

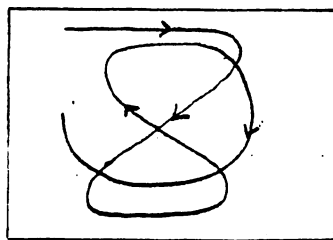
12. 4. 53

ANGUS MACMILLAN, GRIMINISH, ISLE OF BENBECULA

(Aged 7)

Cairneach an Durdain. Mr MacMillan had seen the dance, but remembers nothing of it, except that it was danced to the pipes. He knew also a song, but has forgotten the words and can remember only the tune. This is the one noted by Alexander Carmichael.

Dansa na Tannais. He had seen this danced by adults at a ball in the pipes. As many as will danced it down on their knees, and with their hands clasped across their thighs. It was a follow-my-leader dance, and the pattern followed was as shown below. He had never seen the kiloby step used.



White Coccoade. He described the dance exactly as did Mrs MacMillan. We asked him if he had seen the M.C. put the handkerchief on the floor and dance round it. He said he had, when he was about 10 or 12. Only one handkerchief was put on the floor. We asked him what the steps were like and in what direction the man danced round the handkerchief. He said "Tuor Damisadh Caidheamh" and "Clockwise". He was "sure" on this last point.

Scott's Reel. When he was young, the men and the ladies used the same steps. The men (only) used their hands and the men hooched. He never saw the figure eight replaced by a circle.

He remembers a "Damsadh Cuid", which consisted of "dancing the circle".

THE DEATH of Angus MacMillan, of Grinnisich, Benbecula, the most noted of our Gaelic story-tellers, marks the end of a tradition that lived on for centuries. He was about the last of a type that has gone from our midst, a type that is now quite irreplaceable.

Modern education and ideas had little or no influence upon him. He lived to see the atomic age, but his world was peopled with heroes, giants, fairy princesses, and the sons of the Kings of Lochlann, the Land of Light and the Green Isles at the World's End.

He was the perfect example of the untaught and unlettered but highly cultured and refined mind. The heroes and heroines of his stories had set for him a fixed standard of conduct, and he really did live up to that high standard. There was nothing petty, nothing mean, nothing ignoble in him. He knew that the son of the King of Greece acted in such a manner in a certain situation, and in a similar situation Angus himself would do only what befitted a king's son.

The Open Door

All that was added to the virtues and grace that his Catholic faith had imparted to him. To his neighbours he was always the true and warm-hearted friend, ever ready to lend a helping hand in time of need or trouble. His door was always open, alike to friend or complete stranger. Nationality, creed, social status made no difference to him.

Eminent scholars in several European countries to-day are proud to have numbered Angus MacMillan among their friends. To folklorists, Angus was something more than a mere source of information; he was a phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, he was one of the most remarkable story-tellers in Western Europe and his feats of story-telling are unequalled in the history of folklore recording. His tales took not hours but sometimes several nights to narrate.

10,000 Pages

In the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin there are close on 10,000 ms. pages of tales recorded from the dictation of Angus MacMillan. The Irish Commission have presented a microfilm copy of the entire collection to the University of Edinburgh.

Professor Dag Strömback, Director of the Dialect and Folklore Archive at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, has said of him: "I have never in my life heard a story-teller like Angus MacMillan."

Slàn agus beannachd leibh,
Aonghus. Chs bhí bhur leithid
ann a rís. Requiescat in Pace.

C. M.