

## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

BY AN ARMY CHAPLAIN.

ABOUT a century ago the Highlanders were regarded as little better than a race of savages. Their dress, their language, and their manners were the subject of ridicule among their Southern neighbours, and their well-known attachment to the house of Stuart excited the suspicion and the distrust of the government of the day. "When the English thought of the Highlander at all," says Macaulay—"and it was seldom that they did so—they considered him as a filthy, abject savage, a slave, a papist, a cut-throat, and a thief." The great historian then proceeds to show that this estimate bordered very closely on the truth, and that the Highlanders were little better than they were represented to be. He seems to feel a cruel pleasure in exposing the weaknesses of those whose blood flowed in his own veins, and he, doubtless, meant to display in his picture of Highland manners a proof of his own impartiality. He gives implicit credence to all that he finds in "Burt's Letters," without reflecting that the author, from his very position, must have felt and written like a partisan. Burt was an officer of Engineers employed under General Wade in constructing those roads which opened up the Highlands to the advance of the English forces. He remained in the North from 1726 to 1737, and amused his friends in the South with those letters, in which he professed to describe the manners of the alien race among whom he was placed. There is no reason to believe that he was wilfully untruthful, but the work in which he was engaged rendered him hateful to the Highlanders, and he hated them cordially in return. He was probably unconscious of this feeling himself, but it is perceptible in almost every line he wrote. Johnson carried with him to the Highlands all the prejudices of his countrymen, and a good many others peculiar to himself; but his rugged nature was softened by the hospitality he everywhere met with, and he occasionally gives forth a grunt of approval. The reaction produced by the publication of his "Tour to the Hebrides" was increased by the appearance of the poems and novels of Scott, which created a sort of *furor* in favour of everything Highland, and rendered the land of the mountain and the flood almost classical. Royalty itself condescended to listen to the songs which it would once have been treason to sing aloud; the garb of old Gaul was assumed by many who had no right to wear it; the tartan became a favourite article of dress with both sexes; every nook and corner of the North was explored; the land of Ossian became the land of romance, and its inhabitants were invested with every possible virtue.

The gallant deeds of the Highland regiments in every quarter of the globe added to the general enthusiasm for Caledonians. It was long, indeed, before the English government would believe that they could be trusted; to have armed the Highlanders about the beginning of the last century would have been deemed as much an act of insanity as to arm at the present hour the New Zealand Maoris. Scottish men were known to be under the control of their chiefs, and their chiefs, almost to a man, were devoted to the Pretender. No wonder, then, that the government hesitated before accepting their services; it was not till 1730—only one hundred and sixty years ago—that the first experiment was made. Six companies of Highlanders were then raised, each company being independent of the other. They were known as the *Il reicudan Dhu*, or Black Watch, to distinguish them from the *Seideran Dearag*, or Red Soldiers. They derived their names from



## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

the colour of their clothes ; the regular soldiers wore scarlet, as they do now, while the Highland companies retained their sombre tartan. There was no lack of men : gentlemen of good family were proud to serve as privates under their native officers ; for the whole country had been disarmed, and this indignity was deeply felt by a race who, even in times of peace, never went forth without dirk or claymore. The cadets of good families were proud to serve, if only in the ranks, because they were thus entitled to bear arms ; and to carry a weapon was regarded as a proof that the bearer was a gentleman. The pay privates received was small to a degree, yet poverty was so universal that the pittance they took from government was not to be despised. They were stationed in small parties over the country, and seem to have discharged the same duties as are intrusted to the rural police at the present day. In 1739 four additional companies were raised, and the whole were formed into a regiment of the line. Such was the origin of the first Highland regiment in the service—the gallant 42nd, still known as the Black Watch.

It would be foreign to our purpose to trace the origin and history of all the Highland regiments. That task has already been ably performed by General Stewart, of Garth, who served for many years in the 78th Highlanders, and was appointed governor of the island of Tobago, in the West Indies, where he died. It is somewhat singular that Macaulay appears to have been ignorant of this work, which contains far more valuable information regarding the Highlands than is to be found in "Burt's Letters." General Stewart's book is now almost forgotten ; it is rarely to be met with save in the libraries of country gentlemen in the North, whose forefathers figure in its pages. But it deserves a better fate. No writer has ever possessed a keener insight into the manners and customs of the warlike race whom he was proud to hail as his countrymen, or has described them in peace and in war with a more graphic pen. By birth a Highlander, by profession a soldier, he mingled freely with his clansmen, spoke their language, and had ample opportunities of witnessing their courage in every quarter of the globe. His "Military Annals" read like a romance ; they have all the charm of novelty, because they present us with a picture of manners and feelings that have now died out.

"The simple system of primeval life—  
Simple but stately—hath been broken down ;  
The clans are scattered, and the chieftain power  
Is dead."

It may be said with equal truth that our Highland regiments are dead ; they live only in name. We have regiments composed chiefly of Scotchmen, but there are few Highland soldiers of pure Celtic origin. The Highlands must have been far more populous than they now are, or they never could have raised eighty-six regiments, including local corps, in the course of the four wars in which this country was engaged after 1740. Most of these regiments were formed between 1778 and 1809, and altogether they must have included in their ranks, from first to last, as many as 70,000 or 80,000 men. Some of them were raised before the American rebellion, and Lord Chatham takes credit to himself for having been the first to recognise their invaluable qualities in war :—"I sought for merit wherever it was to be found. It is my boast that I was the first minister who looked for it and found it in the mountains of the North. I called it forth, and drew into your service a hardy and intrepid race of men, who, when left by your



## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

jealousy, became a prey to the artifice of your enemies, and had gone nigh to have overturned the state in the war before the last. These men in the last war were brought to combat on your side; they served with fidelity, and they fought with valour, and conquered for you in every part of the world."

There is no exaggeration in this, and the minister is entitled to all the credit he claims. He knew that a race so warlike and restless would prove a source of constant danger unless those qualities were turned to some profitable account, and it was a wise and liberal policy to employ them in defence of that throne which they had recently almost overturned. The old feeling of clanship was retained; the chiefs and their kinsmen received commissions, and their clansmen were proud to rally around them. Every gentleman of good birth who could raise a hundred men was appointed captain; those who could bring only twenty or thirty ranked as subalterns. Sometimes a little pressure was used by the chiefs, but generally the men were ready to serve. The regiments thus raised were composed almost exclusively of Highlanders. Gaelic was spoken alike by officers and men, and chaplains familiar with the mountain tongue were appointed to every regiment. Gentlemen who could not obtain commissions at once were content to serve in the ranks till vacancies occurred. Two men of gentle birth, privates in the Black Watch, were presented to George II. in 1743. "They performed," says the *Westminster Journal*, "the broadsword exercise, and that of the Lochaber axe or lance, before his Majesty, the Duke of Cumberland, Marshal Wade, and a number of general officers assembled for the purpose in the great gallery of St. James's. They displayed so much dexterity and skill in the management of their weapons as to give perfect satisfaction to his Majesty. Each got a gratuity of one guinea, which they gave to the porter at the palace-gate as they went out," and this, not that they were dissatisfied with the gift, or that their purses were over-well plenished; but they could not have accepted money without forfeiting their own respect and their position as gentlemen.

Now it did sometimes happen that men not of the Highland race were smuggled into these Highland regiments. For example, two gentlemen, anxious to obtain commissions in the Black Watch, and unable to find the requisite number of men among their own countrymen, enlisted eighteen Irishmen at Glasgow. Some of them were O'Donnells, O'Lachlans, and O'Briens, and as such would have been at once rejected by Lord John Murray, the colonel, who would accept none but Highland recruits. The two ingenious gentlemen got over the difficulty by changing Patrick O'Donnel, O'Lachlan, and O'Brien into Donald Macdonnel, MacLachlan, and Macbriar, under which names they were enrolled in the regiment without any suspicion of their nationality. The Lowland Scotch seldom thought of entering these regiments. When the battle of Fontenoy was fought, there was not a soldier in the Black Watch born south of the Grampians, and only two of the Milesian Highlanders were alive. So high was the reputation of the regiment that it could always obtain more Highland recruits than were required. The bounty was a guinea and a crown; but not gold attracted the young mountaineers: they were led to enlist by the thirst of glory and the honour of belonging to a regiment which had already covered itself with fame on many a hard-fought field. So late as 1776, when the Black Watch embarked for service in America, it still retained its strictly national character: all the officers but two were Highlanders, while among the privates we find 931 Highlanders, 74 Lowland Scotch, 5



## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

Englishmen (in the band), 1 Welshman, and 2 Irishmen. This distinctive formation held till 1779, when an attempt was made to destroy the exclusively Highland character of the regiment by drafting into it a body of 150 recruits, the sweepings of the gaols of London and Dublin. The 42nd had hitherto borne a high reputation; the conduct of the men had been exemplary; corporal punishment almost unknown. The commanding officer remonstrated against the admission of these recruits, of whom 16 died during the voyage to America, and 75 others found their way to hospital on landing. The government yielded to his remonstrances: the recruits were drafted into the 26th Regiment in exchange for the same number of Scotchmen. The introduction of the representatives of Richard Cameron into the Black Watch was attended with the worst consequences: flogging and like punishments became more frequent; and the men, accustomed to these degrading spectacles, lost that fine sense of honour which had hitherto distinguished them.

When, in 1793, the 78th Regiment was raised, we find that the strength of the corps was 1,113 men, of whom 970 were Highlanders, 129 Lowland Scotch, and 14 English and Irish. Several of the officers belonged to Lowland families, and brought a certain number of their retainers with them: the Englishmen probably belonged to the band, as in the case of the 42nd. In 1805 the proportion of men in the regiment, which was now stationed in India, was pretty much the same: it contained 835 Highlanders, 184 Lowlanders, 8 English, and 9 Irish. The Highlanders must have been taller then than they are now. After the tallest men were selected for the Grenadier company, there still remained a hundred considerably above the standard of height in light infantry regiments.

The Celtic element predominated equally in the 93rd or Sutherland Highlanders, which was raised in 1800, and consisted of 631 Highlanders, 460 of whom belonged to the county of Sutherland. Eleven years later the numerical strength of the regiment was 1,049: with the exception of 17 Irish and 18 English, all of these men belonged to Scotland.

The 92nd or Gordon Highlanders was raised in 1794 by the last Duke of Gordon, then Marquis of Huntly, and by his mother, the beautiful and witty Duchess Jane. The duchess used to frequent the country fairs, and when she saw a likely youth she would try every persuasion to induce him to enlist. When all other arguments failed, she would place a guinea between her lips, and no young Highlander, however pacific, could refuse the bounty thus proffered. One kiss of that beautiful mouth was worth dying for.

Three-fourths of Duchess Jane's regiment were Highlanders; all the rest were Lowlanders, except 35 Irishmen, whom one of the officers was obliged to accept, *faute de mieux*, to make up his complement. In 1825 the numbers were 716 Scots, 51 English, and 111 Irish; in 1857, 1,043 Scots, 7 English, and 40 Irish.

The only other regiment which retains the garb of old Gaul is the 79th, or Cameron Highlanders, raised in 1793 by Allan Cameron, of Errach, in the northern counties. About four-fifths of the men were Highlanders; the rest were English or Irish. In 1857 the regiment consisted of 895 Scots, 37 English, and 39 Irish.

The 71st, 72nd, and the 74th are also ranked as Highland regiments, and recruit chiefly in the North; but for many years they have substituted the trews for the kilt, and are composed chiefly of Lowland Scotch. The same may be said of



## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

the regiments that retain the kilt; most of the men are Lowland Scotch, natives chiefly of the large manufacturing towns. The Highlands at present scarcely supply sufficient recruits to keep up the strength of two regiments; whereas we find that during the first forty years of this century the Isle of Skye, only 45 miles long and 15 broad, gave us 21 lieutenant and major-generals, 45 lieutenant-colonels, 600 majors, captains, and subalterns, 10,000 privates, and 120 pipers. The recruiting parties stationed in that island meet now with indifferent success; but it is the same everywhere in the Highlands.

Many of the men in these old Highland regiments bore the same name. We find, for example, in one regiment of 800 men no less than 700 who have the word Mac prefixed to their names. In another we find no less than nine John Roses; and as for Donald Macdonalds, their name was Legion. The drill-sergeant showed his ingenuity in distinguishing the bearers of the same cognomen by jocular allusions to their personal appearance, which must occasionally have been not altogether gratifying to the nick-named. In the same company there would be Donald Macdonald with the red hair, Donald with the big feet, Donald with the long legs, Donald of Skye, Donald of Harris, and so forth. When all other means of distinguishing his recruits failed him, the drill-sergeant had recourse to figures, and ranked them as Donald Macdonald No. 1, No. 2, No. 3. No wonder he occasionally got confused amongst so many Donalds, and lost his temper.

About the close of the last century the citizens of Edinburgh found much amusement in listening to the calling of the muster-rolls of one of the newly-raised Highland regiments stationed there, and studying the ingenuity of the sergeants in distinguishing the countless Macs and Donalds in their different companies. The ludicrous effect of such scenes was enhanced by the guttural accent and imperfect English of the speakers, who, if we may judge by the following specimen, seem occasionally to have had peculiar ideas of military duty:—

"Tonald Mactonald No. 5," cried the sergeant, going over the muster-roll of his company.

"Here!" cried a voice so shrill and abrupt that it excited a general titter in the ranks, and the unbounded indignation of the sergeant.

"Here, ye tamm'd rogue! Is that the way she speaks to a shentleman? But we a' ken Tonald's a liar, sae pit her down absent, and tak' her to the guard-room."

"Tonald Mactonald No. 6," continued the sergeant.

There was no answer. The sergeant broke forth into a sort of soliloquy—

"Tonald Mactonald No. 6; that's my sister's son frae Achallatus. Ay, ay, Tonald; she was aye a modest lad, that never spak' till she was spoken to, so we'll put her down present."

And thus the sergeant went over the whole roll, accompanying each name with some remark which showed the estimation in which he held the bearer.

The soldiers of all these regiments wore the scarlet jacket and waistcoat, with a tartan plaid, the lower part of which was wrapped round the body, and the upper thrown loosely over the left shoulder. The plaid served a double purpose; it guarded the soldier's shoulders and firelock from rain by day, and was used as a blanket by night. It was attached to his middle by a belt from which his pistol and dirk, or small dagger, were suspended. On his head was worn the blue bonnet with a border of tartan as at the present day, and a small tuft of feathers or a piece of bearskin; the kilt was of different colours, to distinguish the regiments.



## THE BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER.

The arms were supplied by government, and consisted of a musket, a bayonet, and a large basket-hilted broadsword. In 1769 some alteration was made in the dress of the 42nd; the men were provided with white cloth waistcoats, and goatskin and buff leather purses; the officers began to wear light hangers, instead of the heavy broadsword, which was used only in full dress; and the sergeants were provided with carbines, and laid aside the ponderous Lochaber axes they had hitherto carried. In 1776 the broadswords and pistols were laid aside. The regiment was then serving in America, and it was objected that the broadswords impeded their movements by getting entangled in the brushwood. An attempt was subsequently made to induce them to dispense with the kilt, and to adopt the garb of the Saxon. It was objected to it then, as now, that it was too hot in summer and too cold in winter; but the Highlanders stood out stoutly against the proposed innovation, and the notion of changing the kilt was abandoned. "We were allowed," writes a veteran son of the Gael, "to wear the garb of our fathers, and, in the course of six winters, showed the doctors that they did not understand our constitution; for in the coldest winters our men were more healthy than those regiments who wore breeches and warm clothing." But now that the kilt is no longer worn in the Highlands, and few Highlanders enlist in the kilted regiments, it seems an anomaly to retain an article of dress which, we venture to say, was never worn by nineteen-twentieths of our present soldiers till they entered the army. A large proportion of the officers are English, and it is rather hard that they should have to adopt a dress which must strike them at first as barbarous, if not indecent. It is singular, however, that Englishmen serving in Highland regiments are usually as fond of the kilt as the Highlanders themselves, and would be quite as ready to protest against the adoption of a less peculiar costume.

As to the Highlander's mode of fighting, it was the simplest thing in the world. He discharged his musket, threw it aside, drew his bonnet over his brow, and rushed upon the foe, leaving all the rest to God and his own good broadsword. It was so that he conquered at Prestonpans and elsewhere, but it would be difficult to assert that his undisciplined valour rendered him superior to troops thoroughly drilled, or that the broadsword is more formidable than the bayonet. General Stewart, nevertheless, is of a different opinion:—"From the battle of Culloden, where a body of undisciplined Highlanders, shepherds and herdsmen, with their broadswords cut their way through some of the best disciplined and most approved regiments in the British army (drawn up, too, on a field extremely favourable for regular troops), down to the time when the swords were taken from the Highlanders, the bayonet was in every instance overcome by the sword."

In one of the skirmishes with the French in Egypt, a young sergeant of the 78th killed six of the enemy with the broadsword; the weapon was the same as that still used by sergeants in Highland regiments. The half-dozen Frenchmen were not cut down while retreating, but in fighting with the bayonet, hand to hand, against the broadsword. The gallant sergeant met his death-blow from a sabre stroke from behind as he was returning to his company, after cutting down the last of his six foes. Many other proofs of the efficacy of the basket-hilted weapon might be given, but we question whether its warmest admirers would prefer it to the bayonet in a close attack. In another paper we will tell some anecdotes of frays wherein Highlanders have taken a principal part.