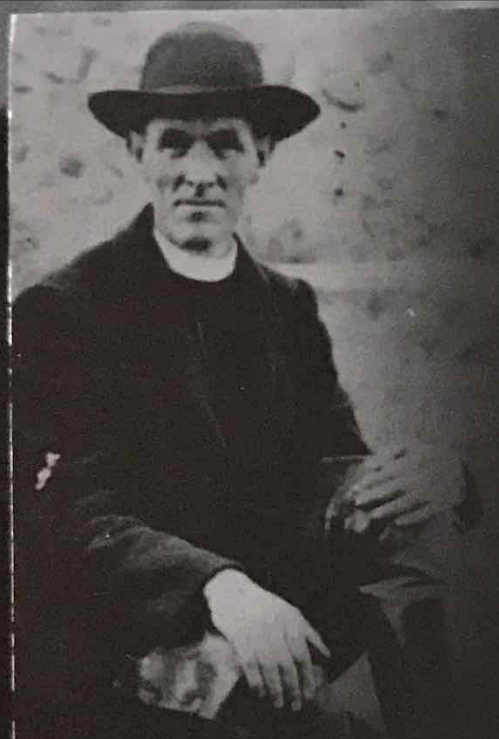

STRANGE THINGS

In 1892 the Society for Psychical Research in London, keen to use telepathy as scientific proof of life after death, launched an enquiry into second sight. The supernatural had always played a prominent part of the lives of the people in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, so off to the Western Isles on the Society's behalf went an attractive and mysterious young Englishwoman called Ada Goodrich Freer. She duly made contact with the man most able to help, 35-year-old Father Allan McDonald of Eriskay – poet, folklorist, and already one of the most celebrated priests of the Catholic Church in Scotland. ***Strange Things*** tells what resulted from this undoubtedly strange meeting. It delves into Freer's murky past and ultimate downfall, while presenting the stories of second sight collected for her by Fr Allan. Called by a leading psychiatrist "a complex and beautiful detective story", and by a leading folklorist "a rattling good read, meticulously researched by two specialists at the top of their game", ***Strange Things*** is now reprinted for the first time since 1968.

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THE STORY OF FR ALLAN MCDONALD, ADA GOODRICH FREER, AND THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH'S ENQUIRY INTO HIGHLAND SECOND SIGHT

JOHN L. CAMPBELL AND TREVOR H. HALL

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INTRODUCTION

As I pointed out in my *Eilein na h-Òige: The Poems of Fr Allan McDonald*, I first saw *Strange Things* when its co-author, Dr Campbell, sent me a parcel of books to hawk around the households of South Uist and Eriskay in the summer of 1970. In South Uist I had a van, but in Eriskay I went on foot like a chapman of old.

Strange Things is, however, no chapbook! It brought back to the people of South Uist and Eriskay some of the folklore which Fr Allan had collected from their parents and grandparents (pp. 249–323). It's also a rattling good read, meticulously researched by two specialists at the top of their game. It tells how the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), keen to use telepathy and hypnosis to construct proof of life after death, launched an enquiry into second sight. Off to the Western Isles went an attractive but duplicitous young Englishwoman called Ada Goodrich Freer, who duly made contact with Fr Allan.

The book bridges the gulf between those late Victorian spiritualists (of whom Arthur Conan Doyle was one) and the genuine world of the spirit that survived in the Western Isles, sustained by oral tradition and buffeted by wind, waves, hunger, prejudice and landlordism. Dr Campbell encapsulates the gulf for us at p. 7 by describing the Gaelic mind as vertical, 'possessing historical continuity and religious sense', and that of the modern Western world as horizontal, 'possessing breadth and extent, dominated by scientific materialism and a concern with purely contemporary happenings'.

Dr Campbell (1906–96), eldest son of Col. Duncan Campbell, laird of Inverneill in Argyll, was one of the outstanding Gaelic scholars of the twentieth century. After studying rural economy at Oxford he went to Barra, from where he and Compton Mackenzie campaigned for the rights of inshore fishermen. He published his first book, *Highland Songs of the '45*, in 1933. While working with Mackenzie on *The Book of Barra* he met the American folklorist Margaret Fay Shaw. In the years following their marriage in 1935 he and Shaw recorded the songs of

Gaelic-speaking communities in Nova Scotia (*Songs Remembered in Exile*, 1990). In 1938 they purchased the island of Canna, where they spent the rest of their lives. Working in his attic study with its remarkable view across the sound to the mountains of Rum, Dr Campbell poured out a succession of significant works. Following his death Hugh Cheape collected many (but not all) of his essays and scholarly articles as *A Very Civil People* (2000); this and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* provide the most accessible accounts of his life.

Dr Trevor Henry Hall (1910–91), eldest son of H. Roxby Hall, Wakefield, was a chartered surveyor and company director with an interest in magic and mystery. As a Leeds magistrate he spoke in *The Enigma of Daniel Home* of how an understanding of the unusual may be reached by 'the opinion of a layman aided to a slight extent only by many years of experience listening ... to some curious tales of human weakness'. His list of publications in *Who Was Who 1991–95* includes twenty-seven books about critical psychical research, conjuring, historical investigation, bibliography, Sherlock Holmes and Dorothy L. Sayers. In 1980 his part of *Strange Things* (pp. 93–220) was reprinted by Duckworth of London as *The Strange Story of Ada Goodrich Freer*, with an introduction in which Eliot Slater (1904–83), editor-in-chief of *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, suggested that Freer was homosexual and endorsed the view expressed at p. 210 that she enjoyed flagellation. I can only add that, unlike Amy Murray who found him fascinating, Freer had so little interest in Fr Allan that she could not even remember his name (pp. 208, 224–25).

Dr Slater described Freer as 'only one, if the strangest, of the many odd and quirky personalities' associated with the SPR in 'Dr Hall's complex and beautiful detective story'. I have been asked on radio if Campbell and Hall were not too hard on Freer. My answer is no. Her crime was plagiarism. In her articles in *Folk-Lore* and her book *Outer Isles* she plundered Fr Allan's collection with such freedom that it has taken a century to dispel the impression that there was little left worth printing. The collection survives in five notebooks in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Canna, and for several years now Mrs Flora Komori and I have been systematically publishing their contents under Fr Allan's name in the Uist community newspaper *Am Pàipear*. I welcome this reprint of *Strange Things* as part of an ongoing process.

Ronald Black, Peebles, January 2006

PREFACE

IT SEEMS desirable that something should be said of the circumstances under which this book came to be written.

When I first went to live on the island of Barra in the Outer Hebrides in 1933, many people were living who could remember Fr Allan McDonald, priest of the island of Eriskay, who had died in 1905 at the age of 46. Alike as a parish priest, a poet, and a collector of Gaelic folklore, Fr Allan McDonald had achieved a fame that lived on long after him. It therefore seemed to me extraordinary that a folklore collection as important as his should have disappeared completely. The collection seemed well worth trying to trace, and eventually, after prolonged enquiries (and in spite of the denials of two persons who actually were in possession of parts of it), I was able to trace four-fifths of it with the help of various clerical and academic friends, to whom I shall always be profoundly grateful.

The material traced consisted of eight quarto notebooks. One of these contained a collection of rare Gaelic words and expressions made in South Uist and Eriskay between 1893 and 1897; another a collection of Gaelic hymns, some traditional, some original, and some translated from English and Latin; another contained a collection of the words of waulking (labour) songs; and another, about which more will be said later, contained a collection of second sight stories and other material, including draft versions of some of Fr Allan McDonald's original Gaelic poems. Apart from these four notebooks there were four others containing general folklore—local history, folk-tales, folk-songs, folk anecdotes, proverbs, place-names, Uist and Eriskay genealogies, and so on. These were numbered I, II, V, and VI. This part of the collection had been begun in the winter of 1887–8 and had been made over the succeeding ten years. Notebooks III and IV were (and still are) missing; these had been written on Eriskay between 1893 and 1896.

An examination of the four surviving folklore notebooks and of a diary kept by Fr Allan McDonald between 1st September 1897 and 30th June 1898 revealed that a lady named Ada Goodrich Freer, well known in folklore circles as the authoress of an important book

on the Hebrides called *Outer Isles*, published in 1902, and a lecturer on several occasions between 1897 and 1901 to the Folklore Society in London and other similar bodies on Hebridean folklore, had been indebted to Fr Allan McDonald's notebooks for her material to a very remarkable degree, though this was not fully realized until a catalogue of his folklore material, which was begun by myself, was completed by Miss Sheila J. Lockett, who also spent some time in checking Fr Allan McDonald's material against Miss Freer's lectures and publications for me. An outcome of this discovery was my article 'The late Fr Allan McDonald, Miss Goodrich Freer and Hebridean Folklore', published in the second volume of *Scottish Studies* in 1958 (pp. 175–88) giving examples of her indebtedness. The article had previously been rejected by several Scottish editors on the grounds that it was 'too contentious'; but the impression the exposure made at the time appears to have been minimal.[1] The present book is to a considerable extent a confirmation, and extension, of the thesis presented in that article.

The revelation that Miss Freer had been an extensive copyist of Fr Allan McDonald's folklore notebooks suggested the possibility that her literary remains, if they could be found, might well contain material copied verbatim from the two missing notebooks. But enquiries made of probable societies and institutions, including the Folklore Society, the Society for Psychical Research, and the Royal Geographical Society, of all of which Miss Freer had been a prominent member, drew a complete blank. The literary remains of Miss Freer, who had been a very well-known writer on folklore and psychical research between 1889 and 1902, authoress of many books, articles, and lectures and the person in charge of the Society for Psychical Research's enquiry into second sight in the Highlands financed by Lord Bute, in 1894, have vanished utterly. Her widowed husband, the late Rev. H. H. Spoer, then living in New York, told me by letter in 1950, the year before he died, that he and his wife had not been able to keep many papers during their travels in the Near East between 1905 and 1923, and that his wife had always returned any material she borrowed to its owners. Nevertheless, it still seems very odd that no literary remains of such a well-known writer have been preserved anywhere. The possible reason for this will be suggested in due course.

It was obvious, when Fr Allan McDonald's collection was traced, that it contained much material of interest that ought to be published. Priority was given to his collection of rare words and

[1] For example, an offprint of the article was sent to the editor of *Folklore*, but as far as I know the article was never mentioned in that journal.

expressions from the Gaelic dialect of South Uist and Eriskay, as this provided a very useful key to difficulties in Gaelic folk-tales and folk-songs collected in South Uist and Barra, and also in Fr Allan McDonald's own Gaelic poems. After arrangements to publish this work in Edinburgh had fallen through, it was accepted by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and published in Dublin in 1958, under the title of *Gaelic Words from South Uist*. The next material chosen from Fr Allan McDonald's collection for publication was his own poems,[1] and after that, the ghost and second sight stories, which are published in this book (in the great majority of cases for the first time) and which it seemed particularly desirable should be published under circumstances which gave Fr Allan McDonald the fullest possible credit for their collection.

When preparing these for publication, it seemed to me that there would be little point in adding even such an interesting collection to the already large amount of material of this kind from the Scottish Highlands that is in print without saying something about the circumstances under which the collection had been made. This involved investigating, and writing the first complete account of, the Society for Psychical Research's enquiry into second sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, which was financed by the third Marquess of Bute, begun in 1892, taken charge of by Miss Freer in the autumn of 1894, and after two interim reports from her in December 1894 and December 1895, mysteriously faded out of sight and came to nothing. In writing this account I have been most fortunate in being allowed access to the unpublished correspondence dealing with the enquiry in the third Marquess of Bute's papers.

My enquiries about Miss Freer herself and about what had happened to her literary remains came to a dead-end in 1953. It was not until 1964, when I happened to read Mr Trevor H. Hall's *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney* (the story of the first secretary of the Society for Psychical Research, who committed suicide in mysterious circumstances in 1888, the year Miss Freer became an Associate of the Society), that I felt that here there was a person, a trained and critical investigator who was thoroughly well informed about the background to psychical research in England in the 1880s and 1890s, and about the strange personalities involved in it, who might know something about Miss Freer or could suggest how more might be discovered about her, and perhaps help to do so. I wrote to Mr Hall, and a large correspondence soon developed on the subject, turning eventually into a full and happy collaboration, in which Mr Hall

[1] Published in 1965, with some translations by the writer, under the title *Bàrdachd Mhgr. Ailein*, T. & A. Constable, Edinburgh.

undertook the writing of the account of Miss Freer's carefully concealed origin and of her peculiar and controversial career in psychical research between 1889, the date of her first address to the S.P.R., and 1901, when she left England for Jerusalem. This, too, is published here for the first time. I have been exceptionally fortunate in having Mr Hall as a collaborator, as it would have been quite impossible to write an adequate account of Miss Freer based on her career in folklore alone: it is significant that the remarks in three of Alexander Carmichael's letters to Fr Allan McDonald written between August 1901 and March 1902, without which evidence it would never have been known that Miss Freer had somehow come to grief and been discredited in the summer of 1901, relate to her career in psychical research, though they occur in letters of which the subject is Gaelic folklore.

I have added an appendix to this book giving illustrations of Miss Freer's often verbatim use of Fr Allan McDonald's folklore notebooks in her lectures and articles published under her name additional to the examples given in my article in *Scottish Studies* in 1958. I regret that Fr Allan McDonald's reputation as a folklorist can only be fully substantiated and restored by attacking Miss Freer's, but the very fulsome obituary accorded to her in Volume XLI of *Folklore*, coupled with the ignoring of Fr Allan McDonald's death in 1905 by that journal, makes this inevitable. Also, it must be remembered that this is not the only time that the knowledge and experience of a scholar on the spot in the Hebrides have been exploited for personal advantage by an outsider. What Fr Allan McDonald thought of it all was recorded by Miss Amy Murray in her *Father Allan's Island*,[1] when she said that although disclaiming personal ambition in the matter, 'he had been little pleased with the working up one pair of hands, at least, had given them' (*i.e.* his folklore notes). There can be no doubt whatever about whose working-up Fr Allan McDonald had in mind.

An unsatisfactory circumstance is the complete absence of any of Fr Allan McDonald's letters from the papers of his friends who one would have expected most carefully to preserve them. I refer particularly to the papers of Alexander and Ella Carmichael and of the Rev. Dr George Henderson, who was lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University from 1906 to 1912. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that at some time the letters from Fr Allan McDonald to such persons may have been abstracted from their papers. As regards the missing Notebooks III and IV, some of their contents are revealed from the lectures of Miss Freer and the later publications

[1] New York, 1920, p. 203.

of George Henderson, who must have had access to these notebooks during the years of his lectureship at Glasgow. This may be a clue to their present whereabouts, although they have not been so far discovered in Henderson's papers.

As for the stories of second sight collected by Fr Allan McDonald, these are given here to a great extent in the chronological order in which he recorded them. This illustrates the development of Fr Allan's contacts with his informants, and of his interest in them and in their stories. This is particularly true of the stories in his MS. notebook called 'Strange Things', after which this book is named, where one story often leads into another, and where any attempt to classify the stories under different headings would mean wrenching them from their psychological context and breaking the continuity of the record. Readers can easily find the various stories of any particular type by consulting the Motif-Index.

Owing to the large extent to which the names of persons, and places, and dates, were recorded by Fr Allan McDonald, his collection is of particular interest. In this respect it is to be hoped that by now the reproduction of the names of the persons concerned, so often concealed in the publication of such material, will not cause any offence to anyone. Mr Trevor Hall and I have every faith in the integrity of Fr Allan McDonald and of his informants, and completely open minds on the nature of their evidence, even if we sometimes think that certain apparently paranormal happenings may have natural causes, or that it is sometimes easy to find later events that may fit apparent omens. In this connection the Gaelic proverb *Cuir math air a' mhanadh, 's theagamh gun tig math as*, 'put a good interpretation on the omen, and perhaps good will come of it', may be remembered. If only a few of the anecdotes recorded by Fr Allan McDonald are first-hand, a number of others may be called good second-hand. To call such things hallucinations, as C. G. Jung has pointed out, is simply to beg the question.[1] 'Whether you believe in a demon of the air or in a factor in the unconscious that plays diabolical tricks on you is all one to me. The fact that man's imagined unity is menaced by alien powers remains the same in either case.'[2] The scholar has not yet arisen who can apply Jung's ideas on the archetypes of the collective unconscious to Highland second sight or to Gaelic folklore: it would be well worth making the attempt.

The Highlander's own view remains that of the Church: these things do exist, even though they may be due to delusion or (in the

[1] *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London, 1963, p. 219.

[2] C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, vol. IX, p. i; London, 1959, p. 105.

big cities) to trickery; but it is a very bad thing to go out of one's way to experience them. The gift of second sight is regarded as an affliction. The reader can form his own opinion of the nature of the evidence provided for it in the stories published here.

I must conclude by expressing my gratitude to the many persons whom I have had to plague with questions in the course of this enquiry, which goes back to 1950, and particularly to those who had known Miss Freer or Fr Allan McDonald, or both, personally, and who have given me their impressions of them. For impressions of Miss Freer (none particularly favourable), I am obliged to the late Lord Colum Crichton Stuart and his sister the late Lady Margaret MacRae (children of the third Marquess of Bute), the late Rev. Dr Kenneth MacLeod, the late Major Finlay S. MacKenzie, formerly proprietor of the Lochboisdale Hotel in South Uist, and to Mrs Mary Ann Campbell, née MacKinnon, of Balevulin in the Island of Tiree. All of these persons have given me written impressions of Miss Freer, and the first four gave me verbal ones as well.[1]

For memories of Fr Allan McDonald, I am indebted to Dr Kenneth MacLeod and Major F. S. MacKenzie, and also very much to the late Rt Rev. Monsignor Canon MacMaster, Fort William, who most kindly put at my disposal both Fr Allan McDonald's diary, and Miss Freer's surviving letters to Fr Allan, and who wrote for me his memories of the life of a student at Blairs and at the Scots College at Valladolid, where both he and Fr Allan McDonald were trained for the priesthood; to the late Mr Ewen MacLennan, who kept the shop on Eriskay betwen 1890 and 1900, and to the late Miss Penelope Campbell, who was housekeeper to Fr Allan McDonald at the time of his death in 1905, and who was the 'grey-eyed girl' of Amy Murray's *Father Allan's Island*. I am also indebted to the Rev. Fr Angus McQueen, the present parish priest of Eriskay, and to his predecessors there, Canon John MacCormick and Fr Colin

[1] Dr Kenneth MacLeod wrote to me on 3rd October 1950. 'You mention Miss Goodrich Freer. I only met her once, and did not like her very much. She seemed too pretentious for my taste. I must admit, however, that in the course of a long conversation, she mentioned more than once that her work for the Psychical Research Society [presumably on the Second Sight Enquiry] would have been a complete failure without Fr Allan's cooperation.'

Mrs Campbell, who remembers Miss Freer giving a lecture on botany to the pupils of Heylipol school in Tiree, was one of the prize-winners in an essay competition organized by Miss Freer there in the winter of 1896–7. The results were given in a letter from Miss Freer, published in the *Oban Times* of 10th July 1897. The subject of the competition was ghost stories, a thing which shocked Mrs Campbell's parents, and which is certainly revealing as regards Miss Freer's methods.

MacPherson, and to Dr A. MacLean and John MacInnes, M.B.E., Daliburgh, for help with my enquiries in Eriskay and South Uist.

I am indebted to Sir John Best-Shaw, Bt., for an account of his recollection of the visit of Miss Freer to the house of his father, then the Rev. C. J. M. Shaw,[1] at Swanley in the summer of 1901, and of what his mother later told him about Miss Freer many years afterwards; and to the Hon. Mrs Stirling of Keir, who was a friend of Lady Margaret MacRae's, for her recollection of the visit of her brother-in-law, Lord Encombe, to Ballechin House during Miss Freer's ghost-hunt there in the spring of 1897,[2] and to the late Professor W. A. F. Balfour-Browne for an account of his memories of his visit to Ballechin with his uncle, Sir James Crichton-Browne, and James Callendar Ross for the weekend of 7–9th May 1897. He survived until 1967. I must also express my great gratitude to the present Marquess of Bute for very kindly allowing Mr Trevor Hall and myself to see copies of the third Marquess of Bute's papers relating to psychical research, and to quote from them freely here, and to Miss Catherine Armet for going to great trouble in finding these letters and copying them for us. Without this material, our book would have been altogether the poorer and less interesting. I am also obliged to Mrs E. G. Nicholson for very kindly letting me have photocopies of the only two surviving letters from the third Marquess of Bute in the papers of the late F. W. H. Myers, who at the time in question was secretary of the Society for Psychical Research. I am also much indebted to Mr P. J. W. Kilpatrick for putting at my disposal contemporary photographs taken in South Uist and Eriskay by his grandfather, Walter Blaikie.

I must also express my gratitude to the following persons who have at various times assisted me in my researches connected with this book: in America, Professor Joseph Baylen of Georgia State College, Professor Charles R. Sanders of Duke University, North Carolina, Dr Karl Kup of the New York Public Library, Mr A. P. O'Hara, Miss Gladys Chamberlain, Miss Dorothy Kurtz, and Miss Eleanor Bell; in Great Britain, besides the persons already

[1] The Rev. C. J. M. Shaw was the 'Mr Q' of *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House*, which was first published by Lord Bute and Miss Freer in London in 1899, see p. 176.

[2] Lord Encombe's name is not to be found in *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House*, even under disguise, but F. W. H. Myers suggested him as a suitable visitor in a letter written to Lord Bute on 8th January 1897, saying, 'I have hopes of Sir John Stirling Maxwell and Lord Encombe, probably known to you and at any rate unexceptionable!' Mrs Stirling tells me that Encombe was completely sceptical about the phenomena at Ballechin.

mentioned, to the Librarians of the London Library, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, the County Library of Dumfries, the London *Times*, the *Scotsman*, and the *Glasgow Herald*; to the Keepers of Printed Books at the Bodleian and the National Library of Scotland; to the Keepers of MSS. at Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities Library; to the Editors of the *Oban Times* and the Inverness *Courier*; to Mr Hugh Barron, secretary of the Gaelic Society of Inverness; to Major Calum Iain MacLeod, Antigonish, and to Miss E. M. Bryant, Mrs Ena Matheson, Mrs Margaret Lyons, Miss Sheila J. Lockett, and the late Miss S. R. Dowling.

I also have to express my gratitude to the various owners of Fr Allan McDonald's literary remains for permission to publish material from them. In respect of this material, one third of the royalties from this book are being given to Fr Allan McDonald's former parishes of Daliburgh and Eriskay.

Isle of Canna — *John L. Campbell*

The assistance I have received in the solution of specific problems has been gratefully acknowledged in the text. I wish especially to thank, however, Dr Eric J. Dingwall, Mr Frank Beckwith, Mr George H. Brook, and Mr Herbert E. Pratt for their continuous advice and help during the whole period of the research upon which my contribution to this book is based.

Thorner, Yorkshire — *Trevor H. Hall*
January, 1967

I

The S.P.R. Enquiry into Second Sight in the Scottish Highlands

1

FR ALLAN McDONALD AND THE ORAL TRADITION OF SOUTH UIST

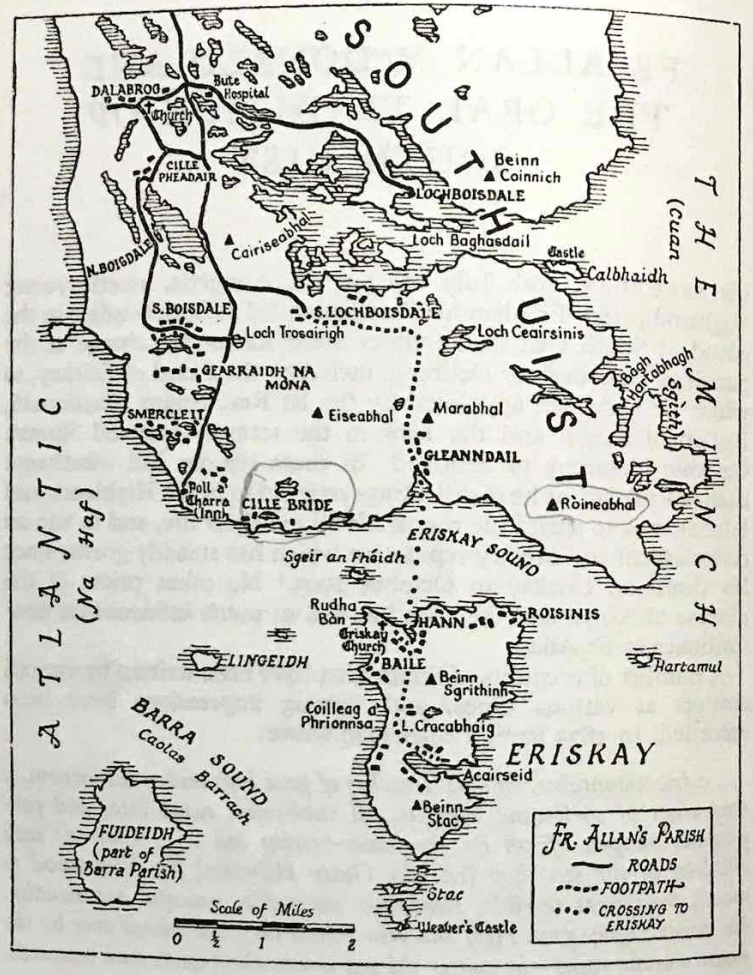
ON SATURDAY, 19th July 1884, a tall, energetic, ascetic young Highland priest, Fr Allan McDonald, landed at Lochboisdale in the island of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides to take charge of the parish of Daliburgh or Dalibrog, including the island of Eriskay, to which he had been appointed by the Rt Rev. Angus Macdonald, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles in the recently restored Roman Catholic hierarchy of Scotland. In these remote and windswept islands Fr Allan, as he is still always referred to in the Highlands and Islands, was to spend the rest of his all too short life, and to win an ecclesiastical and literary reputation which has steadily grown since his death on Eriskay in October 1905.[1] No other priest of the diocese of Argyll and the Isles has had so much influence on non-Catholics as Fr Allan.

A number of accounts of South Uist have been written by various authors at various times, and varying impressions have been recorded. In 1873 Robert Buchanan wrote:

. . . a few mountains, endless stretches of peat bogs and small lagoons, a long tract of shell-sand hillocks, all environed, eaten into, and perpetually shapen afresh by the never-resting sea . . . Like all such children of the sea they [i.e. *the Outer Hebrides*] *flit from mood to mood, sometimes terrible, sometimes miserable, peaceful occasionally, but never highly gay. Half the year round they are misted over by the moist oceanic rains—in winter the sea strews them anew with seaweeds,*

[1] An account of Fr Allan McDonald's writings, and a list of the authors who have mentioned him or have used material from his folklore collection, is given by the writer in his *Fr Allan McDonald of Eriskay: Priest, Poet, and Folklorist*, second edition, Edinburgh, 1956. Since that time Fr Allan McDonald's dictionary, *Gaelic Words from South Uist*, Dublin, 1958, and his Gaelic poems, with some translations, *Bàrdachd Mhgr Ailein*, Edinburgh, 1965, have been published, as well as the part of his diary that was written in Gaelic, which appeared in *Gairm*.

shells, and drift timber—and for a few days in the year they bask in a glassy sea and behold the midsummer sun.[1]



Frederic Rea, who was appointed headmaster of Garrynamonie school in Fr Allan McDonald's parish in 1890, described the scene from his house in the following words:

What a view! To the south the main road wound down to the sea less than two miles away, its dancing blue stretching to a number of smaller islands, and beyond to larger ones rising into mountains. My eye

[1] *The Hebrid Isles*, London, 1883, p. 193.

ranged round from these to the west, and there lay the Atlantic, its mighty swell surging in towards us from as far as the eyes could reach. The awe I felt at this beautiful scene is with me even now as I write . . . Here and there, dotted about, could be seen the thatched stone cottages of crofters who eked out a living from their crofts, or small farms, aided by their earnings in the fishing season.[1]

The Outer Hebrides, whose very existence appears to be sometimes resented in administrative circles in Edinburgh and London, have at times been both extravagantly sentimentalized and immoderately and viciously denigrated. They are not the kind of place it is easy to be indifferent about; they grow on people, often reversing an originally unduly unfavourable first impression of desolation and backwardness.

Fr Allan McDonald arrived in South Uist with a burning enthusiasm to instruct the young, reform the old, raise the devotional standards, and improve the material conditions of his 2,300 parishioners, of whom three-fifths spoke no other language but Gaelic, and like other perfectionists in similar circumstances his immediate impressions were not entirely good ones, but he benefited greatly from the guidance and advice of a good and wise Bishop, who was himself a member of an old Highland family, the Macdonalds of Glenaladale, in dealing with the difficulties which he found.

For various reasons the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles was (and still is) the poorest of all the restored Roman Catholic dioceses in Scotland. In the 1880s and 1890s it had but one wealthy benefactor, the third Marquess of Bute, an erudite convert of whom more will be heard in these pages; his main interest lay in the performance of the full sung services of the Church in the Cathedral at Oban, a temporary structure the construction of which was financed by the Marquess on condition that this was done.[2] A far more pressing need was the improvement of church buildings and priests' houses and the provision of Gaelic devotional literature in the outlying districts of the diocese. The Gaelic-speaking Catholics in the Highlands then had a prayer-book, *Iùl a' Chrìosdaidh*, of which a new edition was published in 1885, and a not too felicitous translation of the New Testament, published in 1875; but there was still a great need for a Gaelic missal, hymnal, and for a catechism in popular language, especially in the Catholic islands of the Outer Hebrides, Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay, and Barra.

[1] *A School in South Uist*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964, p. 12.
[2] See Rev. Roderick Macdonald, 'The "Tin Cathedral" at Oban, 1886–1934' *Innes Review*, vol. XV, pp. 47–55, 1964.

As a boy in Fort William, then a small town on the shore of Loch Linnhe, Fr Allan had been brought up with only a smattering of Gaelic; but like some others in this position, he had conceived a great love for, and interest in the language, which he studied in his spare time when a student at Blairs and later at the Scots College at Valladolid in Spain, where the Highland students kept a holograph Gaelic magazine, to which he contributed, apparently under different pseudonyms. He was able to improve his Gaelic during two years spent under Bishop Angus Macdonald at Oban; in Uist a knowledge of Gaelic was a prime necessity for him, and in Uist he was able to improve his knowledge of Gaelic further by sessions with some of the island's traditional storytellers and other tradition bearers, from whom he was soon noting down old hymns and prayers which he felt might be put to use in future devotional publications. Eventually Fr Allan McDonald became as much at home in the rich Gaelic dialect of South Uist as if he had been born there; the Gaelic part of his diary, and his best poems, are written in that dialect. In 1889 he published a small Gaelic hymnal, including the verse paraphrase of the Mass, which is still sung in Hebridean churches; in 1893 a greatly enlarged edition of this work was printed.[1] But unfortunately Bishop Angus Macdonald was transferred from Oban to Edinburgh in 1892 and his successor gave no encouragement to this side of Fr Allan McDonald's activities, and his capabilities in this direction were not further utilized; though he left in manuscript a Gaelic translation of the Compline service.

In any case, Fr Allan McDonald's ordinary parochial work inevitably would have brought him into contact with the great but sometimes ignorantly despised Gaelic oral tradition of South Uist, of which he was intelligent enough quickly to see the immense interest, and in the winter of 1887–8 he started to note down material relating to traditional local history and folklore, encouraged by Fr Alexander Campbell (1820–93), a Uist-born priest then living in retirement on the island.[2]

Communities where an oral tradition predominates are so much out of the experience of the modern Western world that it is extremely difficult for anyone without first-hand knowledge to imagine

[1] See J. L. Campbell, 'The Sources of the Gaelic Hymnal', *Innes Review*, vol. VII, pp. 101–11, 1956.

[2] The Catholicism of South Uist, which from lack of priests had reached a low ebb by the first quarter of the seventeenth century, was rekindled by the devoted Irish Franciscan missionaries, Frs Cornelius Ward and Patrick Hegarty. See Cathaldus Giblin O.F.M., *The Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland, 1619–1646*, Dublin, 1964. There are some interesting references to second sight in the reports.

how a language can be cultivated without being written to any extent, or what an oral literature is like, or how it is propagated and added to from generation to generation. The consciousness of the Gaelic mind may be described as possessing historical continuity and religious sense; it may be said to exist in a vertical plane. The consciousness of the modern Western world, on the other hand, may be said to exist in a horizontal plane, possessing breadth and extent, dominated by scientific materialism and a concern with purely contemporary happenings. There is a profound difference between the two mental attitudes, which represent the different spirits of different ages, and are very much in conflict.[1]

If I may quote from what I have already written on this subject:

It is always extraordinarily difficult to convey the feeling and atmosphere of a community where oral tradition and the religious sense are still very much alive to people who have only known the atmosphere of the modern ephemeral, rapidly changing world of industrial civilization. On the one hand there is a community of independent personalities whose memories of men and events are often amazingly long (in the Gaelic-speaking Outer Hebrides they go back to Viking times a thousand years ago), and where there is an ever-present sense of the reality and existence of the other world of spiritual and psychic experience; on the other hand there is a standardized world where people live in a mental jumble of newspaper headlines and B.B.C. news bulletins, forgetting yesterday's as they read or hear today's, worrying themselves constantly about far-away events which they cannot possibly control, where memories are so short that men often do not know the names of their grandparents, and where the only real world seems to be the everyday material one.[2]

It must be understood that the recital of an oral tradition, like the Gaelic tradition of South Uist, is not, except on comparatively rare occasions, a matter of public performance; it is something much more informal, belonging to the fireside, and integrated into the people's way of life. Many of the traditional songs were sung to accompany various forms of labour, such as rocking the cradle, milking the cows, waulking the home-made cloth, or rowing the boats; many of the stories related to happenings in Uist and the Highlands during the past 250 years; others belonged to the great stock of international folk-tales and anecdotes. Ballads told of the deeds of the Fingalians (the heroic company of Fionn Mac Cumhail) and of the

[1] See C. G. Jung, *Basic Postulates of Analytical Psychology*, Collected Works, vol. VIII, London, 1960, pp. 338–57.

[2] Introduction to *Tales of Barra Told by the Coddy*, Edinburgh, 1959, pp. 24–5.

Norsemen. Allusions and expressions from all these, with many pithy sayings and proverbs, constantly coloured the speech of the people. Brightly coloured, concrete and epigrammatic, Gaelic speech and Gaelic oral tradition are the reverse of the gloomy mysticism of the Celtic Twilight, practitioners of which were already beginning to find their way to South Uist and Eriskay before Fr Allan McDonald's death in October 1905; they could have become a burden had he lived much longer, for his personality attracted them, whereas he had no use for their ideas.

The background to the Gaelic oral tradition in South Uist had been the old Catholic and Jacobite family of proprietors, the MacDonalds of Clanranald, who owned the island until 1838. Connected with the ancient Lords of the Isles, they had fought for the royalist cause under Montrose, and for the Stewarts in 1715 and 1745, and had sheltered and encouraged the Irish Franciscan and Vincentian missionaries to the Hebrides in the seventeenth century. Moreover, they had been the patrons of the MacVurichs of Stadhlaigearraidh, the famous family of hereditary bards that kept up the practice of classical Gaelic court poetry well into the eighteenth century, longer than any other such family in Ireland or Scotland. They have been described as 'probably the longest-lived literary dynasty in Europe';[1] in 1781 J. F. Campbell of Islay, the famous folk-tale collector, was told by an old man in Uist that the MacVurichs had seven cart-loads of Gaelic MSS.[2]

It is difficult to make the extent of the Gaelic oral tradition of an island like South Uist credible to persons who have had no contact with such a thing. It is not a question of a few people knowing a few songs or stories by heart and reciting them occasionally at some party or concert: it is a case of numbers of people knowing forty or fifty traditional songs, or scores of stories, and not the same songs or stories, but often different ones, so that the total runs into thousands of different songs and many hundreds of different stories, not counting as different various versions of the same song or story. As the great Swedish folklorist C. W. von Sydow wrote:

Among the richest and most outstanding folk-traditions in Europe is that of the Gaels in Ireland and Scotland; and it is one of the most important objects of European folk-tale research to pay as much attention to it as possible. Its rich vitality is to be attributed partly to the

[1] Professor Derick Thomson, 'The MacMhuirich Bardic Family', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol. XLIII, pp. 276–304.

[2] J. F. Campbell MSS., vol. XVIII, p. 131. I owe this information to Dr Alan Bruford.

fact that the people have had their present dwelling-places so long, partly that there used to be professional narrators, there being nothing analogous to them in Teutonic territory.[1]

This being the case, as one might expect, Scotland being the kind of country that it was, nothing whatever was done academically or officially in the way of paying any attention to this rich folk-tradition until under the provocation of a visit by members of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1947, the School of Scottish Studies was founded at Edinburgh University in 1951. Before that date the Gaelic oral tradition of Scotland had been condemned at various times by Scottish Calvinists, who saw it as distracting the people from the study of the Word of God; by Lowlanders and Englishmen, who saw it as encouraging the martial clan spirit of the Highlanders; by Whigs, who saw it as an aspect of Jacobitism; and by utilitarians of all three types, who saw it as something that tended to perpetuate the existence of the Gaelic language and the attachment of the Highlanders to their country, thus making them less suitable material for industrialization and emigration. More recently, a strong interest in it was considered to be a sign of narrow Scottish nationalism or even Sinn Féinism. Consequently it was left to amateurs like J. F. Campbell of Islay, Alexander Carmichael, and Fr Allan McDonald and his other friends to attempt to preserve what they could of this magnificent tradition in their own time and at their own expense.

[1] *Selected Papers on Folklore*, Copenhagen, 1948, p. 59. The reader is also referred to the paper on 'The Gaelic Oral Tradition', by Professor Derick Thomson, in *Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society*, vol. I, Edinburgh, 1954.

2

THE HIGHLAND FOLKLORISTS

ALTHOUGH THE outside world had taken some interest in Scottish Highland folklore, in its aspects of superstition, second sight, and local tradition, ever since the last quarter of the seventeenth century,[1] an interest that had been heightened by the controversy over the alleged translations by James MacPherson of the poems of Ossian in the second half of the eighteenth,[2] no systematic attempt to collect the oral Gaelic literature of the Highlands was made until the late J. F. Campbell of Islay organized the collection of folk-tales with the help of collaborators in various parts of the Highlands in the 1850s; part of this great collection was published under the title of *West Highland Tales* in 1860, in four volumes, and two more volumes have been published from Campbell's MSS. in the present century, but much more remains unpublished. J. F. Campbell, however, died in 1883, before Fr Allan McDonald went to South Uist. Campbell's contemporary, who became a personal friend of Fr Allan's, was Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), by profession an exciseman; his great interest was the old hymns and incantations of the Hebrides, part of his collection of which, after various vicissitudes in the 1890s, were published by T. & A. Constable through the good offices of Walter Blaikie, another friend of Fr Allan's, in 1900 (two volumes: three more have appeared since Carmichael's death). Carmichael was the doyen of the little coterie of folklorists to which Fr Allan belonged; his interests in Highland traditions extended far beyond the material he published (which earned him a LL.D. from Edinburgh University and a Civil List Pension), and he left a very large collection in MS., both of his own and of his correspondents. This, with J. F. Campbell's collection, could have been the basis of

[1] For the titles of some publications connected with these aspects of Highland folklore see the chapter here on second sight.

[2] James MacPherson's first publication was *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands*. It appeared in 1760. The famous literary controversy that followed had one fortunate effect: it led to a systematic search for old Gaelic MSS. in the Highlands and to the preservation of what by then remained of them. See Professor Derick Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of MacPherson's Ossian*, Edinburgh, 1952.

a national Scottish Gaelic folklore archive. Other members of this group were William MacKenzie, secretary of the Crofters' Commission, who read an important paper on 'Gaelic Incantations and Charms in the Hebrides' to the Gaelic Society of Inverness on 23rd March 1892 (published in Volume XVIII of its *Transactions*, pp. 97–182: some of the material in it provided by Fr Allan McDonald); the Rev. Dr George Henderson (1865–1912), later to be Lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University, who was indebted to Fr Allan for material used in several of his publications, such as *Leabhar nan Gleann* (1898), *The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland* (1910), and *Survivals in Belief among the Celts* (1911); and Alexander Carmichael's daughter Ella, who became the co-editor of the *Celtic Review*, published from 1904–16, and, as is well known, was the second wife of the late Professor W. J. Watson, and mother of the late Professor James Carmichael Watson, who was killed in action in 1942.

Two other writers who were indebted to Fr Allan McDonald may be mentioned here: these were Frederic Breton, who used some of Fr Allan's folklore to provide local colour for his *Heroine in Homespun*, a rather absurd two-volume novel of which the scene was South Uist, in 1893; in this Fr Allan is portrayed as 'Father MacCrimmon'; and Amy Murray, a gifted American folk-musician who visited Eriskay in September 1905, made a collection of folk-tunes there with his help, and later wrote a book about him called *Father Allan's Island*. Of a third person, Miss Ada Goodrich Freer, who first visited South Uist in 1895, won Fr Allan's confidence and personal regard to the extent that much of his collection was put at her disposal to her great personal advantage, nothing more will be said here, as much of the rest of this book is devoted to her.

Of the circle described, Fr Allan McDonald's greatest personal friend was his contemporary, George Henderson. A shy, likeable, unpretentious man, Henderson, who was a Fraser on his mother's side, was the last professional Celtic scholar in Scotland to study the Gaelic oral tradition in the field for many years. He spent some time in South Uist in the late autumn and early winter of 1892, not long after Fr Allan McDonald had had a breakdown in health, the serious effects of which were probably not immediately apparent. The two men took to each other immediately and remained fast friends for the rest of Fr Allan McDonald's life. Two letters, hitherto unpublished, which Henderson wrote to Alexander Carmichael about this visit to Uist and what he found there, are of great interest.

The Presbytery,
Dalibrog, S. Uist.
Wednesday, 11 p.m.

My dear Carmichael,

It is not possible for me to say when I should come away from here. Though I should stay months here busy as a House of Commons' Clerk I should find my hands fully occupied. Father Macdonald I like exceedingly; we are glad good friends and sit and jaunt about as suits us. I could not desire a more congenial companion; and so far as Celtic matters are concerned his taste is high and refined, while his knowledge is wide and accurate. I like the mind and the man and everybody who knows him are [sic] *bound to do the same.*

All the people here are of a literary cast; and roughly speaking, perhaps around Dalibrog itself one could summon as much talent as one would find at the Oban Mòd.[1] *I take an interest in contemporary literature and have already about a score of meritorious pieces that illustrate the life here as well as Gaelic idiom and phonetic variety. I have besides 3 long sgialachds [folk-tales]; while a long one is ready for tomorrow night and a Feinn-Duan*[2] *for Saturday—entirely new. I wish I could stay here till spring and then I would have something to speak of. We are going to Eriska on Monday; and you can easily imagine how I try to do. I am anxious my efforts in this direction may not be entirely frustrated as almost all I know of the islanders redounds to their credit. Fancy persons such as these forced to starvation point by donkeys and brutes of hireling superiors—inferior in all save sham and uppishness to the scoundrels who have no more sympathy than the stones, if one allows their actions to speak for them!*

The journey across was quiet and pleasant. Oban has some characters knocking about in it now who are quite disreputable—a mixty-maxty of mischief, slyness and rascality; but come to Uist and you see men and women who are such in more than in name, whose voices have a ring of excellence in them, and whatever faults they may have these can largely be attributed to circumstances over which they have no control.

The big farms need to be broken up and nobody needs speak of emigration of any sort till what land we have is divided among the people. One demands now-a-days of land-lords what special mark they have brought with them on their bodies or their minds to indicate to demonstration an indubitable claim to starve others and despise the image of the one Former whose shape they profess to bear?

But the chief duty is to put matter on record to point to as the marks

[1] The annual musical and literary festival of the Highland Association, An Comunn Gaidhealach.

[2] *i.e.* a Fingalian ballad.

of genuine civilisation and so uphold the claim of the downtrodden and the wretched to draw attention to a race so long suffering and hit blows & hand on a sword which will shed no blood 'ach nach fag riamh fuigheall beuma'[1]*—like Fionn's.*

But I must go to bed rejoicing in the knowledge I live among a literary people—and hope to waken with Fionn and all the other excellent Xtns from that date till now. . . .

Geo Henderson

Father Campbell does not sleep well on account of asthma; Fr Allan is well.

The visit lasted until Christmas 1892. On 26th December Henderson wrote to Carmichael from Oban, the mainland port at which he had landed on his return from Uist, as follows:

I am here at the Commercial Hotel, ready to start by [*the*] Chevalier[2] *tomorrow for Inverness: and I look to be back to the Capital*[3] *a week after New Year's Day. It would be to my taste to have stayed longer in the Isles; the more so as I have not seen so many places and persons as I should have wished. The finest things in Uist, I convince myself I have to see still; but being desirous to pass the New Year Season with familiar faces and dearest friends I came here today; all my time in S. Uist was occupied and I shall be glad if the results may in a small measure anticipate your expectations. The details I cannot enter on, but here are the lists.*

Henderson goes on to give the names of fifteen long folk-tales and nine long ballads which he had taken down. The stories included versions of such famous tales as *Fear na Habaid* ('The Man of the Habit')[4] and *Sgialachd a' Chait Chaothaich* ('The Tale of the Wild Cat'). Of the nine ballads, eight were Ossianic and one, *Am Bròn Binn* ('The Sweet Sorrow'), Arthurian.[5] In three cases two versions of the same ballad were collected, and in two others the prose introduction.[6]

[1] 'Which leaves no remnant of a blow', *i.e.* cuts right through anything it strikes, like Fionn's famous sword called 'Mac a' Luin'. See *Stories from South Uist*, London, 1961, p. 16.

[2] The steamer then sailing between Oban and Inverness by the Caledonian Canal.

[3] *i.e.* Edinburgh.

[4] A version of this story was recited by the late Duncan MacDonald, Peninerine, South Uist, at the international folklore conference held at Stornoway in October 1953.

[5] See *Miscellany presented to Kuno Meyer*, Halle, 1912, p. 18.

[6] See Appendix on p. 324 for a list of titles. Fortunately, this collection of stories and ballads has been preserved, though it has never been published.

Henderson continued:

Fr Allan is to do the Feinn Saga for me;[1] *he will transcribe the Gaelic version of 'The Raising of the Feinne' so that the incidents may be kept in sequence in order that the unity of treatment may throw light on the origin of the Feinn Mythos. I could get at least ten of this class yet. There is a first class reciter in Eriska*[y]*, from whom no one ever took down a word,*[2] *and Iain Taillear*[3] *at Dalibrog from whom nobody ever took down a word—a man very rich in incident and variety; Smith's sons*[4] *come in after these. I should have included* Clanna Lir ['*The Children of Lear*']*—the offset to Deirdre*[5] *or Clann Uisneach—the correspondent to the second tragic story of Ireland. Though only a fragment I am glad to have saved it to show its existence among us.*

Between MSS. given me by Fr Allan of songs by Dr Macdonnell who was at Plockton, and various Catholic pieces of merit, I have a number of songs by living poets, by [*the*] *late Fr Allan MacLean, who died in Nova Scotia, of Alastair Mór, Lochaber, of an* Oran Lua-[dha]*idh, in touching stanzas which are said to have been added by Flora Macdonald,*[6]*—all in all some 80 songs, besides others I had formerly, etc., etc.*

There is material to be got still which may serve to illustrate the life of language (*phonetics*)*; manners; customs; art; myth and legend; fable; history—indeed with a little more time, with encouragement from minds like your own I would not say to anyone to lose heart, but Work and let the Labour speak.*[7]

It would be a grand thing to form a work on the scale of the West Highland Tales,[8] *say* Scottish Celtic Romances, *with notes and comparative grammar of Romance;*[1] *taking account of the development of the Feinn Saga; with some Ròlaisdean* ['*Yarns*'] *and Fables; second sight and the general result of the Celtic spirit poring on the mysteries of God. . . .*

[1] See *Celtic Review*, vol. II, pp. 263, 351, and vol. III, p. 56, and J. L. Campbell, *Stories from South Uist*, pp. 209–14.

[2] Probably Alexander Johnston, source of the 'Feinn Saga' or rather, of this version of it, is meant.

[3] Iain mac an Tàilleir (John MacKinnon). Fr Allan McDonald later took down stories from him.

[4] Patrick Smith, South Boisdale, who had been a source for Carmichael. One of Henderson's sources was his son John.

[5] Carmichael published a version of the Deirdre story, from Barra, in 1905.

[6] Probably the waulking song beginning *Tha Seathan a nochd 'na mharbhan* ('Sean is tonight a corpse'), which one of Fr Allan McDonald's informants ascribed to Flora MacDonald: but the song has every appearance of being much older, see p. 232.

[7] There still is such material to be got in Uist, but it can hardly be said that adequate steps are being taken to collect it.

[8] The four-volume collection of Highland folk-tales made by the late J. F. Campbell of Islay, published at Edinburgh in 1860–2.

It is a pity that Henderson was never again able to make a protracted visit to South Uist. The material he collected there in 1892 remains largely unpublished. Henderson was later to take the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Vienna, and B.Litt. at Oxford, but whether Germanic erudition benefited his approach to Scottish Gaelic studies is a moot question. He was friendly with the Carmichaels, who hoped that he would marry Ella; but this hope was to be disappointed.

As for Fr Allan McDonald, the ultimate result of his breakdown in health in 1892 was that his Bishop separated Eriskay from Daliburgh and transferred him there in January or February 1894.[2] On Eriskay he had less parochial work to do and more time to write; but he was very isolated, and his health remained poor for the rest of his life. But he came to love the rocky island, and his most famous poem, often called *Eilean na h-Òige*, 'The Isle of Youth', was written in praise of it, and as a description of the life there.[3] When he went to Eriskay in 1894, he had filled two quarto notebooks with folklore of all kinds, and a third with traditional hymns and translations of hymns; by the time of his death in 1905 he had added to this four further quarto notebooks of folklore, another of waulking songs, another containing a collection of rare words and phrases from local Gaelic songs, stories, and colloquial speech,[4] and finally, another containing a number of second sight stories, and, among other things, a collection of flower names, of the place-names of the island of Mingulay, and some of his best poems. The whole of this collection disappeared from view within a short time after his death, and the whereabouts of any remained unknown until shortly before the last war, when the writer discovered the last named notebook on the shelves of a friend's library. Later, after the war, other volumes were traced with the help of other friends, but

[1] Presumably what Henderson means by this is a Motif-Index, such as was prepared for folk-tales generally by Aarne and Stith Thompson later.

[2] The date is often given as 1893, presumably on the authority of his obituary in the *Catholic Directory* of 1906, but the parochial register of Daliburgh proves the date was early in 1894. A clock presented to him by his Daliburgh parishioners to mark the occasion still exists.

[3] A full translation of this poem can be seen in *Bàrdachd Mhgr Ailein*, Edinburgh, 1965, pp. 122–30.

[4] See p. xi.

Notebooks III and IV remain missing, though some of the contents are known.

It is with the stories about second sight in the notebook last described, which Fr Allan titled 'Strange Things', and with similar stories in his first two notebooks, that we have to deal here: for the first time the tale of how 'Strange Things' came to be collected will be told, and for the first time the stories themselves in it will be printed.

3

SECOND SIGHT IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

'THE MOST known and the most general superstition of the Gaels,' wrote the Swiss scientist Necker de Saussure,[1] 'is that which they call *Taishitaraugh* [*Taibhseadaireachd*] and the English, *Second Sight*. It is the faculty of discerning objects invisible to other persons. Those who were gifted with it were called Seers, and in Gaelic *Taishatrim* [*Taibhseadairean*].' De Saussure, who was sceptical about the faculty himself, goes on to quote Martin Martin's description of the seers and their visions in his book on the Western Islands of Scotland, which was first published in 1703. De Saussure also mentions, as did Thomas Pennant before him, what is one of the most famous cases of second sight—Lord President Forbes foretelling at the time of the battle of Prestonpans that the Jacobite rising of 1745 would end at Culloden.[2]

The great Oxford Celtic scholar, Edward Lhuyd, who visited Argyllshire in the autumn of 1699, describes some of the usual prognostications as follows:

Men with the second sight see a man with a light like the light of the glow-worm, or with fish [*scales*] *over his hair and his clothes, if he is to be drowned; bloody, if he is to be wounded; in his shroud if he is to die in his bed; with his sweetheart on his right hand if he is to marry* [*her*], *but on his left hand if he is not to win his sweetheart.*

In Mishnish in Mull there was a man who was said to see a man carrying a creel-ful of cheese from his house, although he was eight

[1] L. A. Necker de Saussure, *A Voyage to the Hebrides*, London, 1822, pp. 92–3. The original French reads 'La plus connue et la plus générale des superstitions des Gaëls est celle qu'ils nomment *Taishitaraugh*, et les Anglais *Second Sight*, seconde vue. C'est la faculté de discerner les objets invisibles. Ceux qui en étoient doués s'appelloient *Seers* en Gaëlic *Taishatrin* qui signifie *voyants*.' (*Voyage en Écosse et aux Iles Hébrides*, vol. III, Geneva, 1821, p. 240.)

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 245; and Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, vol. I, fifth edition, London, 1790, p. 200.

miles from home; and since he recognised him, he went back [*and*] *caught hold of him.*[1]

Martin Martin himself defined second sight as follows:

> *The* Second-Sight *is a singular Faculty of Seeing an otherwise invisible Object, without any previous Means us'd by the Person that sees it for that end; the Vision makes such a lively impression upon the Seers, that they neither see nor think of any thing else, except the Vision, as long as it continues: and then they appear pensive or jovial, according to the Object which was represented to them.*[2]

He goes on to discuss the faculty, giving about thirty cases, mostly from the Isle of Skye, and an account of the significance of the signs perceived by the seers, such as was given by Lhuyd. As the cases described by Martin are very similar to those recorded by Fr Allan McDonald and printed here, there is no need to dwell on them. Martin (who otherwise frequently reprobated Hebridean 'superstitions', particularly if they offended his religious convictions) had a complete belief in second sight, and goes on to answer the objections of sceptics to the existence of such a faculty. These he gives as three. First, that the seers are 'visionary and melancholy People' (or, as we would say, persons liable to hallucinations). This Martin denies, saying that 'it is observ'd among 'em, that a Man drunk never sees the Second Sight; and he that is a Visionary, would discover himself in other things as well as in that; and such as see it, are not judged to be Visionaries by any of their Friends or Acquaintance'.

The second objection was, 'There is none among the Learned able to oblige the World with a satisfying account of those Visions, therefore it is not to be believed.' To this Martin replied tartly that 'If every thing for which the Learned are not able to give a satisfying account be condemn'd as impossible, we may find many other things generally believed, that must be rejected as false by this Rule,'[3] words which remind one of the way in which Jung wrote of the 'shallow positivism' with which Freud rejected the possibility of psychic phenomena.[4]

[1] J. L. Campbell and Derick Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands*, Oxford, 1963, pp. 54–5. The passage in question was translated from the Welsh by Professor Derick Thomson. Lhuyd got this information from the Rev. John Beaton, last learned member of the famous family that had been hereditary physicians in the Isles for many generations.

[2] Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, second edition, London, 1716, p. 300.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 308.

[4] C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 152.

The third objection Martin recorded was that 'The Seers are Imposters, and the people who believe them are credulous, and easily imposed upon.' To this he replied that 'The Seers are generally illiterate, and well meaning People, and altogether devoid of design, nor could I ever learn that any of them made the least gain by it, neither is it reputable among 'em to have that Faculty: because the People of the Isles are not so credulous as to believe implicitly, before the thing foretold is accomplished; but when it actually comes to pass afterwards, it is not in their power to deny it, without offering violence to their Senses and Reason.'[1] Martin went on to point out that the faculty was not confined to one corner of the Hebrides, nor even to the isles themselves, but was also known in other places, such as Wales, the Isle of Man, and Holland.

In fact, a great deal of interest has been taken in Highland second sight, and many cases have been described, ever since the second half of the seventeenth century, when men of learning, such as Edward Lhuyd, John Aubrey, Robert Wodrow, and Robert Boyle, began to perceive that the Gaelic-speaking Highlands of Scotland were a remarkably interesting repository of archaic customs and beliefs, and began to gather information about them. The information given to them about second sight included the following points: even by 1700 it was said that it was not so common as it used to be; it was 'a trouble to most of them who are subject to it, and they would be rid of it [at] any rate if they could';[2] it was not a gift acquired in consequence of any pact with the Evil One, being of its nature spontaneous (this was a matter of some importance in the seventeenth century, when trials for witchcraft still occurred in Scotland: had it been held that the seers owed their powers to any such pacts, they could have been in serious trouble). Whether the gift of second sight was hereditary or not is something on which the authorities were not in agreement.[3]

[1] *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, p. 309.

[2] Lord Tarbat, letter to the Hon. Robert Boyle, p. 92. Printed as an Appendix to Andrew Lang's edition of Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth*, Stirling, 1933, third edition. The letter is titled 'A Succint Accompt of the Predictions made by Seers whereof himself was Ear and Eye-witness'.

[3] The literature on Highland second sight is extensive. Besides the works already referred to here, there may be mentioned: John Aubrey's *Miscellanies*, London, 1721; 'Theophilus Insulanus', 'Treatises on the Second Sight' (*Miscellanea Scotica*, Glasgow, 1819, vol. III); J. G. Campbell, *Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*, Glasgow, 1900 (mostly material from the island of Tiree); *Witchcraft and Second Sight*, Glasgow, 1902; Rev. John Frazer, 'Deuteroscopia, or a Brief Discourse, concerning the Second Sight' (first printed in 1820 in *A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft and the Second Sight*; Mrs Grant, *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland*, London,

Very little had been added to the debate between Martin Martin and the sceptics of over two hundred and fifty years ago, although many more alleged cases of second sight have been recorded since his time. It was therefore to be expected that sooner or later the phenomenon of Highland second sight and the seers themselves would receive attention from the investigators of supposedly paranormal phenomena in which interest had been steadily increasing in England in the second half of the nineteenth century; and so it came to pass.

1811. In fact, the phenomenon is mentioned in most of the books that have been written about the Scottish Highlands. The Irish Franciscan missionaries to the Hebrides mention several instances of it in their reports to Rome from the Isles between 1624 and 1640.

4

THE S.P.R.'s ENQUIRY INTO SECOND SIGHT IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

ON THE 18th of August 1894 the following report appeared in the columns of the *Oban Times*, the leading local paper of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland:

'SECOND SIGHT' IN THE HIGHLANDS

We understand that several members of the Society for Psychical Research are at present on a tour of the West Highlands and Islands collecting information from the natives in regard to that peculiar faculty said to be possessed by many people, especially in the Highlands, and popularly known as 'second sight', as well as kindred subjects. While in Oban, two of the lady members interviewed a number of people reputed to have some experience in the matter, and were particularly interested in the details of the famous 'Evil Eye' case, which came before Sheriff Substitute MacLachlan about twelve months ago—a full report of which duly appeared in the Oban Times. *Among the party was the lady editor of* Borderland *and the Rev. Mr Dewar, North Bute, Secretary for the Society in Scotland. It is reported that the tour has been inaugurated at the instance of the Marquis of Bute, who is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Society.*

We shall hear a great deal more about the apparently self-styled 'lady editor of *Borderland*', a person whose name was Ada Goodrich Freer and who in fact was only assistant editor to W. T. Stead on this occult quarterly, which was published from 1893 to 1897.[1] But first of all it is necessary to explain what the Society for Psychical Research was, and how its members came to be involved in seeking for instances of 'second sight' in the Scottish Highlands.

The Society for Psychical Research had been founded by a number of persons, mostly Cambridge intellectuals, in 1882, 'for the purpose of making an organized and systematic attempt to

[1] Not from 1896 to 1899, as was later incorrectly stated in Miss Freer's *Who's Who* entries.

of Carmina Gadelica *borrowed nothing from me. I did put a book of notes at his disposal,*[1] *as he courteously mentions in the introduction to his great work, but, as he tells us in the same paragraph, he was unable to make use of these notes, having so much material of his own. Mr Carmichael has done more for the collection of Island folklore than any living man.*

Allan McDonald

Eriskay, South Uist, 7th January 1903

This letter was printed in *Folklore* of March 1903, Volume XIV, p. 87, under the heading 'Folklore from the Hebrides: A Disclaimer'. It marked the formal and final ending of a friendship that had lasted for more than six years, greatly to Miss Freer's advantage.

[1] This was Fr Allan McDonald's MS. collection of hymns. Carmichael did not use any of Fr Allan's material in his first two volumes, published in 1900; but other volumes published after Carmichael's death do contain some of Fr Allan's material.

IV

Strange Things'

3

FR ALLAN McDONALD'S OWN EXPERIENCES

IT IS generally believed in the Isles that Fr Allan McDonald himself had second sight, or rather that he developed it. Mention of this is made by Amy Murray in her book *Father Allan's Island*,[1] the fruit of a folk-song collecting expedition to Eriskay in September 1905, the month before Fr Allan died. This book contains more personal information about Fr Allan McDonald than any other written at that time.

Miss Murray says:

Fr Allan himself had seen but once, he said, and that nothing more than the corpse-candle (a sight nowise out-of-the-way), and in another island. Looking down from a hill-side by night, he saw it move across the plain, then down a glen, to a house where he knew a man was dying: walking homewards, met a messenger to say, The man was dead.

This story suggests Fr Allan's experience in August 1888, which he wrote down at or near the time,[2] but there the light was seen on the shore and the person whose death it was felt to have presaged was a woman.

Amy Murray continues:

But at Dalibrog, on a night before one of his young men was drowned, he lay awake a long time, hearing outside a low murmuring as of a multitude. Father Chisholm, a priest (and seer as well[3]) from another parish, was in another bed in the same room and asleep, or so Father Allen thought. But presently he spoke out, saying, 'Do you hear anything?'

'It might be the wind.'

'You know it is not *the wind,' rejoined the other.*

They got up and looked out at the window, which gave on the gravelled doorland of the chapel, but saw nothing.

[1] Published in New York in 1920. The quotation here is from pp. 200–1.
[2] The story is No. 13 of the Early Collection (I 140).
[3] See 'Strange Things', Nos. 49–51. Fr, later Canon, Chisholm was then parish priest of Castlebay, Barra.

Next day Father Allan was in the same room while they were carrying the drowned man into the chapel; and when he heard them underneath the window, speaking low amongst themselves, he knew that sound for what he heard the night before.

It is possible that this incident is the subject of one of Fr Allan McDonald's Gaelic poems, *Bha ceothragach mìn am muigh*, 'There was a fine mist outside'.[1] Translated this reads:

There was a fine mist outside, and the sighing of the wind could not be heard; the light of the day was obscured, and I could not perceive human voices. Despondency possessed my soul, I raised my head from the pillow; my breath came seldom and my heart was beating strongly. There is a sound in my ear and in my head that fills my heart with dread, a sound like the footsteps of thousands marching in the fresh snow, going to a struggle from which they will not return.

But this may have been a premonition of the First World War. Its presence in one of Fr Allan McDonald's later notebooks argues against its having been made while he was at Dalibrog, unless he entered it long afterwards.

Fr Allan McDonald himself left a diary in which one or two incidents of this sort were recorded. The first is from the entry for 6th February 1898:

At 10.45 to 50 p.m. when saying my Office [I] heard a loud (feminine?) call just as if in front of my house. It was clear and bright at the time, nearly as bright as day with the moon, and calm at the moment. I looked out and saw nobody. One of the servants heard it also from her bedroom as if it was in front of the house, and said it sounded like Trothadaibh! *or* Trothad mar seo! [2] *She declares that it must be a* manadh *or forewarning or presage. We shall see.*

This reminds me of an occurrence that took place on the Sunday evening previous to Fr Rigg's death on 15th August 1897.[3] I was in the enclosure north west of my house in Eriskay. The evening was delightfully warm with hardly any wind. I heard what I took to be the prolonged hurrah! of say a hundred children out in the open air. It seemed to be at [a] distance from me in some part of Uist across the Sound. I heard the same sound about six times in succession with little intervals between as much as would allow one or two remarks to be made to provoke the children to another hurrah. I looked across the Sound to Uist especially to the east of Glendale, but saw nobody. I thought it must be the children of Garrynamonie school out on picnic somewhere in honour

[1] *Bàrdachd Mhgr Ailein*, p. 94.
[2] *i.e.*, Come here!
[3] The 15th August 1897 was a Friday.

of the Queen's Jubilee. I called the servant out, and she heard it four or five times. That was after the six times or so I heard it alone first. I could make nothing of it but that we thought it the sound of many voices.

Mrs Robertson [the] late teacher here who was in Pollachar was returning to Eriskay that evening, and I could find out from her all about the Uist Jubilee picnic, for so I had explained the phenomenon to myself. Two hours or more after [wards] I met a man who told me that Fr Rigg had caught the infection[1] *and was in bed. Mrs Robertson came later and confirmed the news. I asked her about the picnic. She said there was no such thing at all. The very next Saturday was the day of Fr Rigg's burial. I don't know why I connect the two things. The cry did not convey to my mind anything melancholy, and sounded so far off as to have no more expression than the ringing cheers of children heard at a great distance away from them.*

On 13th March 1898 Fr Allan McDonald wrote in Gaelic, which I have translated, that:

About midnight I was going to sleep. As I often do, I looked out of my bedroom window to see whether everyone else had gone to bed. There was not a light to be seen in any house. Around the church[2] *as far as I could see—but I could not see the church itself though it was not very dark around it—I'd say it was just about as high as the window in the near end of the church, I saw a little red light, no bigger than the light of a candle with a red flame, remain for about three minutes in the same place. It would then go out for about a minute, at least it went out of my sight. I saw it again there.*

I watched it carefully, and I could not say whether it went to the west or to the south west from the spot where I saw it first. The night was not so dark then anyway that anyone would need a torch,[3] *and I can hardly believe that anyone who belonged to the island would have taken a torch with him last night. Hitherto the sky had been clear with stars. At the moment the sky began to get cloudy. The light was not unlike the little light that comes from an ember fallen from a peat torch. I called to the servants, who had gone to sleep, to get up to see it, but they did not take the trouble. 'It's only a* manadh *(forewarning),' said my housekeeper. 'It's a long time since people first saw that light at the church.'*

'Perhaps it's a will-o'-the-wisp?'

[1] Probably typhus, caught when administering to the stricken occupant of a house which no one else dared to enter.

[2] The building formerly used as a church on Eriskay, some distance from Fr Allan's house.

[3] Made in those days by two burning peats held together on a stick.

'Indeed no, it was a forewarning of some sort.'

After I had put out my light and gone to bed, I noticed the match-box on my mantlepiece, which was of a bright ——[1] *colour, which makes it slightly luminous in the dark, I noticed that it was a good deal more bright than I ever remembered its being before. The light at the church was red. I wouldn't swear to it but that the light around the church was a little higher and a little further to the south than the church. Since I couldn't see the church, I can't be sure.*

Some interesting material connected with another of Fr Allan's experiences, which is still talked about and which has undergone some embroidery, were communicated to me by the late Rev. Dr Kenneth MacLeod. I give first an account of this matter which Dr MacLeod says was 'written by some lady or other whom Mrs Kennedy-Fraser knew or at any rate had met. It was meant either for a magazine or a lecture.' (It may be said right away that the hand in which the account is written is not that of Miss Goodrich Freer.) 'You will notice that I have stroked out the reference to myself, as the only thing I could corroborate was the general impression that Father Allan had the gift of second sight. Personally I believe he had, though he was silent about it himself. He often told me stories about other people who had the gift, but never any about himself.'

Acting on Dr Kenneth MacLeod's advice, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser sent the account to the Rev. Fr John Gray, of St Peter's Church, Edinburgh (1866–1934), the person who was involved in the story, for confirmation of its details. His comments on its inaccuracies, as well as a note of mine, follow the narrative itself, which is an interesting example of the way in which such anecdotes get added to. The anonymous writer says:

Fr Al[l]an MacDonald who was for many years priest in Eriska [sic] *one of the Outer Hebrides belonged to the mainland and did not believe in the phenomena known as second sight. Before his death however he had the gift himself. Communication with the island is uncertain, by fishing boat etc. and there is no telegraph but when two ladies went there to collect Highland music Father Al[l]an knew of it and expected them though no message had been sent. One of these ladies told me this instance of his foreknowledge *and it was corroborated by the Revd. Kenneth MacLeod now minister of Crianlarich*.*[2] *Mrs Kennedy Fraser, the lady in question, said she had also heard the story in Edinburgh*

[1] An illegible word here.

[2] *. . .*. The words between asterisks were deleted by the Rev. Dr Kenneth MacLeod, whose remark that he could not corroborate the statement is printed above.

from the Polish gentleman who figures in it but who had not then been in Scotland.

All the people in Eriska belong to the Roman Catholic Church, but the church was too small for the congregation and had also fallen into disrepair, and it was Father Al[l]an's great wish that a new church should be built. So when a good fishing year came and his people had money from the herring he said, 'Now is the time to build' and the work was started, but before it was finished the money came to an end and work had to cease. Father Al[l]an was much concerned and very anxious that the building should be finished before the winter storms should set in. He held special services and made special intercession that the money needed might be sent to him.

At this time a lady was dangerously ill in Paris, and a great friend, an Austrian Pole by birth who was also a devout Catholic made a vow that if she recovered he would he would give a certain sum to God. The lady recovered and her friend dreamed of an unfinished church on an island and a voice of intimation [was] made to him that his gift was to be made to this church.

I do not know why he associated the island with Scotland, but he wrote to a friend in Edinburgh telling him the circumstances and asking him to make inquiries as to the place intended. Mr Gray was advised to consult the fathers in the monastery at Fort Augustus and went there, when he was told of Father Al[l]an and his special need. He inquired how the island was to be reached and was told to go straight down to Oban where he would be just in time to catch the steamer for the Outer Isles; that he could land either in Barra or South Uist and must then hire a fishing boat to take him across to Eriska. This programme he carried out, and as the fishing boat came alongside the pier, a priest came down to meet it saying, 'Where is the Mr Gray who is bringing me money to finish my church?'

On this story Fr John Gray wrote the following comment in a letter to Mrs Kennedy-Fraser dated 15th December 1911:

In the summer of 1899, I think, I was in Scotland, a stranger and a layman (being then only tonsured) but wearing clerical dress as the mark of what I hoped would be. I asked a friend in Fort William what was the poorest mission in the county. He replied: go to Eriskay: Donald and Alfred are just starting. I went. At Fr Allan's table, where we sat down on arrival, he asked us: 'Have you seen a man named Gray anywhere?' I said, 'I am he,' not a little astonished.

He said, 'It isn't you: the man I mean is a layman.' We were leaving with the tide and I went with him into another room and mentioned some business I had with him, about which no one but myself knew. He said,

'You are the man I was expecting.' I was a little ruffled and asked what he meant. He said, 'I had a telegram.' I understood this to [be] a joke as he had just said there was no station on the island. Al[l]an said nothing more of this subject, and I was naturally mystified.

Returning to Fort William I mentioned to my friend there that Fr Al[l]an was expecting me. He told me Al[l]an was possessed of second sight: and since I have considered the explanation lost in that limbo of conflicting evidence. All the particulars in the MS. of which I have first-hand knowledge are inaccurate: except those which relate to myself which you see are passably correct, with a little good will.

Many of my brethren have heard Fr Al[l]an yarn half the night and remember well the weird effect of his stories. And all add that whatever it is, he had the gift of second sight. He told me there will be no one but himself upon the rock in fifty years i.e. *1949.*[1] *But I think that was a reasoned prediction: and I know he had arranged for his burial.*

The 'Austrian Pole' referred to in the anonymous lady's narrative was Marc-André Raffalovich (1864–1934). He was not an Austrian Pole but a Russian Jew, born in Paris.[2] He settled in London in 1884. He and John Gray were friends and minor literary figures in London in the 1890s. Gray was received into the Catholic Church in 1890, Raffalovich in 1896. In the autumn of 1898 Gray entered the Scots College in Rome as a student for the priesthood, and he was ordained on 21st December 1901, afterwards being appointed to a curacy at St Patrick's Church in Edinburgh. Raffalovich himself settled in the Morningside district of Edinburgh in 1905, and soon afterwards built at his own expense St Peter's church near by, of which Fr John Gray was appointed the first parish priest in 1906. The date of Fr Gray's ordination has some bearing on the date of his visit to Eriskay. It will be noticed that Fr Gray says nothing in his letter to Mrs Kennedy-Fraser of his reasons for asking a friend in Fort William what was the poorest mission in the country, nor does he make any reference to Raffalovich's alleged vow.

It was certainly not the case that work on the building of Eriskay church came to a halt in the summer because funds had run out.

[1] The 1951 Census gave the population of Eriskay as 330!

[2] Fr Brocard Sewell, O. Carm., *Two Friends, John Gray & André Raffalovich*, St Albert's Press, 1963, p. 10. Raffalovich's parents are described as natives of Odessa. This book is the authority for the other information about André Raffalovich and Fr John Gray given here. There is no allusion to Fr Gray's visit to Eriskay in it.

It is characteristic of the confusion that has attended this story that Amy Murray writes: 'Money came in even from Russia, from some titled man (who was it? I forget), who happened to hear of the poor mission' (*Fr Allan's Island*, p. 218).

The accounts for the building have been preserved, and they show that the first purchase of material for the church, thirty barrels of lime, was made on 17th February 1902, before when a total of £302 5*s* 0*d* had been collected, in three deposits of £102 5*s*, £180, and £20. There is no sign whatever in the accounts that work was held up at any time through lack of funds: the church itself was opened on 7th May 1903, and the last account was paid on 4th March 1904. Raffalovich was certainly a generous contributor: on 5th February 1903 there is an entry 'Seb. A. Raffalovich, £75'. There is also the following letter from him in Fr Allan McDonald's papers:

My dear Father,

I am indeed delighted to be of some use to your mission. How would you like the hundred pounds paid to you? A cheque sent to you? or the money paid into a bank? Please answer to the Caledonian Hotel, Inverness, where we shall be for a week.

A friend of mine says she would like to give £25 towards the altar when the time comes for you to get the altar.

Will you say a novena of masses (for John Gray's ordination) beginning on December 16th and ending on Dec. 24th? If so I will send you 45 shillings.

Believe me
very sincerely yours
André Sebastian Raffalovich

19th August

The year of the date is not stated, but the reference to Fr Gray's ordination shows it must have been 1901, and assuming that the letter was written as soon as Gray had informed Raffalovich that financial aid towards the building of Eriskay church would be very acceptable, Gray's visit to Eriskay must have been in 1901 and not in 1899. Presumably Raffalovich's £75 in February 1903 was an additional contribution, made when funds were running low. It may be noticed that a donation of £20 was received by Fr Allan from Miss Gribbell on 26th September 1902: she was Raffalovich's chatelaine and an old family friend.

As regards the assertion that Fr Allan 'foresaw' two ladies who visited Eriskay to collect Highland music, Dr Kenneth MacLeod has already told us he is unable to corroborate this, nor is there any confirmation of it in Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's chapter on her visit to Eriskay in her book *A Life of Song*,[1] nor does Amy Murray mention any such thing in her *Father Allan's Island*, where many conversations with Fr Allan McDonald are recorded: in fact, she writes that 'Father Allan himself had *seen* but once . . . and that nothing more than the corpse-candle'[1] which bears out Dr Kenneth MacLeod's remark about Fr Allan's being reticent about discussing his own experiences. Finally, it must be said that there was no occasion on which two lady folk-musicians visited Eriskay together; Evelyn Benedict (who says nothing about second sight in her letters to Fr Allan), Amy Murray, and Mrs Kennedy-Fraser all found their way separately to Eriskay in the summer of 1905 and at different times.

[1] London, 1929.

With regard to Fr Allan McDonald's experience at Ballechin House, there is an interesting, but unconvincing, account of these in an obituary which appeared in the Glasgow *Observer* of 14th October 1905, in which Fr Allan was described as a "Seer and Psychologist":

Some years ago the late Lord Bute assembled a house party at Ballechin—which had the reputation of being a haunted house. The party comprised a number of persons interested in psychological phenomena, and Father Allan was one of the group. Very frequently he spoke afterwards of his experiences in the house that night. He described certain pheonomena which he himself witnessed, and stated, among other events of the night, that at one time he was conscious of a bed-curtain being moved in his room by a hand which was quite visible, while he was satisfied that there was not a living person near but himself.

As has been stated on page 225, Fr Allan McDonald was a visitor at Ballechin from 29th April to 6th May, 1897. If he actually had such a vision as is related here, it is very surprising that Miss Freer did not mention it in her book *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House*. All she recorded was that Fr Allan and his fellow guest Fr MacDougall were kept awake all the night of 29th–30th April by the sounds in the house.

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 200. See p. 257 here.