

## THE MACARTHURS,

## HEREDITARY PIPERS TO THE LORDS MACDONALD OF THE ISLES.

The MacArthurs who filled the important office of Pipers to the MacDonalds of the Isles, were esteemed next in excellence to the MacCrummens, and like them they kept a seminary for instruction in Pipe-music. Pennant, who visited the Hebrides in 1774 eulogises Sir Alexander MacDonald's Piper, in whose house or college he was very hospitably entertained, and was gratified by the performance of many Piobaireachds. He describes the building, as being divided into four apartments, the outer being for the shelter of cattle during winter; another formed the hall where the students appear to have practised; a third was set apart for strangers; and the fourth was reserved for the family.\*

The most celebrated of this race was Charles, whose musical education was perfected by Patrick *òg* MacCrummen; and respecting him the following anecdote is handed down:—Sir Alexander MacDonald being at Dunvegan, on a visit to the laird of MacLeod, he heard the performance of Patrick *òg* with great delight; and desirous if possible to have a Piper of equal merit, he said to MacCrummen one day, that there was a young man whom he was anxious to place under his tuition, on condition that he should not be allowed to return, until such time as he could play equal to his master. "When this is the case," said MacDonald, "you will bring him home, and I will give you ample satisfaction for your trouble." "Sir Alexander," says Patrick, "if you will be pleased to send him to me, I will do all that I am able to do for him." Charles was accordingly sent to Borreraig, where he remained for eleven years, when MacCrummen, considering him as perfect as he could be made, proceeded to Mugstad, to deliver his charge to Sir Alexander, who was then residing there, and where *Eain Dall* Mackay, Gairloch's blind Piper, happened also to be. MacDonald hearing of their arrival, thought it a good opportunity to determine the merit of his own Piper, by the judgment of the blind man, whose knowledge of Pipe-music was unexceptionable. He therefore enjoined Patrick *òg* and MacArthur not to speak a word to betray who they were, and addressing MacKay, he told him he had a young man learning the Pipe for some years, and was glad that he was present to say whether he thought him worth the money which his instructions had cost? Mackay said, if he heard him play, he would give his opinion freely; but requested to be informed previously with whom the Piper had been studying. Sir Alexander told him he had been with young Patrick MacCrummen. "Then," exclaimed Mackay, "he could never have found a better master." The young man was ordered to play, and when he had finished, Sir Alexander asked the other for his opinion. "I think a great deal of him," replied *Eain*; "he is a good Piper; he gives the notes correctly, and if he takes care, he will excel in his profession." Sir Alexander was pleased with so flattering an opinion, and observed that he had been at the trouble of sending two persons to the college, that he might retain the best, so he said the second one should also play, that an opinion on his merits might also be given. Mackay observed that he must be a very excellent performer that could surpass the first, or even compare with him. When Patrick *òg*, who acted as the second pupil, had finished playing, Sir Alexander asked the umpire, what he thought of his performance. "Indeed, sir, no one need try me in that manner," returned the blind man, "for though I have lost the eyes of my human body, I have not lost the eyes of my understanding; and if all the Pipers in Scotland were present, I would not find it a difficult task to distinguish the last player from them all." "You surprise me, MacKay! and who is he?" "Who but Patrick *òg* MacCrummen," promptly rejoined MacKay; and turning

\* V. 2. p. 348.

to where Patrick was sitting, he observed, "it was quite needless, my good sir, to think you could deceive me in that way, for you could not but know that I should have recognised your performance among a thousand." Sir Alexander then asked MacKay himself to play, and afterwards he called for a bottle of whisky—drank to their healths, and remarked that he had that night under his roof the three best Pipers in Britain.

MacKay's opinion of Charles MacArthur was well founded, for he was so much admired for his musical taste, that a gentleman in MacLeod's country prevailed on Malcolm MacCrummen to send his son Donald Roy, afterwards Captain, for six months to reside with MacArthur—not that he could learn more music, but would be improved by studying MacArthur's particular graces.

Charles MacArthur had issue, two sons, Donald and Alexander, the former of whom was drowned in passing between Uist and Skye. The latter went to America. His brother Niel had a son John who was taught by his uncle Charles, and who, settling in Edinburgh, was appointed Piper to the Highland Society of Scotland, a situation which he held until his death. He was much admired for his fine style of performance, and he gave instructions to students in Bag-pipe music, from which he was usually styled "Professor MacArthur."

John Bane MacArthur, another brother, had a son named Angus, who went with Lord MacDonnld to London, where he remained till his death.

He left several MSS of Piobrachds, most of which were noted down when he lay on his deathbed, by John MacGregor, for the Highland Society of London. Some of them are his own composition, and they are very creditable to his musical genius. I believe he was the last of the MacArthurs hereditary Pipers to The MacDonald of the Isles.

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