

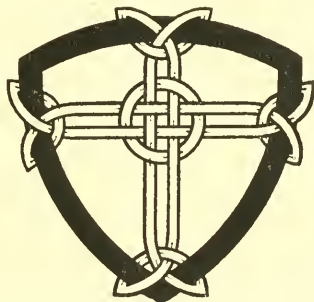
CARMINA GADELICA

HYMNS AND INCANTATIONS

WITH ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES ON WORDS, RITES, AND
CUSTOMS, DYING AND OBSOLETE: ORALLY COLLECT-
ED IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND

AND TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, BY
ALEXANDER CARMICHAEL

VOLUME I



EDINBURGH

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25 GEORGE IV. BRIDGE
1900

Material on Beltane from vols. 1 & 2 of the Carmina
Gadelica (nothing in vol. 3, not got PDFs of 4-6)



Alexander Samishel

AM BEANNACHADH BEALLTAIN

[73]

BEALLTAIN, Beltane, is the first day of May. On May Day all the fires of the district were extinguished and 'tein eigin,' need-fire, produced on the knoll. This fire was divided in two, and people and cattle rushed through for purification and safeguarding against 'ealtraigh agus dosgaidh,' mischance and murrain, during the year. The people obtained fires for their homes from this need-fire. The practice of producing the need-fire came down in the Highlands and Islands to the first quarter of this century. The writer found traces of it in such distant places as Arran, Uist, and Sutherland. In 1895 a woman in Arran said that in



EANNAICH, a 'Thrianailt fhuir nach gann,
 Mi fein, mo cheile agus mo chlann,
 Mo chlann mhaoth 's am mathair chaomh na' ceann,
 Air chlar chubhr nan raon, air airidh chaon nam beann,
 Air chlar chubhr nan raon, air airidh chaon nam beann.

Gach ni na m' fhardraich, no ta na m' shealbh,
 Gach buar us barr, gach tan us tealbh,
 Bho Oidhe Shamhna chon Oidhe Bheallt,
 Piseach maith, agus beannachd mallt,
 Bho mhuir gu muir, agus bun gach allt,
 Bho thonn gu tonn, agus bonn gach steallt.

Tri Pears a gabhail sealbh anns gach ni na m' stor,
 An Trianailt dhearbha da m' dhion le coir,
 O m' anam riarach am briathra Phoil,
 Us dion mo chiallain fo sgiath do ghloir,
 Dion mo chiallain fo sgiath do ghloir.

THE BELTANE BLESSING

the time of her father the people made the need-fire on the knoll, and then rushed home and brought out their 'creatairean,' creatures, and put them round the fire to safeguard them, 'bho 'n bhana bhuitsich mhoir Nic-creafain,' from the arch-witch Crawford.

The ordeal of passing through the fires gave rise to a proverb which I heard used by an old man in Lewis in 1873:—'A Mhoire! mhicean bu dora dhomhsa sin a dheanamh dhuit na dhol eadar dha theine mhoir Bheail,' Ah Mary! sonnie, it were worse for me to do that for thee, than to pass between the two great fires of Beall.

BLESS, O Threefold true and bountiful,
 Myself, my spouse, and my children,
 My tender children and their beloved mother at their head.
 On the fragrant plain, on the gay mountain sheiling,
 On the fragrant plain, on the gay mountain sheiling.

Everything within my dwelling or in my possession,
 All kine and crops, all flocks and corn,
 From Hallow Eve to Bealtane Eve,
 With goodly progress and gentle blessing,
 From sea to sea, and every river mouth,
 From wave to wave, and base of waterfall.

Be the Three Persons taking possession of all to me belonging,
 Be the sure Trinity protecting me in truth,
 Oh! satisfy my soul in the words of Paul,
 And shield my loved ones beneath the wing of Thy glory,
 Shield my loved ones beneath the wing of Thy glory.

Beannaich gach ni, agus gach aon,
 Ta 's an teaghlach bheag ri m' thaobh,
 Cuir Crois Chriosd oirn le buaidh baigh,
 Gu 'n am faic sinn tir an aigh,
 Gu 'n am faic sinn tir an aigh.

Trath threigeas buar am buabhal bho,
 Trath threigeas cuanal an cual chro,
 Trath dh' eireas ceigich ri beinn a cheo,
 Treoir na Trianaid bhi triall n' an coir,
 O treoir na Trianaid bhi triall n' an coir.

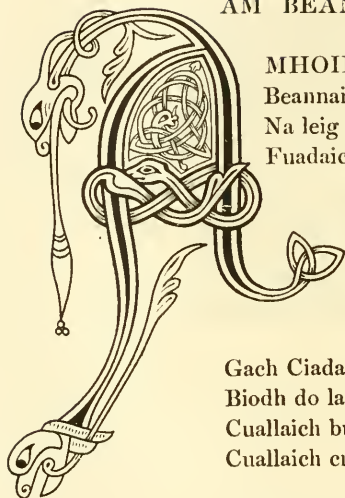
A Thi a chruthaich mi air tus,
 Eisd us fritheil rium aig lubadh glun,
 Moch us anamoch mar is iul,
 A d' lathair fein a Dhe nan dul,
 A d' lathair fein a Dhe nan dul.

Bless everything and every one,
Of this little household by my side,
Place the cross of Christ on us with the power of love,
Till we see the land of joy,
 Till we see the land of joy.

What time the kine shall forsake the stalls,
What time the sheep shall forsake the folds,
What time the goats shall ascend to the mount of mis ,
May the tending of the Triune follow them,
 May the tending of the Triune follow them.

Thou Being who didst create me at the beginning,
Listen and attend me as I bend the knee to Thee,
Morning and evening as is becoming in me,
In Thine own presence, O God of life,
 In Thine own presence, O God of life.

AM BEANNACHD BEALLTAIN [74]



MHOIRE, a mhathair nan naomh,
Beannaich an t-al 's an crodh-laoigh,
Na leig fuath na foirne, n'ar gaoith,
Fuadaich oirne doigh nan daoi.

Cum do shuil gach Luan us Mart,
Air crodh-laoigh 's air aighean dair,
Iomachair leinn o bheinn gu sal,
Tionail fein an treud 's an t-al.

Gach Ciadaon agus Daorn bi leo,
Biodh do lamh chaon a chaoidh na'n coir,
Cuallaich buar d'am buabhal bho,
Cuallaich cuanal d'an cual chro.

Gach Aona bisa a Naomh n'an ceann,
Treoraich caoraich a aodann bheann,
Le 'n al beag ba as an deigh,
Cuartaich 'ad le cuartachd Dhe.

Gach Sathurna bith leo mar chach,
Tabhair gobhair a steach le 'n al,
Gach meann us maos gu taobh sal,
Us Lioc a h-Eigir gu h-ard,
Le biolair uaine shuas m'a barr.

THE BELTANE BLESSING

MARY, thou mother of saints,
Bless our flocks and bearing kine,
Hate nor scath let not come near us,
Drive from us the ways of the wicked.

Keep thine eye every Monday and Tuesday
On the bearing kine and the pairing queys,
Accompany us from hill to sea,
Gather thyself the sheep and their progeny.

Every Wednesday and Thursday be with them,
Be thy gracious hand always about them,
Tend the cows down to their stalls,
Tend the sheep down to their folds!

Every Friday be thou, O Saint, at their head,
Lead the sheep from the face of the bens,
With their innocent little lambs following them,
Encompass them with God's encompassing.

Every Saturday be likewise with them,
Bring the goats in with their young,
Every kid and goat to the sea side,
And from the Rock of Aegir on high,
With cresses green about its summit.

Treoir na Trianailt d' ar dian 's gach cas,
 Treoir Chriosda le shithl 's le Phais,
 Treoir an Spioraid, Ligh na slaint,
 Us Athar priseil, Rìgh nan gras.

* * * *

'S gach naomh eile bha nan deigh
 'S a choisinn suamhnas rioghachd De.

Beannaich sinn fein agus ar cloinn,
 Beannaich gach creubh a thig o'r loinn,
 Beannaich am fear sin air an sloinn,
 Beannaich a Dhe, an te a rug o'n bhroinn.

Gach naomachd, beannachd agus buaidh,
 Bhi 'g aomadh leinn gach am 's gach uair,
 An ainm Trithinn Naomha shuas,
 Athar, Mic, us Spiorad buan.

Crois Chriosd bhi d' ar dion a nuas,
 Crois Chriosd bhi d' ar dion a suas,
 Crios Chriosd bhi d' ar dion mu 'r cuart,
 Gabhail beannachd Bealltain uainn,
 Gabhail beannachd Bealltain uainn.

The strength of the Triune our shield in distress,
 The strength of Christ, His peace and His Pasch,
 The strength of the Spirit, Physician of health,
 And of the priceless Father, the King of grace.

* * * * *

And of every other saint who succeeded them
 And who earned the repose of the kingdom of God.

Bless ourselves and our children,
 Bless every one who shall come from our loins,
 Bless him whose name we bear,
 Bless, O God, her from whose womb we came.

Every holiness, blessing and power,
 Be yielded to us every time and every hour,
 In name of the Holy Threefold above,
 Father, Son, and Spirit everlasting.

Be the Cross of Christ to shield us downward,
 Be the Cross of Christ to shield us upward,
 Be the Cross of Christ to shield us roundward,
 Accepting our Beltane blessing from us,
 Accepting our Beltane blessing from us.

LAOIDH AN TRIALL

[75]

ON the first day of May the people of the crofter townland are up betimes and busy as bees about to swarm. This is the day of migrating, 'bho baile gu beinn,' from townland to moorland, from the winter homestead to the summer sheiling. The summer of their joy is come, the summer of the sheiling, the song, the pipe, and the dance, when the people ascend the hill to the clustered bothies, overlooking the distant sea from among the fronded ferns and fragrant heather, where neighbour meets neighbour, and lover meets lover. All the families of the townland bring their different flocks together at a particular place and drive the whole away. This miscellaneous herd is called 'triall,' procession, and is composed of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats. In the 'triall' the sheep lead; the cattle follow according to their ages; then come the goats, and finally the horses, with creels slung across their backs laden with domestic gear of various kinds. The men carry burdens of spades, sticks, pins, ropes, and other things that may be needed to repair their summer huts, while the women carry bedding, meal, and dairy utensils. About their waists the women wear a cord of wool, or a belt of leather called 'crios-feile,' kilt girdle, underneath which their skirts are drawn up and fastened, to enable them to walk the moor with greater ease. These crofter women appear like Leezie Lindsay in the old song—

'She kilted her coats of green satin,
And she kilted them up to the knee.'

When the people meet, they greet each other with great cordiality, as if they had not seen one another for months or even years, instead of probably only a few days before. There are endless noises in the herd: sheep bleat for their lambs, lambs for their mothers, cows low for their calves, and the calves respond, mares neigh for their foals, and foals whinny in reply to their dams as they lightly skip and scamper, curveting in and out, little dreaming of coming work and hard fare. The men give directions, several at a time; the women knit their stockings and sing their songs, walking free and erect as if there were no burdens on their backs or on their hearts, nor any sin or sorrow in the world so far as they are concerned.

Ranged along on either side of the procession are barefooted, bareheaded comely girls, and sturdy boys, and sagacious dogs, who every now and then, and every here and there, have a neck-and-neck race with some perverse young beast, unwillingly driven from his home, for, unlike his elders, the animal does not know or does not remember the pleasures of the heathery knoll, the grassy dell or

HYMN OF THE PROCESSION

fronded glen, and the joyous freedom of the summer sheiling. All who meet them on the way bless the 'triall,' and invoke upon it a good day, much luck and prosperity, and the safe shepherding of the Son of Mary on man and beast. When the grazing ground is reached, the loads are laid down, the huts repaired, fires kindled and food made ready. The people bring forward their stock, each man his own, and count them into the fold. The herdsman of the townland and one or two more men stand within the gateway and count the flocks as they enter. Each crofter is restricted in his stock on the common grazing of the townland. He may, however, vary the number and the ages of the species and thus equalise a deficit in one species by an excess in another. Should a man have a 'barr-suma,' oversoum, he may arrange with a man who has a 'di-suma,' undersoum, or with the townland at large, for his extra stock. Every facility is given to a man in straits, the consideration of these intelligent crofting people towards one another being most pleasing. The grazing arrangements of the people, complex to a stranger, but simple to themselves, show an intimate knowledge of animal and pastoral life. Having seen to their flocks and to the repairing of their huts, the people resort to their sheiling feast. This feast consists principally of a male lamb, without spot or blemish, killed that day. Formerly this lamb was sacrificed, now it is eaten. The feast is shared with friends and neighbours; all wish each other luck and prosperity, with increase in their flocks :—

'Aun an coir gach fireach
Piseach crodh na h-airidh.'

Beside each knoll
The progeny of the sheiling cows.

The frugal feast being finished and the remains divided among the dogs, who are not the least interested or interesting actors in the day's proceedings, every head is uncovered and every knee is bent as they invoke on man and beast the 'shepherding of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.'

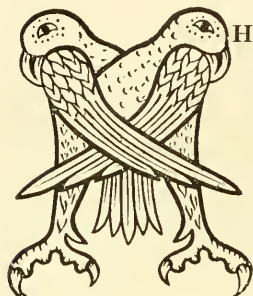
Protestantism prevails in Lews, Harris, and North Uist, and the people confine their invocations to the Trinity :—

'Feuch air fear coimhead Israil
Codal cha 'n aom no suain.'

The Shepherd that keeps Israel
He slumbers not nor sleeps.

Roman Catholicism prevails in Benbecula, South Uist, and Barra, and in their dedicatory hymn the people of these islands invoke, besides the Trinity, St. Michael of the

three-cornered shield and flaming sword, patron of their horses; St. Columba of the holy deeds, guardian of their cattle; Bride of the clustering hair, the foster-mother of Christ; and the golden-haired Virgin, mother of the White Lamb.



HICHEIL mhil nan steud geala,
 Choisinn cios air Dragon fala,
 Ghaol Dia 's pian Mhic Muire,
 Sgaoil do sgiath oirnn, dion sinn uile,
 Sgaoil do sgiath oirnn, dion sinn uile.

Mhoire ghradhach! Mhathair Uain ghil,
 Cobhair oirne ghlan Oigh na h-uaisleachd,
 Bhrìde bhuidheach, bhuaichille nan treud.

Cum ar cuallach, cuartaich sinn le cheil,
 Cum ar cuallach, cuartaich sinn le cheil.

A Chaluim-chille, chairdeil, chaoimh,
 An ainm Athar, us Mic, us Spiorad Naoimh,
 Trid na 'Trithinn, trid na 'Triaid
 Comaraig sinn fein, gleidh ar triall,
 Comaraig sinn fein, gleidh ar triall.

Athair! a Mhic! a Spioraid Naoimh!
 Biodh an 'Trithinn leinn a la 's a dh' oidhebe,
 'S air machair loim no air roinn nam beann
 Bidh an 'Trithinn leinn 's bidh a lamb mu 'r ceann,
 Bidh an 'Trithinn leinn 's bidh a lamb mu 'r ceann!

As the people intone their prayers on the lonely hill-side, literally in the wilderness, the music of their evensong floats over glen and dell, loch and stream, and is echoed from corrie and cliff till it is lost on the soft evening air.

VALIANT Michael of the white steeds,
 Who subdued the Dragon of blood,
 For love of God, for pains of Mary's Son,
 Spread thy wing over us, shield us all,
 Spread thy wing over us, shield us all.

Mary beloved! Mother of the White Lamb,
 Shield, oh shield us, pure Virgin of nobleness,
 And Bride the beauteous, shepherdess of the flocks,
 Safeguard thou our cattle, surround us together,
 Safeguard thou our cattle, surround us together.

And Columba, beneficent, benign,
 In name of Father, and of Son, and of Spirit Holy,
 Through the Three-in-One, through the Trinity,
 Encompass thou ourselves, shield our procession,
 Encompass thou ourselves, shield our procession.

O Father! O Son! O Spirit Holy!
 Be the Triune with us day and night,
 On the machair plain or on the mountain ridge
 Be the Triune with us and His arm around our head,
 Be the Triune with us and His arm around our head.

IASGAIREAN BHARRAI—

Athair! a Mhic! a Spioraid Naoimh!
Bi-sa, Thrithinn leinn a la 's a dh' oidheche,
S air chul nan tonn no air thaobh nam beann
Bidh ar Mathair leinn 's bidh a lamh fo 'r ceann,
'S air chul nan tonn no air thaobh nam beann
Bidh ar Mathair leinn 's bidh a lamh fo 'r ceann!

BARRA FISHERMEN—

O Father! O Son! O Spirit Holy!

Be thou Three-One with us day and night,

And on the back of the wave as on the mountain side

Thou our Mother art there with thine arm under our head.

And on the back of the wave as on the mountain side

Thou our Mother art there with thine arm under our head.

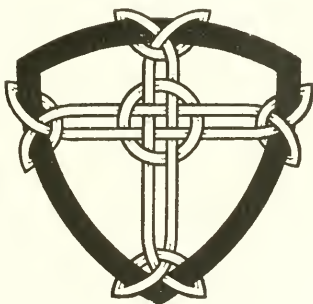
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Teanacsa, avert, safeguard, ward away. 'Teanacsa gorta,' avert famine; 'teanacsa dosgain,' ward away misfortune from cattle, protect from danger, distress, or difficulty.

Teasdam, I preserve, secure, keep, help, assist.

Teilg, *teilg*, a chord, string of a lyre, of a harp, or other stringed instrument.

Teilinn, *teilinn*, a musical instrument, a stringed instrument. Welsh 'telu,' a harp.

Teine, fire. (Vol. i. p. 174.)

'Cha loisg teine, grian, no gealach mi.' No fire, no sun, no moon, shall burn me.

Similar immunity from fire is mentioned in an Arthurian ballad taken down in Uist:—

'Cha loisg teine's cha dearg arm air an No fire shall burn, no arm can hurt the
fhear, man,

Ach a chlaidhe geal glan fein.' But his own white sword of light

—therefore while he slept his enemy killed him with his own sword.

Tein-eigin, neid-fire, need-fire, forced fire, fire produced by the friction of wood or iron against wood.

The fire of purification was kindled from the neid-fire, while the domestic fire on the hearth was re-kindled from the purification fire on the knoll. Among other names, the purification fire was called 'Teine Bheuil,' fire of Beul, and 'Teine mor Bheuil,' great fire of Beul. The fire of Beul was divided into two fires between which people and cattle rushed australly for purposes of purification. The ordeal was trying, as may be inferred from phrases still current. 'Is teodha so na teine teodha Bheuil'—Hotter is this than the hot fire of Beul. Replying to his grandchild, an old man in Lews said:—'A Mhoire! mhicean, bu dhurra dhomb-sa sin a dheana dhusa na dhol eadar dha theine mhor Bheuil'—Mary! sonnie, it were worse for me to do that for thee than to go between the two great fires of Beul.

The neid-fire was resorted to in imminent or actual calamity upon the first day of the quarter, and to ensure success in great or important events.

The writer conversed with several persons who saw the neid-fire made, and who joined in the ceremony. As mentioned elsewhere, a woman in Arran said that her father, and the other men of the townland, made the neid-fire on the knoll on 'La buidhe Bealltain'—Yellow Day of Beltane. They fed the fire from 'cuaile mor conaidh caoin'—great bundles of sacred fagots brought to the knoll on Beltane Eve. When the sacred fire became kindled, the people rushed home and brought their herds and drove them through and round the fire of purification, to save them from the 'bana bhuitseach mhor Nic Creafain Mac Creafain'—the great arch witch Mac Crauford, now Crawford.

That was in the second decade of this century.

John Macphail, Middlequarter, North Uist, said that the last occasion on which the neid-fire was made in North Uist was 'bliadhna an t-sneachda

bhuidhe'—the year of the yellow snow—1829 (?). The snow lay so deep and remained so long on the ground, that it became yellow. Some suggest that the snow was originally yellow, as snow is occasionally red. This extraordinary continuance of snow caused much want and suffering throughout the Isles.

The people of North Uist extinguished their own fires and generated a purification fire at Sail Dharaich, Sollas. The fire was produced from an oak log by rapidly boring with an auger. This was accomplished by the exertions of 'naoi naoinear ciad ginealach mac'—the nine nines of first-begotten sons. From the neid-fire produced on the knoll the people of the parish obtained fire for their dwellings. Many cults and ceremonies were observed on the occasion, cults and ceremonies in which Pagan and Christian beliefs intermingled.

'Sail Dharaich,' Oak Log, obtained its name from the log of oak for the neid-fire being there. A fragment of this log riddled with auger holes marks a grave in 'Cladh Sgealoir,' the burying-ground of 'Sgealoir,' in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Alexander Mackay, Edinburgh, a native of Reay, Sutherland, says:—'My father was the skipper of a fishing crew. Before beginning operations for the season, the crew of the boat met at night in our house to settle accounts for the past, and to plan operations for the new season. My mother and the rest of us were sent to bed. I lay in the kitchen, and was listening and watching, though they thought I was asleep. After the men had settled their past affairs and future plans, they put out the fire on the hearth, not a spark being allowed to live. They then rubbed two pieces of wood one against another so rapidly as to produce fire, the men joining in one after the other, and working with the utmost energy and never allowing the friction to relax. From this friction-fire they rekindled the fire on the hearth, from which all the men present carried away a kindling to their own homes.

'Whether their success was due to their skill, their industry, their perseverance, or to the neid-fire, I do not know, but I know that they were much the most successful crew in the place. They met on Saturday, and went to church on Sunday like the good men and the good Christians they were—a little of their Pagan faith mingling with their Christian belief. I have reason to believe that other crews in the place as well as my father's crew practised the neid-fire.'

A man at Helmsdale, Sutherland, saw the 'tein-eigin' made in his boyhood.

The neid-fire was made in North Uist about the year 1829, in Arran about 1820, in Helmsdale about 1818, in Reay about 1830.

Teiric, hake, herring hake, herring eke or eek. A triangular frame with spikes upon which herrings are hung up to dry in the smoke within or in the sun without.

Teòm, dole, gift, bribe, alms. 'Teom eisg,' dole of fish; 'teom deora,' alms of poor; 'teom an t-sionnach,' bribe of the fox; 'co toinnte ri teom an