

Charlie's Year (19): The Road to Culloden

The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

THE main difference between Prestonpans – a Jacobite victory – and Falkirk – another Jacobite victory – was this. At Prestonpans, 21 September 1745, there were no Highland troops on the Government side. At Falkirk, 17 January 1746, Hawley's redcoats were augmented by the Munroes, who ran away, and by the Campbells, who were held in reserve and never fought.

There was also a Lowland regiment, the Scots Royals. When Lord John Drummond saw *them* run away, he said: "These men behaved admirably at Fontenoy – surely this is a feint."

The point is this. These regiments saw themselves as peace-keepers, like UN troops today. They wanted to arrest Prince Charles or scare him off. They had no desire to be heroes if it meant killing their fellow-countrymen.

That's why it's important to see the battle through the eyes of 21-year-old Duncan Ban Macintyre. Like every other Gaelic poet of the time whose work has survived, he was a Jacobite – but he was there as a soldier of the Campbell militia. He looked, turned round, and fled, losing his sword (actually it belonged to Fletcher of Achallader, who had promised to pay him if he went in his place).

Robert Chambers doesn't mention Duncan Ban in his "History of the Rebellion of 1745–6" of 1840, but in "Eachdraidh a' Phrionnsa" of 1844, which was supposed to be a translation of Chambers's work, John Mackenzie cites his 'Òran air Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice':

*Mar gu'n rachadh cù ri caoirich,
'S iad nan ruith air aodann glinne,
'S ann mar sin a ghabh iad sgaoileadh
Air an taobh air an robh sinne!*

("As when a dog would set on sheep / And they scampered on a glen slope, / That is how they took a scattering / On the side that we were on!") Mackenzie then translates a bit from Chambers about these regiments being blinded and disconcerted by the winter gale that was blowing in their faces, adds a bit of his own about how they fled in panic, and gives more of Donnchadh Bàn:

*Nuair a bhual iad air a chéile,
'S ard a leummaid a pilleadh,
'S ghabh sinn a mach air an abhainn
Dol g'ar n'-amhaich anns an linne!*

("When they clashed into each other / We'd be leaping high retreating / And we plunged into the river, / Sinking neck-high in the pool!") This was the Carron, west of the town.

It was after four o'clock, and getting dark. The Jacobites thought it was a manoeuvre (as Mackenzie puts it, *gur ann a chuir an nàmhaid car ma chnoc dhiu*) aimed at attacking them from behind. They turned to each other and said: *C'àit' am beil na daoine? C'àit' an deach iad?* "Where are the men? Where did they go?"

I was told a story the other day by a reader that the pipers were blamed for having thrown down their pipes to draw their swords, so no signal could be given that the battle was won. Neither of my two sources says that (even though Mackenzie, being a piper himself, had a great store of piping anecdotes). It sounds like the squaddie's usual assumption that the officers know what's happening but aren't letting on.

The officers *didn't* know. Chambers: “Many of the officers were of opinion that they ought to retire for shelter to Dunnipace and other villages in the rear.” Mackenzie: *Thuir cuid de na h-oifigich gum b' fhearr dhaibh triall gu fasgath Dhun-Nipaic, gus am faigheadh iad fios cia mar chaidh dha na nàimhdean*. Not for shelter, but to find out what had happened to the enemy.

Mackenzie now translates very carefully for a while, probably because he sees before his eyes the answer to a question he had often heard debated in the ceilidh-houses of Gairloch – it wasn't till 8 p.m. that the Jacobite leadership got clear intelligence that they had won.

Men were sent out to secure the camp which Hawley had abandoned, says Chambers, “owing to the desertion of his waggoners and the necessity of a speedy retreat”, or, as Mackenzie puts it, *a' meas gach seud gun bhrìgh an coimeis r'a bheatha* – “considering all treasures worthless compared to his own life”.

The Jacobites “cleaned” the battlefield too. It must have been a gruesome business by torchlight. Chambers tells how an old man in Falkirk recalled long after that the slain were stripped so effectively that next morning they looked like “a large flock of white sheep at rest on the face of the hill”. Mackenzie embroiders further, saying of the man *nach fac e dad ach eich mharbha, cuifeannan leth loiste, agus cuirp nam marbh; a bha na laidhe glè dhlù air a chéile* – “that he saw nothing but dead horses, half-burned wads of tow, and corpses lying very close to each other”.

Before leaving Edinburgh, Hawley had erected two gibbets in the Grassmarket for hanging Jacobites. Now he came back again, and finding it convenient to blame others for his defeat, he proceeded to hang some of his own men. Chambers doesn't say what his excuse was, and this gives Mackenzie the chance to use the first person singular, thus disguising the fact that his work is basically a translation: *Ge be ciod a chuire fhuair e do na truaghanan bochda sin cha chuala mi*. “What fault he found with those poor wretches I have not heard.”

By now halfway through his task, Mackenzie is omitting far more than he is translating. He tells us nothing of three events of little interest to MacKenzies, the capture of MacDonald of Tirnadrish, the accidental killing of young MacDonald of Glengarry, and the siege of Stirling Castle.

He does find room, however, for a delightful little anecdote about Robert Stewart, a young Gael in the Edinburgh city guard (nowadays he'd be called a policeman). Having two days off, he slipped away on Thursday morning, joined the Jacobites at Falkirk, fought for the Prince at 4 o'clock on Friday, and was back on duty in Edinburgh on Saturday morning. The captain of his company suspected where he had been but winked at the offence, says Chambers. Mackenzie tells it better (I translate): “The captain of the guard knew very well what trip Rob Stewart had made, but instead of hanging him from a gallows as Hawley would have done, the worthy Scot laughed heartily (*'s ann a rinn an t-Albannach fùghantach glag mór gàire*).”

The news of Falkirk reached St James's in London when, says Chambers, “a drawing-room happened to be held”. It reminds me of the sort of nonsense that confronts those of us who translate documents for the Scottish Parliament. Our aim is to make the Gaelic more comprehensible than the English. Mackenzie does this by reaching for a phrase from traditional tales – the king's court, he says, was *ri fleaghachas agus ri sùgradh*, feasting and merrymaking.

The one person who was pleased at the news was Sir John Cope, the loser of Prestonpans. “The face of this general is said to have been perfectly radiant with joy at the intelligence,” says Chambers. He was brought back to earth when a Scottish peer mistakenly addressed him as General Hawley.

King George immediately sent his 25-year-old son, the duke of Cumberland, to Edinburgh to take charge. “As no Scotsman could be expected to describe him with impartiality,” says Chambers, “it may be as well here to use the words of Lord Mahon.”

Mackenzie translates Mahon's ultimately damning assessment of "the Butcher" with great care, with one strange exception. Mahon: "On arriving at Edinburgh, he immediately arrested the course of Hawley's savage executions." Mackenzie: *Cho luath sa ràinig e Dunéidean ghnàthaich e na doighean ceusaidh cruaidh-chridheach a bh'aig Hawley.* ("As soon as he reached Edinburgh he practised Hawley's savage executions.")

Did Mackenzie not understand the phrase "arrested the course of"? I suspect he translated this bit in his friend Artt MacLachlan's pub in Clyde Street, because on the next page when trying to tell us that the duke led his army of 10,000 men out of Edinburgh on 31st January, he gives the date as *an tri-amh latha diag thar fhichead de mhios dheireannach a' Gheamhraidh* – 33rd January. What's more, soon after this he tells us that when the duke reached Falkirk he took some Jacobite soldiers prisoner, but he is mixing up the ends of two successive paragraphs of Chambers, for the capture took place at the duke's next stop, Stirling.

Yes, the Jacobites were heading for Inverness. They had considered turning to face Cumberland, and with this in mind the troops were reviewed (*dh' àireamadh an fheach*, says Mackenzie, "the army was counted") on the field of Bannockburn. They seemed to be down to 5,000 men again, but "in reality many were only straggling" (*air fàrsan*, stravaiging) "over the country". On the 29th Lord George Murray and the chiefs had drawn up a paper recommending retreat to the Highlands until the weather improved, when they could bring 10,000 men into the field; one report, not translated by Mackenzie, claims that when the Prince read this "he was transported with rage and vexation, and struck his head against the wall till he staggered, exclaiming loudly against Lord George Murray".

At daybreak (*sgarachdain nan trà*) on 1 February the Jacobites moved north from Bannockburn in a state of disorder which infuriated Lord George. In the confusion the powder stored in St Ninian's Church caught fire and blew up. Many people were killed. Mackenzie knew something about this, for he adds to Chambers's account that the Prince himself narrowly escaped injury when stones and slates from the church flew by.

It was decided, "for the sake of subsistence", that the army should divide, the Prince taking the Highland troops over the Drumochter, while Lord George led the rest round by Angus and Aberdeenshire. Unnecessarily, Mackenzie explains the point about subsistence in a footnote. He is having another bad patch. Chambers explains how "at the commencement of the pursuit" Cumberland's lumbering army is only a day behind, but that by the sixth day the gap has increased three-fold. Mackenzie takes "pursuit" to mean the rout at Falkirk (*an latha theich iad bharr an t-Sléibhe*) and says that on the third day the duke was six days behind! But he makes up for poor arithmetic with an adventurous piece of translation telling how the storm and cold threatened to make frozen lumps of timber (*gasanan fuara reòta*) of Cumberland's troops, and how the snowy Highland peaks raised their branching rocky heads (*an cinn dhosracha ghailbheinn*) into view, "presenting," says Chambers, "but few inducements for an advance".

Cumberland stopped at Perth for a while, believing that Charles had left the country by one of the east-coast ports, as his father had done in similar circumstances in 1715. Then he marched north by Angus and Aberdeenshire. Chambers speaks of the loathing which the duke and his army met on this march through what we would now call "SNP territory". One incident sums it up. "As he was slowly parading through the town of Brechin, hemmed closely in, and retarded by an immense crowd which had collected to see him, he observed a pretty girl standing on a *stair-head*, gazing, among many others of her sex, at the unusual spectacle; it pleased him to honour this damsel with a low bow and an elevation of the hat. The object of his admiration returned the compliment by a contemptuous gesture which does not admit of description."

Though ignored by Mackenzie, it's an important passage, because it helps us understand the ghastly events that unfolded on and after 16 April. As Chambers says: "The symptoms of disaffection which he saw in these districts must have given him an extremely unfavourable

impression of the kingdom in general, and had a strong effect in disposing him to treat it, after his victory, as a conquered country.”

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