

## **Lochaber so Sore: Lochaber no More?**

by Hugh Stewart

*Gleann Nibheis, gleann nan clach,*

*Gleann 'sam bith an gart anmoch.*

*Gleann fada, fiadhaich, fàs.*

*Sluagh bratach a' mhì-ghnèithis.*

*Glen Nevis: glen of stones.*

*Glen of late harvest.*

*Long, wild, waste glen.*

*Thievish folk of evil temper.*

*Glen Nevis: glen o' stanes.*

*Glen far hairst late remains.*

*Glen lang, wild an' wast.*

*Fowk faas ire kinles fast.*

Noo oor three tungs a' belabour

The guid name o' Brae Lochaber.

Sayin', in trilogy twice macaronic:

"Shun it like the plague bubonic."

Siclike hatred Scotland's shame

Lang ere Alasdair gied it a name.

Hate rose anent the loss o' *crodh*

In the age o' *togail nam bo*

Plus, files, forbye, the antrin *each*

In the auld Hielan' *linn nan creach*.

The Gaelic abune's auld as riev'in'

Oor maist ancient form o' thievin'.

Fit aim hud a Wast-Hielan' loon?

Dux medal: School o' the Moon.  
They a' follaed *Rathad nam Mèirleach*  
Lang ere they follaed *Tearlach*  
An' the Inglis has been here  
Gey close tae the ninety year.  
Tho' oor owreset's no' quite that  
O' the buik-learit son o' Wat,  
Foremaist scholar tae get his rear  
On auld Embro's Celtic cheer.  
He wrote the Bible o' toponyms,  
Testaments, Psalter an' Buik o' Hymns.  
Grampian gangrels noo can say  
Fitna hill they clam ilk' day.  
Sae that leaves jeest the Doric.  
That cannae claim tae be historic.  
The quatrain in the Lallans-spik  
Wis scrievit in a recent wik.  
The scriever wad hae coonselled Maggie:  
"Haud awa' frae the heich an' craggy.  
Catch-wecht fechts are niver wise:  
It's acht hunner times yer size."  
But there's nae wye he could ken  
She hud designs upon the Ben.  
An' this finest o' fine quines  
Realised thae fine designs.  
Maggie braved the steep ascent.  
On tappin' oot she was hell-bent.

She went brawly *ris a' bhruthaich*,  
*An deach i air a dearg chuthaich?*  
Sae it cam' that, unco soon,  
She stood on the monarch's croon,  
Closest she'll win tae the Moon.  
*Anail a' Ghaidheil*, plus a look roon,  
Syne Mags felt up for gyaun doon.  
Tae the far-awa' garrison toon  
Lang-syne acquaint wi' Tammis Telford  
An' faas hospital's the Belford,  
Weel-kent for its special'ty,  
Savin' the high-peak casualty.  
Efter she'd faan unco hard  
Mag saw inside its casualty ward  
Far the medics took a lookie  
Set her bane, syne set her stookie.  
Sae she'd been quite weel located  
Fur the mishanter mebbe fated.  
Steady descent an' she'd been soon  
Tae the saut water gey near doon,  
Then stood she on a sliddery stane  
That brocht tae her baith grief an' pain.  
Wi' the fracture o' her shackle-bane.  
Her fortitude was truly stoic,  
Like the ancient Hellenes, heroic.  
Her courage wad hae made the day  
O' J. Pittendrigh Macgillivray,

Fa saw in us fa wear the tartans:

“The race that was as the Spartans.”.

That nicht mak o’ oor wee lass

A latter-day female Leonidas.

But auld Lakonia an’ Caledonia?

We maun say we hae oor doots

The likeness is o’ sharks an troots.

Oor J.P. MacG. weel nicht be,

Jeest files, a thocty OTT.

KEY. GAELIC. *Gleann Nibheis, gleann nan clach* [pronounced Glown Neev-eesh, glown nan clach]/.

*Gleann ‘sam bith an gart anmoch* [pr. Glown sam bee an gart anna-moch]/.

*Gleann fada, fiadhaich, fàs* [pr. Glown fat-ah, fee-aye-eech, fas]/.

*Sluagh bratach a’ mhì-ghnèithis* [pr. Shloo-ugg brat-och a vee-graay-eesh].

*Crodh* [pronounced crow=cattle]/ *Togail nam bo* [pr. Toke-all nam bo]=cattle lifting/ *Each* [pr. ech]=horse/ *Linn nan creach* [pr. Lean nan crech]=Era of Plunderings/ *Rathad nam Mèirleach* [pr. Raa-at nam Mer-loch]=Road of the Thieves (Lochaber to Moray)/ *Tearlach* [pr. Cher-loch]=(Bonnie Prince) Charlie/ *ris a’ bhruthaich* [pr. reesh a vroo-eech]=Uphill/ *An deach i air a dearg chuthaich?* [pr. An jech ee err a jerrug who-eech]=Did she go on the rampage? literally “red battle frenzy” an adrenaline rush cf “berserk” & “amok”/ *Anail a’ Ghaidheil* [pr. Ann-ell a Gael] completed by *air a’ mhullach* [pr. err a vooloch]=The Highlander takes his (first) breather on the summit.

KEY. DORIC/LALLANS. Alasdair (MacMhaighstair Alasdair), great Gaelic bard who first used the phrase *Mi-run mor nan Gall*=Great ill-will of the non-Gaels. Antrin=odd, occasional. Owreset=translation. Buik-learit=well-read/erudite. Son o’ Wat=W.J.Watson, first Professor of Celtic at Edinburgh University from 1914, noted for *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (1926). Cheer=chair. Spik=speak. Wik=week. Wecht=weight. Fecht=fight. Scievit=written. Mishanter=accident. Heich=high. Garrison toon: Fort William is An Gearasdan (The Garrison) in Gaelic. Saut=salt. Sliddery=slippery. Files=whiles.