

THE

Celtic Monthly:

A Magazine for Highlanders.

EDITED BY
JOHN MACKAY, Kingston, Glasgow.

VOL. III.

GLASGOW: ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, CELTIC PRESS, 10 BOTHWELL STREET.

HENRY WHYTE, JOHN MENZIES & CO., AND WILLIAM LOVE.

EDINBURGH: NORMAN MACLEOD, AND JOHN GRANT.

INVERNESS: WILLIAM MACKAY. PORTREE: J. G. MACKAY.

OBAN: THOMAS BOYD. AND HUGH MACDONALD.

1895.

THE BLACK CHANTER OF CLAN CHATTAN.

AMONG the many interesting historical relics carefully treasured at Cluny Castle in Badenoch—the Seat of the Chief of Clan Chattan—is the Black Chanter or *Feadan Dubh*, of the Clan, on the possession of which the prosperity of the House of Cluny is supposed to depend. Of the many singular traditions regarding it, one is that its original fell from Heaven during the memorable Clan battle—rendered familiar to general readers through the pages of Scott's "Fair Maid of Perth"—fought between the Macphersons and the Davidsons in presence of King Robert III., his Queen, and Nobles, on the North Inch of Perth, in 1396, and that being made of crystal it was broken by the fall and the existing one made in *facsimile*. Another tradition is to the effect that this is the genuine original, and that the cracks were occasioned by its violent contact with the ground. Be the origin of the *Feadan Dubh* what it may, it is a notable fact that whether in consequence of its possession, or of their own bravery, no battle at which the Macphersons were present with the *Bratach Uaine*, or

green banner, of the Clan, and the Chief at their head, was ever lost.

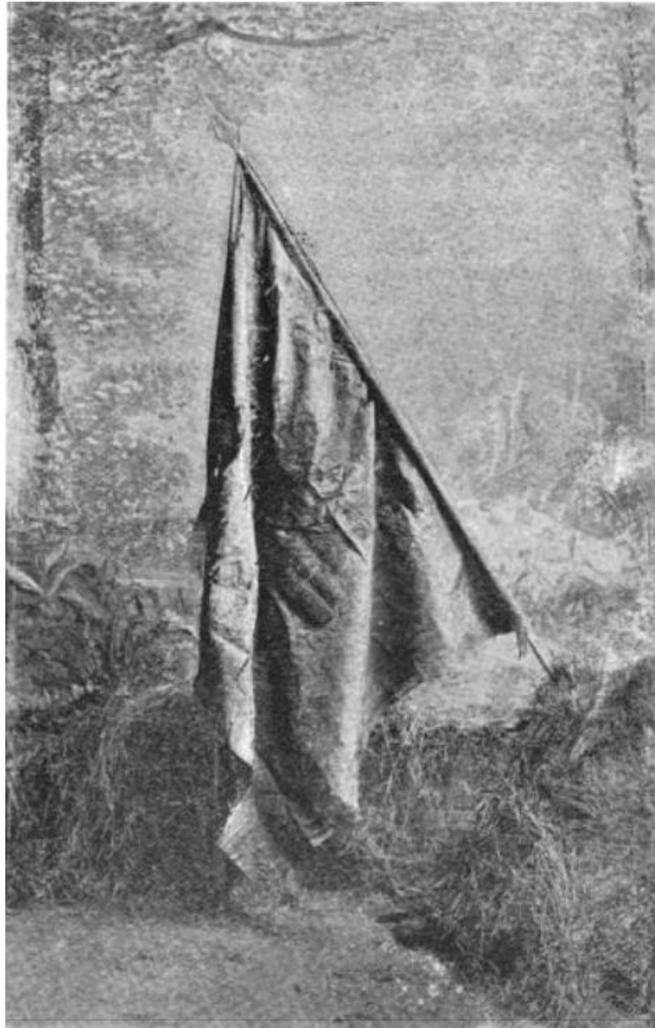
The following lines are inscribed upon the Chanter:—

"Feadan Dubh Chlann Chatain

'S fad o chualas

'S buan a mhaireas

'S mor 'adh."



THE GREEN BANNER OF CLAN CHATTAN.
Carried at the head of the Clan in the '15, and the '45.

It is related that before the Battle of Culloden an old witch, or second seer, told the Duke of Cumberland that if he waited until the *Bratach Uaine* and the *Feadan Dubh* came up he would be defeated. Ewen of Cluny was present at the Battle of Prestonpans with six hundred of his Clan, and he accompanied Prince Charlie into England. On the Prince's retreat into Scotland, Cluny with his men put two regiments of Cumberland's dragoons to flight at Clifton, fought afterwards at the Battle of Falkirk, and was on his

way from Badenoch to Inverness with his Clan to join the Prince when flying fugitives from Culloden met him with the intelligence of that sad day's disaster. As Colonel John Roy Stuart (*Iain Ruadh Stiubhart*) the famous warrior-poet of the '45 has it in his *Oran eile air lutha Chuilodair*:—

"Clann-Mhuirich nam buadh,
Iad-san uile bhi bhuainn,
Gur h-e m' iomadan truagh r'a leughadh"

which may be freely translated:—

(Clan Vourich of might!
When dire was our plight,
Would you had been there to aid us!)

The celebrity of the Highland bagpipe and the part it has played—so to speak—in the history of the Highlands and of our Highland regiments are well known. "As others with the sound of trumpets, so those with the sound of the pipes are inspired with ardour for the fight" The potency of bagpipe music on the hearts of all true Highlanders is universally acknowledged. As regards the *Gathering* it was the piobaireachd's shrill summons thrilling in the ears of our forefathers

emulation, as they marched to the foe, and which pealing to survivors of the battlefield in notes re-echoed by the frowning crags, drowning by its piercing tones the loud wailings of the bereaved, and the woful shrieks of the despairing women, called in a maddening voice for speedy and unsparing retribution."

To those whose dearest associations are connected with the blue hills and rushing torrents of the Highlands there is something, on the other hand, singularly heart-stirring in the *Failte*, or Welcome, on the strains of the bagpipe, and something inexpressibly touching in the plaintive notes of the *Cumhadh*, or Lament, especially when heard in after years or in the exile of a distant land According to tradition the Black Chanter of Clan Chattan is endowed with magical properties. Towards the end of the combat on the North Inch of Perth, we are told that there was seen an aeri-



THE BLACK CHANTER OF CLAN CHATTAN

"the sad tale of their devastated glens, and their houseless friends which gathered them for the war by notes which had often sounded to hard-earned victory; speaking in strains which made their blood boil with glowing

al minstrel hovering over the heads of the Macphersons, who after playing a few wild strains on the instrument let it drop from his hand. The Macpherson piper secured this enchanted pipe, and even though mortally

wounded poured forth the pibroch of the Clan till death effectually silenced his music. The Black Chanter was ever after held to ensure success not only to the Macphersons, but also to its temporary possessors, whenever lent to other Clans by the generosity of the Chief of the time. The Grants of Strathspey having received an affront through the cowardice of some unworthy members of that Clan and being dejected beyond measure, borrowed this magical instrument. Its bold war-notes soon roused their drooping energies and stimulated them to such valour that from that time forth it passed into a proverb that “no enemy ever saw the back of a Grant.” The Grants of Glenmoriston afterwards borrowed it in the same way, and it was only restored to “old Cluny” in the early part of the present century.

Here are some spirited and appropriate lines on the Black Chanter composed by Mrs. D. Ogilvy about half-a-century ago, and worthy, I think, of a permanent place in the pages of the *Celtic Monthly*:—

Black Chanter of Chattan, now hushed and exhausted,
Thy music was lost with the power of the Gael,
The dread inspiration Macpherson had boasted.
For ever expired in Drummosie’s* sad wail.

Of old on St. Johnstone’s† dark meadow of slaughter
Thy cadences hurried the piper’s last breath;
The vanquished escaped amid Tay’s rolling water,
The conqueror’s pibroch was silenced by death.

That piper is nameless, and lost in like manner,
The tribes are forgotten of mighty Clan Quhele;
While Chattan, that bears the hill cat on his banner,
No time can extinguish, no ruin assail.

From the hand of a cloud-cleaving bard thou wert given

To lips that embraced thee till moveless and dead;
Since then never idly Macpherson hath striven.
Nor trust in his fortune been shaken by dread.

O mouth piece of conquest! who heard thee and trembled?

Who followed thy call, and despaired of the fight?
Availed not that foemen before thee dissembled,
For quenched was their ardour and nerveless their might.

* Another name for Culloden.

† In olden times the City of Perth was sometimes so-called from its patron, Saint John.

The blast of thy pibroch, the flaunt of thy streamer,
Lent hope to each spirit and strength to each arm;
While the Saxon confronting was scared like the dreamer

Whose sleep is of peril, of grief, and alarm.

Led on by thy promise, what Chieftain e’er sallied,
Nor proved in his venture how just was thy vaunt?
At the spell of thy summons exultingly rallied
The faltering pulse of dispirited Grant.

Forerunner of victory! why didst thou tarry?
Thy voice on Drummosie an empire had changed;
We then had not seen our last efforts miscarry,
The Stuart had triumphed, the Gael been avenged.

Ah, fatal Drummosie—sad field of the flying!
The Gathering sank in the hopeless Lament;
What pibroch could stanch the wide wounds of the dying?

What magic rekindle the fire that was spent?

Proud music! by shame or dishonour ne’er daunted,
By murmur of orphan, by widowed despair.
The fall of thy country thy spell disenchanting,
with the last of the Stuarts it vanished in air.

Yet rouse thee from slumber. Black Chanter of Chattan,

Send forth a strong blast of defiance once more;
On the flesh of thy children the vulture doth batten,
And sodden with blood are the sands of Lahore.

As fierce as the tiger that prowls in their forest,
Those sons of the Orient leap to the plain;
But the blade striketh vainly wherever thou warrest,—
Black Chanter of Chattan, bestir thee again!

Kingussie.

A. MACPHERSON.