BLIADHNA THEARLAICH :
HOW THE HIGHLANDER SINGS IT

There is an old Gaelic proverb that says

"*Thig Crioch air an t-Saoghal ach maraidh Gaol 's Ceol* "
(The world will come to an end but love and song will remain)
and this is particularly true of my subject because for a brief moment tonight I want to speak about :

BLIADHNA THEARLAICH :
['The Year of Charles']
HOW THE HIGHLANDER SINGS OF IT

This is a vast subject.

There is a very large body of Jacobite song in Gaelic. 'Many of the great Gaelic poets of the 18th century were Jacobite supporters and composed songs on the subject. They include Rob Donn MacKay, Duncan Bàn MacIntyre and Alexander MacDonald,(*Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair*.

Rob Donn the Sutherland poet did not take part in the rising. In fact his chief - Lord Reay - supported the Hanoverian side . But Rob was still for the Prince as this 'Òran do Phrionnsa Tearlach' (Song to Prince Charles) shows:

'S gun deanmaid comunn fàilteach riut
Gu bruidhneach, gàireach, amhranach,
Gu bot'lach, copach, stòpanach,
Le cruit, le ceòl 's le dannsaireachd.

We'll welcome thee full heartily,
With laughter, speech and melody,
And readily we'll drink thy health,
With harp and song, and dancing too

Duncan Bàn MacIntyre, an Argyll man, fought at Falkirk on the Hanoverian side as a paid replacement for Fletcher of Dunans and having fled, returned minus his sword much to the chagrin of the man who commissioned him and who refused to pay him the wage he owed Duncan for fighting (or not fighting) on his behalf. Despite his service with the Hanoverian forces, he displayed Jacobite sympathies

a number of his works, notably his witty "Òran do'n Bhriogais" (English:*Ode to Trousers*) inspired by the Disarming Act 1746,

Alexander MacDonald,(*Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair Dalillea Loch Shiel))* penned many Jacobite Gaelic songs such as: *Òran Nuadh* — "A New Song", *Òran nam Fineachan Gaidhealach* — "The Song of the Highland Clans" and *Òran do'n Phrionnsa* — "A Song to the Prince," These songs serve as testament to the enthusiasm shown by his supporters towards the possible arrival of the prince as well as the Bard's own passion for the Jacobite cause. These compositions are said to have been sent to the banker Aeneas MacDonald, the brother of Kinlochmoidart, in Paris and were read to the Prince in translation to encourage him to come to Scotland. Alasdair was among the first to arrive at Glenfinnan to witness the raising of the Standard. He is also said to have sung his song of welcome: *Tearlach Mac Sheumais*. He is of course the Jacobite song writer and poet par excellence and who can resist the infectious enthusiasm of his Song I mentioned *A Song to the Prince*

O hi-ri-ri, tha e tighinn,
O hi-ri-ri, 'n Rìgh tha uainn,
Gheibheamaid ar n-airm 's ar n-èideadh
'S bre-EH can-an-fhèilidh an cuaich

This song tells of the poet's joy on hearing that Prince Charles Edward Stuart is coming. It is a warrior song "*We will seek out our arms and accoutrements and wear our pleated tartan.* The Prince is described as a tall and fair-faced man who will come riding on a war-horse. He will cut down his enemies with his sword, as if they were stalks in the field. The bard describes how the sound of the pipes will arouse the followers of Prince Charles on the field of battle. Anyone wearing the "ugly red coat" will have his black hat split like a cabbage.

These songs have a contemporary immediacy, but it is also true to say that a great number of Jacobite songs were written many years after the warfare of 1689 and the Risings of 1715, 1719 and 1745, when the political cause had died.

It could be argued that by 1780 to be pro-Jacobite was not revolutionary, but was a rather right-wing and romantic hankering after the old ways which resulted in such songs as 'My Ain Countrie', 'The Skye Boat Song' and 'Will Ye No Come Back

Again?' Many of the newer songs were cloyingly sentimental and backward-looking.

I have no wish to look at these songs tonight

Instead I would like to go to the grassroots of the campaign ; to indulge in a mood swing and to look at two songs written by ordinary Highland folk ; those who maybe suffer the most in any conflict then and now .One song shows the joyous beginnings and the other the disastrous consequences of Bliadhna Thearlaich .

The first is sung in quite a restrained traditional style by Flora MacNeil from Barra a great tradition bearer of Gaelic song from that treasure house the Outer Isles who leaned much of her repertoire in the oral tradition passed to her by two generations of her family.

The song is called *An Fhideag Airgid) The Silver Whistle* an odd title but one which I believe comes from a multi-faceted old Celtic folk tale about a giant who is to appear from the sea to restore the rightful owner to the land . In essence the tale said

"I have a silver whistle and a silver castle… I have a white steed that can fly through air, ….blow on the whistle and I will be your faithful comrade and ally as long as I live."

The song is,sadly, anonymous and was written when the Prince landed from the French frigate La Doutelle at what was to be named *Coilleag A 'Phrionnsa* (The Prince's Strand) on 23rd July 1745

The song has the quality of a rowing song which comes through particularly in the vocables '*hi ri hu hi o ro* 'It is shot through with great optimism . The almost mystical divine right of the Stuart Kings to rule shines through.

'My King's Son has come to Scotland '

There is a magical element in the song. He or I suspect SHE sees the Prince coming in what is a fabulous vessel :

A stately ship with her silver rigging '

Listen to this short extract :

PLAY

'Who will sound the silver whistle

Now that my King's son has come to Scotland

On a great ship skimming on the wave tops

On a brindled ship, a stately ship glittering with silver rigging

There is a admiration for the physical presence of the Prince . There is warm Highland hospitality on offer, loyalty, acknowledgement of the charisma of the Royal Presence and an invitation to integrate with what are his own people. Most of all the singer shows a glad acceptance of the task ahead in the service of the rightful King and his son

PLAY

Young Charles of the beguiling blue eyes

Welcome, love and renown to you

Playing of fiddles and the choicest of music to you

Who will sound the silver whistle

Who is to say I will not sound it myself?'

The next song is different. According to Strathglass folklore recently published in the Gaelic Society of Inverness publication *The Hugh Barron Papers* and in 19th century correspondence in the Celtic Monthly William Chisholm, a laird known in Gaelic as *Fear Innis nan Ceann* and a near relative of the Chief of that name, was reluctant to join Roderick Og Chisholm son of his Chief at their muster to join the Prince's Forces. A very handsome man by all accounts, William had married Christine Fergusson daughter of a

well –to- do Contin armourer and blacksmith. She was a zealous, deeply convinced Jacobite and persuaded her husband to join the muster. He left her to join. On his arrival ,Roderick apparently said to him in Gaelic *'Thainig thu Uilleam. Dh'aithnich mi gun deanadh Cirsty an gnothach.Gabh a bhratach ! 'Ah you've arrived William. I knew Christine would do the trick. Take charge of the Standard !'* So William Chisholm's fate was sealed. What happened to him therafter is told in differing folklore accounts – some say he was seen leaving the field with a party of Chisholms in good order ; some say he died a hero's death defending wounded comrades on the field of Culloden Whatever his end, he did not return to Christine or Strathglass.

A Stone erected by the Fraser Tacksman of Mauld stands memorial where their dwelling was but in her grief Christine's lasting memorial is, for all Gaels, the lament for her husband which she wrote : *Mo R ùn Geal òg.* It appears to have been her only composition but she speaks eloquently in a classical bardic style for all the grieving women who were to be found in almost every household in Gaelic –speaking Scotland and furth of it! It is one of the masterpieces of Gaelic song , and is the essence of personal sorrow particularly in the short refrain at the end of each verse *Mo Rùn Geal òg (My fair young love)* The song says that the Prince took from her everything she possessed in the war on his behalf so much so that all she has to expect is the shroud at her passing. And yet it is to her eternal credit that , despite her grief ,she can still sing the question "Who will raise the sword now to fill Charles' throne….

Here are two verses of it sung by Karen Matheson:
PLAY

I said I did not wish to dwell on the greater poets but instead listen to the voice of the common people caught up in civil war. There is however one modern rather enigmatic poem I must finish by quoting . It refers to that poet swordsman and professional soldier John Roy Stuart. It is by William Hill and says of Ian Ruadh

My face to the driving rain and my heart colder,

Not in the face of death or exile from a mortal land

Fairer than the bleak moor, the fields of France

Where a smooth courtly language flows from the tongue

On pleasant chateaux of the Loire.

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Why should the heart yearn

For the drizzling crags of home

And the poor hovels

That scatter the heather on the damp mists of the West

A country of drovers, vendetta and harsh words

Of an old and dying poetry of forgotten heroes.

And what in these brown glens or in all Scotland

Could buy the elegance of one Parisian street?

Now that the walls of Dunedin of the Kings

No longer are defence,

The only battlement

Is the hedge of my clenched teeth

Around a tongue that carries the rough Gaelic of Strathspey.

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This is the poor excuse, the last defence

That turns my face to the rain and breaks my heart.

As the old proverb said:

“*Thig Crioch air an t-Saoghal ach maraidh Gaol 's Ceol* “

That world came to an end but we still turn our faces to the rain and ensure the love of that world, its poetry and its music will last ….and for this reason I would ask you to be upstanding and to drink with me a toast to:

THE ROYAL HOUSE OF STUART