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Author: Various

Editor: Alexander Mackenzie
Alexander Macgregor
Alexander Macbain

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THE CELTIC MAGAZINE.

No. I. NOVEMBER 1875.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN the circular issued, announcing the CELTIC MAGAZINE, we stated that it was to be a Monthly Periodical, written in English, devoted to the Literature, History, Antiquities, Traditions, Folk-lore, and the Social and Material Interests of the Celt at Home and Abroad: that it would be devoted to Celtic subjects generally, and not merely to questions affecting the Scottish Highlands: that it would afford Reviews of Books on subjects interesting to the Celtic Races—their Literature, questions affecting the Land—such as Hypothec, Entail, Tenant-right, Sport,

Emigration, Reclamation, and all questions affecting the Landlords, Tenants, and Commerce of the Highlands. We will also, from time to time, supply Biographical Sketches of eminent Celts at Home and Abroad, and all the Old Legends connected with the Highlands, as far as we can procure them, beginning with those of Inverness and Ross shires.

We believe that, under the wiser and more enlightened management now developing itself, there is room enough in the Highlands for more Men, more Land under cultivation, more Sheep and more Shepherds, without any diminution of Sport in Grouse or Deer: that there is room enough for all—for more gallant defenders of our country in time of need, for more produce, more comfort, and more intelligence. We shall afford a _medium_ for giving expression to these views. When submitting the first number of the Magazine to the public, we think it proper to indicate our own opinion on these questions at greater length than we could possibly do in a circular; but, while doing this, we wish it to be understood that we shall at all times be ready to receive contributions on both sides, the only conditions being that they be well and temperately written, and that no side of a question will obtain undue prominence—facts and arguments alone allowed to work conviction. Thus, we hope to make the _Celtic Magazine_ a mirror of the intelligent opinion of the Highlands, and of all those interested in its prosperity and progress.

In dealing with Celtic Literature, Antiquities, Traditions, and Folk-lore, we must necessarily be Conservative. It is impossible for a good Celt to be otherwise than conservative of the noble History of his Ancestors—in love and in war, in devotion and daring. If any should deem this feeling on our part a failing, we promise to have something to say for ourselves in future, and not only give a reason for our faith, but show that we have something in the Highlands worth conserving.

In dealing with the important question of Sport, we cannot help taking a common sense view of it. We cannot resist the glaring facts which, staring us in the face, conclusively prove that the enormous progress made in the Highlands during the last half century, and now rapidly going on, is mainly due to our Highland Sports. A great amount of nonsense has been said and written on this question, and an attempt made to hold grouse and deer responsible for the cruel evictions which have taken place in the North. Arguments, to be of any force, must be founded on facts; and the facts are, in this case, that it was not grouse or deer which caused the Highland evictions, but sheep and south country sheep farmers. The question must be argued as one not between men and deer, but between men and sheep, and sheep against deer. We believe there is room enough for all under proper restrictions, and, to make room for more men, these restrictions should be applied to sheep or deer.

We believe that it would be a wise and profitable policy for Landlords as well as for Tenants to abolish Hypothec and Entail, and to grant compensation for improvements made by the latter. We are quite satisfied from experience, that the small crofter is quite incapable of profitably reclaiming much of our Highland Wastes without capital, and at the same time bring up a family. If he is possessed of the necessary capital, he can employ it much more advantageously elsewhere. The landlord is the only one who can reclaim to advantage, and he can hardly be expected to do so on an entailed estate, for the benefit of his successors, at an enormous rate of interest, payable out of his life-rent. If we are to reclaim successfully and to any extent, Entail must go; and the estates will then be justly burdened with the money laid out in their permanent improvement. The proprietor in possession will have an interest in improving the estate for himself and for his successors, and the latter,

who will reap the greatest benefit, will have to pay the largest share of the cost.

Regarding Emigration, we have a matured opinion that while it is a calamity for the country generally, and for employers of labour and farmers in particular that able-bodied men and women should be leaving the country in their thousands, we unhesitatingly assert that it is far wiser for these men and women to emigrate to countries where their labour is of real value to them, and where they can spend it improving land which will not only be found profitable during their lives, but which will be _their own_ and their descendants _freehold_ for ever, than to continue starving themselves and their children on barren patches and crofts of four or five acres of unproductive land in the Highlands. We have experienced all the charms of a Highland croft, as one of a large family, and we unhesitatingly say, that we cannot recommend it to any able-bodied person who can leave it for a more promising outlet for himself and family. While we are of this opinion regarding _voluntary_ emigration, we have no hesitation in designating _forced evictions_ by landlords as a crime deserving the reprobation of all honest men.

We shall also have something to say regarding the Commercial Interests of the Highlands—its trade and manufactures, and the abominable system of long Credit which is, and has proved, so ruinous to the tradesman; and which, at the same time, necessarily enhances the price of all goods and provisions to the retail cash buyer and prompt payer. On all these questions, and many others, we shall from time to time give our views at further length, as well as the views of those who differ from us. We shall, at least, spare no effort to _deserve_ success.

The HIGHLAND CEILIDH will be commenced in the next number, and continued from month to month. Under this heading will be given Highland Legends, Old Unpublished Gaelic Poetry, Riddles, Proverbs, Traditions, and Folk-lore.

MACAULAY'S TREATMENT OF OSSIAN.

"IT's an ill bird that befouls its own nest." And this is the first count of the indictment we bring against Lord Macaulay for his treatment of Ossian. Macpherson was a Highlandman, and Ossian's Poems were the glory of the Highlands; Macaulay was sprung from a Highland family, and as a Highlandman, even had his estimate of Ossian been lower than it was, he should have, in the name of patriotism, kept it to himself. But great as was Macaulay's enthusiasm, scarce a ray of it was ever permitted to rest on the Highland hills; and glowing as his eloquence, it had no colours and no favours to spare for the _natale solum_ of his sires. Unlike Sir Walter Scott, it can never be said of him that he shall, after columns and statues have perished,—

> A mightier monument command—
> The mountains of his native land.

There are scattered sneers at Ossian's Poems throughout Macaulay's Essays, notably in his papers on Dryden and Dr Johnson. In the latter of these he says:—"The contempt he (Dr J.) felt for the trash of Macpherson was indeed just, but it was, we suspect, just by chance. He despised the Fingal for the very reason which led many men of genius to admire it. He despised it not because it was essentially common-place,

but because it had a superficial air of originality." And in his History of England occur the following words:—"The Gaelic monuments, the Gaelic usages, the Gaelic superstitions, the Gaelic verses, disdainfully neglected during many ages, began to attract the attention of the learned from the moment when the peculiarities of the Gaelic race began to disappear. So strong was this impulse that where the Highlands were concerned men of sense gave ready credence to stories without evidence, and men of taste gave rapturous applause to compositions without merit. Epic poems, which any skilful and dispassionate critic would at a glance have perceived to be almost entirely modern, and which, if they had been published as modern, would have instantly found their proper place in company with Blackmore's Alfred and Wilkie's Epigoniad, were pronounced to be fifteen hundred years old, and were gravely classed with the Iliad. Writers of a very different order from the impostor who fabricated these forgeries," &c., &c. Our first objection to these criticisms is their undue strength and decidedness of language, which proclaims prejudice and _animus_ on the part of the writer. Macaulay here speaks like a heated haranguer or Parliamentary partizan, not like an historian or a critic. Hood says—"It is difficult to swear in a whisper"; and surely it is more difficult still to criticise in a bellow. This indeed points to what is Macaulay's main defect as a thinker and writer. He is essentially a dogmatist. He "does not allow for the wind." "Mark you his absolute _shall_," as was said of Coriolanus. No doubt his dogmatism, as was also that of Dr Johnson, is backed by immense knowledge and a powerful intellect, but it remains dogmatism still. In oratory excessive emphasis often carries all before it, but it is different in writing—there it is sure to provoke opposition and to defeat its own object. Had he spoken of Macpherson's stilted style, or his imperfect taste, few would have contradicted him, but the word "trash" startles and exasperates, and it does so because it is unjust; it is too slump and too summary. Had he said that critics had exaggerated Macpherson's merits, this too had been permitted to pass, but when he declared them in his writings to be entirely "without merit," he insults the public which once read them so greedily, and those great men too who have enthusiastically admired and discriminatingly praised them. Macpherson's connection with these Poems has a mystery about it, and he was probably to blame, but every one feels the words, "the impostor who fabricated these forgeries," to be much too strong, and is disposed, in the resistance and reaction of feeling produced, to become so far Macpherson's friend and so far Macaulay's foe. We regret this seeming strength, but real infirmity, of Macaulay's mode of writing—not merely because it has hurt his credit as a critic of Ossian, but because it has injured materially his influence as an historian of England. The public are not disposed, with all their admiration of talents and eloquence, to pardon in an historian faults of boyish petulance, prejudice, and small personal or political prepossessions, which they would readily forgive in an orator. Macaulay himself, we think, somewhere speaking of Fox's history, says that many parts of it sound as if they were thundered from the Opposition Benches at one or two in the morning, and mentions this as a defect in the book. The same objection applies to many parts of his own history. His sweeping character of Macpherson is precisely such a hot hand-grenade as he might in an excited mood have hurled in Parliament against some Celtic M.P. from Aberdeen or Thurso whose zeal had outrun his discretion.

Macaulay, it will be noticed, admits that Ossian's Poems were admired by men of taste and of genius. But it never seems to have occurred to him that this fact should have made him pause and reconsider his opinions ere he expressed them in such a broad and trenchant style. Hugh Miller speaks of a critic of the day from whose verdicts when he found himself

to differ, he immediately began to re-examine the grounds of his own. This is a very high compliment to a single writer; but Macaulay on the Ossian question has a multitude of the first intellects of modern times against him. The author of the History of England is a great name, but not so great as Napoleon the First, Goethe, and Sir Walter Scott, nor is he greater than Professor Wilson and William Hazlitt; and yet all these great spirits were more or less devoted admirers of the blind Bard of Morven. Napoleon carried Ossian in his travelling carriage; he had it with him at Lodi and Marengo, and the style of his bulletins—full of faults, but full too of martial and poetic fire—is coloured more by Ossian than by Corneille or Voltaire. Goethe makes Homer and Ossian the two companions of Werter's solitude, and represents him as saying, "You should see how foolish I look in company when her name is mentioned, particularly when I am asked plainly how I like her. How I like her! I detest the phrase. What sort of creature must he be who merely liked Charlotte; whose whole heart and senses were not entirely absorbed by her. Like her! Some one lately asked me how I liked Ossian." This it may be said is the language of a young lover, but all men are at one time young lovers, and it is high praise and no more than the truth to say that all young lovers love, or did love, Ossian's Poems. _This is true fame._ Sir Walter Scott says that Macpherson's rare powers were an honour to his country; and in his Legend of Montrose and Highland Widow, his own style is deeply dyed by the Ossianic element, and sounds here like the proud soft voice of the full-bloomed mountain heather in the breeze, and there like that of the evergreen pine raving in the tempest. Professor Wilson, in his "Cottages" and his "Glance at Selby's Ornithology," is still more decidedly Celtic in his mode of writing; and, in his paper in Blackwood for November 1839, "Have you read Ossian?" he has bestowed some generous, though measured praise, on his writings. He says, for instance—"Macpherson had a feeling of the beautiful, and this has infused the finest poetry into many of his descriptions of the wilderness. He also was born and bred among the mountains, and though he had neither the poetical nor the philosophical genius of Wordsworth, and was inferior far in the perceptive, the reflective, and the imaginative faculties, still he could _see_, and _feel_, and _paint_ too, in water colours and on air canvass, and is one of the Masters." Hear next Wilson's great rival in criticism, Hazlitt. They were, on many points bitter enemies, on two they were always at one—Wordsworth and Ossian! "Ossian is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihood, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets—namely, the sense of privation—the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country—he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed, with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head, the fox peeps out of the ruined tower, the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale, and the strings of his harp seem as the hand of age, as the tale of other times passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind! If it were indeed possible to shew that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain—'Roll on, ye dark brown year, ye bring no joy in your wing to Ossian!'" "The poet Gray, too," says Wilson, "frequently in his Letters expresses his wonder and delight in the beautiful and glorious inspirations of the Son of the Mist." Even Malcolm Laing—Macpherson's most inveterate foe—who edited Ossian for the sole purpose of revenge, exposure, and posthumous dissection, is compelled to say that "Macpherson's genius is equal to that of any poet of his day, except perhaps Gray."

In another place (Bards of the Bible—'Jeremiah') we have thus spoken of Ossian:—"We are reminded [by Jeremiah] of the 'Harp of Selma,' and of blind Ossian sitting amid the evening sunshine of the Highland valley, and in tremulous, yet aspiring notes, telling to his small silent and weeping circle, the tale of—

"Old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago."

"It has become fashionable (through Macaulay chiefly) to abuse the Poems of Ossian; but, admitting their forgery as well as faultiness, they seem to us in their _better passages_ to approach more nearly than any English prose to the force, vividness, and patriarchial simplicity and tenderness of the Old Testament style. Lifting up, like a curtain, the mist of the past, they show us a world, unique and intensely poetical, peopled by heroes, bards, maidens, and ghosts, who are separated by their mist and their mountains from all countries and ages but their own. It is a great picture, painted on clouds instead of canvass, and invested with colours as gorgeous as its shades are dark. Its pathos has a wild sobbing in it, an Æolean tremulousness of tone, like the wail of spirits. And than Ossian himself, the last of his race, answering the plaints of the wilderness, the plover's shriek, the hiss of the homeless stream, the bee in the heather bloom, the rustle of the birch above his head, the roar of the cataract behind, in a voice of kindred freedom and kindred melancholy, conversing less with the little men around him than with the giant spirits of his fathers, we have few finer figures in the whole compass of poetry. Ossian is a ruder "Robber," a more meretricious "Seasons," like them a work of prodigal beauties and more prodigal faults, and partly through both, has impressed the world."

Dr Johnson's opposition to Ossian is easily explained by his aversion to Scotland, by his detestation of what he deemed a fraud, by his dislike for what he heard was Macpherson's private character, and by his prejudice against all unrhymed poetry, whether it was blank verse or rhythmical prose. And yet, his own prose was rhythmical, and often as tumid as the worst bombast in Macpherson. He was too, on the whole, an artificial writer, while the best parts of Ossian are natural. He allowed himself therefore to see distinctly and to characterise severely the bad things in the book—where it sunk into the bathos or soared into the falsetto,—but ignored its beauties, and was obstinately blind to those passages where it rose into real sublimity or melted into melodious pathos.

Macaulay has, in various of his papers, shewn a fine sympathy with original genius. He has done so notably in his always able and always generous estimate of Edmund Burke, and still more in what he says of Shelley and of John Bunyan. It was his noble panegyric on the former that first awakened the "late remorse of love" and admiration for that abused and outraged Shade. And it was his article on Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress which gave it—popular as it had been among religionists—a classical place in our literature, and that dared to compare the genius of its author with that of Shakespere and of Milton. But he has failed to do justice to Ossian, partly from some early prejudice at its author and his country, and partly from want of a proper early Ossianic training. To appreciate Ossian's poetry, the best way is to live for years under the shadow of the Grampians, to wander through lonely moors, amidst drenching mist and rain, to hold _trystes_ with thunderstorms on the summit of savage hills, to bathe in sullen tarns after nightfall, to lean over the ledge and dip one's naked feet in the spray of cataracts,

to plough a solitary path into the heart of forests, and to sleep and dream for hours amidst the sunless glades, on twilight hills to meet the apparition of the winter moon rising over snowy wastes, to descend by her ghastly light precipices where the eagles are sleeping, and returning home to be haunted by night visions of mightier mountains, wider desolations, and giddier descents. A portion of this experience is necessary to constitute a true "Child of the Mist"; and he that has had most of it—and that was Christopher North—was best fitted to appreciate the shadowy, solitary, and pensively sublime spirit which tabernacles in Ossian's poetry. Of this Macaulay had little or nothing, and, therefore, although no man knew the Highlands in their manners, customs, and history better, he has utterly failed as a critic on Highland Poetry.

We might add to the names of those authors who appreciated Ossian, Lord Byron, who imitates him in his "Hours of Idleness"; and are forced to include among his detractors, Lord Brougham, who, in his review of these early efforts, says clumsily, that he won't criticise it lest he should be attacking Macpherson himself, with whose own "stuff" he was but imperfectly acquainted, to which Lord Byron rejoins, that (alluding to Lord Byron being a minor) he would have said a much cleverer and severer thing had he quoted Dr Johnson's sarcasm, that "many men, many women, and many _children_ could write as well as Ossian."

We venture, in fine, to predict that dear to every Scottish heart shall for ever remain these beautiful fragments of Celtic verse—verse, we scruple not to say, containing in the Combat of Fingal with the Spirit of Loda, and in the Address to the Sun—two of the loftiest strains of poetic genius, vieing with, surpassing "all Greek, all Roman fame." And in spite of Brougham's sneer, and Johnson's criticisms, and the more insolent attacks of Macaulay, Scotchmen both Highland and Lowland will continue to hear in the monotony of the strain, the voice of the tempest, and the roar of the mountain torrent, in its abruptness they will see the beetling crag and the shaggy summit of the bleak Highland hill, in its obscurity and loud and tumid sounds, they will recognize the hollows of the deep glens and the mists which shroud the cataracts, in its happier and nobler measures, they will welcome notes of poetry worthy of the murmur of their lochs and the waving of their solemn forests, and never will they see Ben-Nevis looking down over his clouds or Loch Lomond basking amidst her sunny braes, or in grim Glencoe listen to the Cona singing her lonely and everlasting dirge beneath Ossian's Cave, which gashes the breast of the cliff above it, without remembering the glorious Shade from whose evanishing lips Macpherson has extracted the wild music of his mountain song.

GEO. GILFILLAN.

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ALASTAIR BUIDHE MACIAMHAIR, the Gairloch Bard, always wore a "_Cota Gearr_" of home-spun cloth, which received only a slight dip of indigo—the colour being between a pale blue and a dirty white. As he was wading the river Achtercairn, going to a sister's wedding, William Ross, the bard, accosted him on the other side, and addressing him said,

'S ann than aoibheal air bard an Rugha
'Sa phiuthar a dol a phosadh
B-fhearr dhuit fuireach aig a bhaile
Mo nach d' rinn thu malairt cota.

To which _Alastair Buidhe_ immediately replied—

Hud a dhuine! tha'n cota co'lach rium fhein
Tha e min 'us tha e blath
'S air cho mor 's gha 'm beil do ruic-sa
Faodaidh tusa leigeal da.

MARY LAGHACH.

FROM THE GAELIC, BY PROFESSOR BLACKIE.

Ho! my bonnie Mary,
My dainty love, my queen,
The fairest, rarest Mary
On earth was ever seen!
Ho! my queenly Mary,
Who made me king of men,
To call thee mine own Mary,
Born in the bonnie glen.

Young was I and Mary,
In the windings of Glensmoil,
When came that imp of Venus
And caught us with his wile;
And pierced us with his arrows,
That we thrilled in every pore,
And loved as mortals never loved
On this green earth before.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

Oft times myself and Mary
Strayed up the bonnie glen,
Our hearts as pure and innocent
As little children then;
Boy Cupid finely taught us
To dally and to toy,
When the shade fell from the green tree,
And the sun was in the sky.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

If all the wealth of Albyn
Were mine, and treasures rare,
What boots all gold and silver
If sweet love be not there?
More dear to me than rubies
In deepest veins that shine,
Is one kiss from the lovely lips
That rightly I call mine.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

Thy bosom's heaving whiteness
With beauty overbrims,
Like swan upon the waters
When gentliest it swims;
Like cotton on the moorland

Thy skin is soft and fine,
Thy neck is like the sea-gul
When dipping in the brine.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

The locks about thy dainty ears
Do richly curl and twine;
Dame Nature rarely grew a wealth
Of ringlets like to thine:
There needs no hand of hireling
To twist and plait thy hair,
But where it grew it winds and falls
In wavy beauty there.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

Like snow upon the mountains
Thy teeth are pure and white;
Thy breath is like the cinnamon,
Thy mouth buds with delight.
Thy cheeks are like the cherries,
Thine eyelids soft and fair,
And smooth thy brow, untaught to frown,
Beneath thy golden hair.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

The pomp of mighty kaisers
Our state doth far surpass,
When 'neath the leafy coppice
We lie upon the grass;
The purple flowers around us
Outspread their rich array,
Where the lusty mountain streamlet
Is leaping from the brae.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

Nor harp, nor pipe, nor organ,
From touch of cunning men,
Made music half so eloquent
As our hearts thrilled with then.
When the blythe lark lightly soaring,
And the mavis on the spray,
And the cuckoo in the greenwood,
Sang hymns to greet the May.

Ho! my bonnie Mary, &c.

PROFESSOR MORLEY, EDITOR OF "EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE," ON CELTIC LITERATURE AND THE CELTIC PROFESSORSHIP.

PROFESSOR MORLEY, at a meeting called by the Gaelic Society of London, in Willis' Room, spoke as follows, and we think his remarks, being those of a great and unprejudiced Englishman of letters, well worth reproducing in the _Celtic Magazine_:—

He said that the resolution, which had a fit proposer in a distinguished representative of the north, was seconded by one [himself] who had no other fitness for the office than that he was altogether of the south, and had been taught by a long study of our literature to believe that north and south had a like interest in the promotion of a right study of Celtic. We were a mixed race, and the chief elements of the mixture were the Celtic and Teutonic. The Teutonic element gave us our strength for pulling together, the power of working in association under influence of a religious sense of duty; but had we been Teutons only, we should have been somewhat like the Dutch. He did not say that in depreciation of the Dutch. They are popularly associated with Mynheer Vandunck, but are to be associated rather with grand struggles of the past for civil and religious liberty, for they fought before us and with us in the wars of which we had most reason to be proud, and gave the battle-field upon which our Sidney fell at Zutphen. Nevertheless, full as Dutch literature is of worthy, earnest thought, it is not in man to conceive a Dutch Shakspere. This was not his first time of saying, that, but for the Celtic element in our nation, there would never have been an English Shakspere; there would never have been that union of bold originality, of lively audacity, with practical good sense and steady labour towards highest aims that gave England the first literature in the world, and the first place among the nations in the race of life. The Gael and Cymry, who represented among us that Celtic element, differed in characteristics, but they had in common an artistic feeling, a happy audacity, inventive power that made them, as it were, the oxygen of any combination of race into which they entered. He had often quoted the statement made by Mr Fergusson in his "History of Architecture," that, but for the Celts, there would hardly have been a church worth looking at in Europe. That might be over expressive of the truth, but it did point to the truth; and the more we recognise the truth thus indicated the sooner there would be an end of ignorant class feeling that delayed such union as was yet to be made of Celt with Saxon—each an essential part of England, each with a strength to give, a strength to take. We had remains of ancient Celtic literature; some representing—with such variation as oral traditions would produce—a life as old as that of the third century in songs of the battle of Gabhra, and the bards and warriors of that time, some recalling the first days of enforced fusion between Celt and Teuton in the sixth century. There were old manuscripts, enshrining records, ancient when written, of which any nation civilised enough to know the worth of its own literature must be justly proud. Our story began with the Celt, and as it advanced it was most noticeable that among the voices of good men representing early English literature, whenever the voice came from a man who advanced himself beyond his fellows by originality of thought, by happy audacity as poet or philosopher, it was (until the times of Chaucer) always the voice of a man who was known to have, or might reasonably be supposed to have, Celtic blood in his veins; always from a man born where the two races had lived together and blended, or were living side by side and blending. Before the Conquest it was always in the north of England, afterwards always along the line of the west, until in the latter part of the fourteenth century, London was large and busy enough to receive within itself men from all parts, and became a sort of mixing-tub for the ingredients of England. From that time the blending has been general, though it might even now be said that we are strongest where it has been most complete. With such opinions then, derived by an Englishman who might almost call himself most south of the south, from an unbiassed study of the past life of his country, he could not do other than support most heartily the resolution—"That a complete view of the character and origin of society, as it exists in these countries, cannot be given without a knowledge of the language, literature, and