the Old College in High Street (see *An Gàidheal*, October, 1952).

During the '45 he was granted a Captain's commission by Prince Charlie, and he spared no efforts in the Prince's struggle, which he seems to have regarded as a crusade for the Highlands, or even for the Gaelic way of life.

Macdonald was a middle-aged man when he bent his persuasive powers to the task of rallying his fellow Highlanders to the Prince's cause. He seems to have done this with both songs and oratory. One of the most famous of these songs is the stirring *Hì ri ri tha e tighinn*, but it is only one of many. His hopes were high, and his love and his hatred both at white heat.

His poetical range was wide. The poems on the Seasons must have been almost contemporary with Thomson's on that subject. His imaginative extravaganzas on the *Birlinn of Clanranald* has been well rendered by Hugh MacDiarmid. In *Allt an t-Siucair* he writes detailed but lively natural description. His drinking songs can still enliven a convivial company. His *Urnuigh do'n Cheòlraidh*, or Address to the Muses, contains an adult statement of the aims of his art.

He has the two bibliographical distinctions of having published in book form the first Gaelic Vocabulary, in 1741, and the first collection of original Gaelic verse, in 1751.

An edition of his poems was prepared by the Revs. A. and A. Macdonald; certain of them are printed in *Sàr Obair nam Bàrd*, and the Gaelic text of the *Birlinn* is in Angus Macleod's *Sàr Orain*.

## Ceilidh Corner

### Seanfhacal (Proverb).

Fiadh á fireach, breac á linne, slat á coille—trì meirle as nach do ghabh an Gàidheal riamh nàire.

(A deer from a deer-forest, a trout from a pool, a sapling from a wood—three thefts of which the Gael was never ashamed.)

### Tòimhseachan (Riddle).

Chan ith thu e, 's chan òl thu e, is cha bhi thu beò as aonais?

(You do not eat it, and you do not drink it, and you cannot live without it?)

Answer:—Anail (Breath).

### Amaladh-cainnte (Tongue-twister).

Fàd bog, fada bog, fàd bog mònach.

(A soggy peat, long and soggy, a soggy peat of turf.)

N.B.—Get a Gaelic speaker to pronounce this for you, and then say it three times in quick succession, making sure that you distinguish between the long a in *fàd* and the short one in *fada*.