

Memories
Written by William Macphail 'Clach Oich', Gravir

With the passing of the black-houses and the erection of new modern cottages and bungalows in the rural parts of Lewis, the hospitality, the glamour and the romance of our early years are passing away. This is sadly brought home to the exiles on revisiting the former scenes and haunts of childhood days. They are amazed at the sweeping changes that have taken place in the manners, customs and mode of living of the inhabitants in the rural parts within a few short years. Everywhere around them they see the passing of the old, and the dawning of the new era. The mouldering roofless walls of the old black houses standing in silent contrast to the more commodious and hygienic cottages now adorning our rural landscape kindle a blaze of vivid recollections in their breasts.

The verses of 'Làithean m'òig' were suggested while on a visit to my native village of Gravir having climbed to the top of 'Meall nan Uan', a hill that overlooks 'Loch Odhairn' and the surrounding panorama of heather clad hills, moorland streams and lochs. I sat down to court the views and to inhale the soothing, fragrant breath of the evening. The tang of summer was in the heather-scented breeze that swept the hills, which were basking in the sun, showing their rugged beauty to advantage. The babble of the nearby brook and the song of the thrush were the only sounds to break the brooding silence of this bewitching evening hour, indeed a 'golden moment for a poetic heart'.

While thus musing on the enchanting days of our departing friends, and the perplexities of life, a neighbouring shepherd lad and his dog 'Tyne' appeared over the brow of the hill. This hardy son of the soil, as yet unspoilt by contamination with the evils that lurk beneath the thin veneer of our present day civilisation, was bare-headed and bare-footed, his loosely flowing hair waving in the breeze, the bottoms of his trousers rolled up to his knees, a pair of clipping shears hanging from a belt around his slim waist, and a goodly sized bag of newly clipped wool strapped across his shoulder. His faithful friend and inseparable companion - a handsome specimen of the common collie breed like Byron's dog, 'possessed beauty without vanity, courage and strength without ferocity, and all the virtues of man without his vices'.

With the appearance of these remarkable intruders, my meditations and reflections were brought to a speedy end, and having prolonged my stay as the shepherd's guest, and partaken freely of his unbounded hospitality, I at length bade 'adieu' to the peace and solitude of 'Meall nan Uan', and with a last lingering look at the scenes and haunts of my early years, I reluctantly turned away to the never ending strife and cold formalities of the city, where I have since learned with regret of the passing of 'Tyne' to realms unknown, and the embarking of my shepherd friend on a commercial career. He now serves behind the counter in his own store in the village. Such are the vicissitudes of life in this materialistic age.