THE REVEREND JAMES MACDONALD: AN OPINIONATED TRAVELLER IN DENMARK AND SWEDEN

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The Reverend James Macdonald was born in 1771 or -72 at Paible in North Uist, and died of a "decline" at Edinburgh in 1810. If his was a short life, however, it was also a remarkably eventful if not exactly merry one.

In the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland, the Reverend James is described as "James Macdonald, Traveller". Although he was a graduate of Aberdeen University, and sometime tutor, linguist, writer and agricultural improver, this label probably fits him best, for it was by his travels and what he made of them that he acquired such fame as came his way.

First and foremost, though, James Macdonald is remembered as an important link between the pre-Romantic German literary world of Goethe, Schiller, Herder and Wieland, and the Scotland of Burns and "Ossian": an aspect of his career which is well documented by Alexander Gillies in his detailed study, *A Hebridean in Goethe's Weimar* (Oxford, 1969). His first visit to Germany took place in the summer of 1796, in the capacity of tutor to the young William Macdonald of St. Martin's in Perthshire, who was destined for the Gymnasium or grammar school run by Karl August Böttiger in Weimar. A Scottish correspondent of Böttiger's wrote to him on 26th June of that year that the elder Macdonald was "an amiable man, a capital linguist and a zealous Highlander", adding in a later epistle that he was also acquainted with original Gaelic poems. Indeed, James's father Hugh Macdonald ("Uisdean Bàn") was a well-known tradition-bearer in his own community in the Uists, and gave evidence on the Ossianic question to the committee set up for that purpose by the Highland Society of Scotland.

It was not long before James Macdonald built up a circle of friends and admirers in Weimar, and on 25th November 1796 Böttiger wrote to Professor Dalzel of Edinburgh University:–

"The favourite topic of our conversation is Caledonia, and our

common table and tea-table talk runs about old Gaelic antiquities, Ossian's songs, the Western Islands, the picturesque beauties of the Highlands, the smiling farms and busy throngs of the Lowlands, and such other things as we want very vastly to hear related by eye-witnesses, as we want very much a true statement of all these cases, in order to be undeceived and weaned from the prejudices we have sucked from English authors ... thus, for instance, I had never heard of that true poetical genius the late Mr. Burns."

But while acting as his country's unofficial cultural ambassador, James Macdonald was also improving the shining hour with industry and zeal:–

"He has made astonishing progress in the languages since his arrival on the Continent. While he was here he made himself complete master of the French and German languages and also understood very well the Italian and Spanish, and I am told he is now learning the Danish."

About the same time Macdonald made a start on Swedish, and also managed to lay his hands on a Russian grammar.

By the time they left Germany in 1798 the two Macdonalds had visited Dresden, Berlin, Jena and Leipzig, where from October 1797 until March 1798 they attended classes at the university. They were received at the court of Weimar, and won the friendship and esteem of the Duke and the Dowager Duchess. They visited Schiller, whom they thought "a clever fellow", and also paid their respects to Goethe, who did James the honour of reading him the last five cantos of " Hermann und Dorothea" in advance of publication. All in all, it was a brilliant beginning in the world of letters for the young Uist tacksman's son, who until the age of twelve had known no other language but his native Gaelic.

The next few years were to be rather a comedown by comparison. Vague thoughts of farming "in a lonely valley in South Uist" (his father was now tacksman of Daliburgh) came to nothing. A hoped-for career in the diplomatic service failed to materialize. What *did* in fact come his way was the offer of a minister's living at Anstruther Wester in the East Neuk of Fife: an offer which this most reluctant of clergymen grudgingly resolved to accept. He could hardly do otherwise, as the post had been obtained for him by his young pupil's father, Macdonald of St. Martin's, assisted by the good offices of the Duke of Argyll. As Alexander Gillies comments, however, "It almost seems as if he accepted the charge with ill grace", for in his subsequent letter of acceptance to St. Martin's he wrote: "In case *nothing better* should be

obtained for me, I must be contented with a temporary residence in Fifeshire, in the hope of getting back some time or other to dear little Weimar." Anstruther was at least in the vicinity of the universities of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, and perhaps his period of penance in the Anstruther pulpit might serve as a stepping-stone to academic preferment.

Macdonald's sojourn in Anstruther was to last for only five years, and for much of that time he was absent on more congenial business. There were trips to Edinburgh to meet literary friends, holidays in Germany, where old acquaintances could be renewed and the latest literary trends absorbed, and there was also the affair – using the word in its most neutral sense – of Emilie von Berlepsch, an aristocratic German divorcée and bluestocking whose admiration for Macdonald led her to visit him in Anstruther and persuade him to take her on a guided tour of the Hebrides. Not surprisingly, the new minister did not endear himself to his congregation nor to the local Presbytery whose meetings he so infrequently attended. As Gillies remarks, with tactful understatement: "The impression is inescapable that he was not wholeheartedly attached to his charge or even to the Church".

On 18th July 1804 Macdonald attended his last meeting of the Anstruther Wester Kirk Session, and in October he wrote to the Presbytery of St. Andrews that "divine providence" had called him "to discharge an important duty at a considerable distance from Anstruther". In this instance "divine providence" went under the name of William Macdonald of St. Martin's: none other than Macdonald's old patron, and the father of his former pupil and fellow traveller in Germany. In his younger days William had acted as guardian and factor to John of Moidart, 19th chief of Clanranald, who died in 1794 while still only in his thirties, leaving a six-year-old son, Ranald George, to succeed him. In due course the little boy was sent to Eton, where it seems that his wilder instincts were given free rein, for by his mid teens he had become a source of anxiety and embarrassment to his guardians. These included such influential figures as Hector Macdonald Buchanan, Principal Clerk of Session and intimate friend of Sir Walter Scott; George, 22nd Earl of Crawford, and Sir Archibald Macdonald, cadet of Sleat and Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer of England. An earlier guardian had been the boy's maternal grandfather, the late but largely unlamented Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield.

John of Moidart had made provision on his deathbed for a travelling companion to be appointed for his son when the appropriate time came. In 1803 the future Regency buck was removed from the school which, it would appear, had little more to teach him, and some serious thought was

given to his future. William Macdonald of St. Martin's recommended sending the boy abroad as soon as possible under a responsible tutor, and when the original candidate – the Reverend James Walker – declined to accept the responsibility, St. Martin's proposed the Reverend James Macdonald of Anstruther.

Not surprisingly, in view of his family background, James was a loyal supporter of his clan chief, and the opportunity to combine the tutorship of young Clanranald with a paid trip to his beloved Germany was irresistible. On 26th August 1804, tutor and pupil set out from Edinburgh *en route* for Dresden.

The next two years were to be productive ones for Macdonald although they would culminate in his estrangement from his difficult charge. Not content with sampling the delights of Kiel, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Leipzig and Dresden, the pair eventually pushed on to Teplitz and Prague, and June of the following year found Macdonald in Vienna. Here, in true Scottish fashion, he suffered badly from the heat of a Viennese summer, while the condition of the people and the state of the nation generally did little to improve his temper. While he pursued his studies, Gillies tells us, he "reflected upon the perpetual idleness and pleasure-seeking habits of the Viennese, and commented adversely on the education of the nobility." The theatres were "despicable", and the preachers "deplorable". Nor was the political scene any better. The Emperor was "timid, selfish and suspicious", and the great officers of state "despicable old wives soured by old disappointments."

While in Vienna, Macdonald worked on the manuscript account of his more recent travels in the Hebrides, to which he tacked on the narrative of his subsequent journey through Denmark and Germany. The original version has not survived, but a German translation was published in 1808 under the title *Reise durch Schottland, seine Inseln, Dänemark und einen Theil von Deutschland.* Gillies – usually so uncritical and admiring of all that James Macdonald accomplished – slates this work as "disappointing and frustrating", and "provoking" in its obvious inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

In the autumn of 1806 James Macdonald and his pupil cut short their Grand Tour and returned to Edinburgh. A few months later Clanranald's guardians met together and, in accordance with their ward's wishes, terminated James Macdonald's appointment as tutor. There seem to have been faults on both sides. Macdonald had irritated young Clanranald by insisting that they were equals rather than master and man, and that he – Macdonald – had been the intimate friend and companion of John of Moidart. He insisted on sharing the young man's carriage and rooms, and

even proposed "to lay aside the vulgar appellation of governor and adopt the more affectionate one of cousin."

The guardians took cognisance of these complaints, but remained sceptical of their charge's motives in throwing off the bonds of tutelage. On 2nd May 1807 they met again to deprecate "the minor's appearance of unsteadiness and frivolity", for he had now decided to go off on his own to London and thence abroad again, "without having specified any satisfactory purpose for such a journey". His real destination, it later transpired, was the Swedish port city of Gothenburg.

Meanwhile, James Macdonald had not been idle. After dropping Clanranald off in Edinburgh he had accompanied another former pupil, Ewan Murray-Macgregor, to Weymouth. Later that year and again the following year he made extensive trips through the Hebrides collecting material for his *General View of the Agriculture of the Hebrides*, which he had been commissioned to write by Sir John Sinclair of Statistical Account fame. For this work the Board of Agriculture paid him £300. On October 10th 1808, Macdonald actually found time to get married: his wife being Janet Playfair, daughter of the Principal of St. Andrews University. It was not destined to be a long partnership.

On their way back to Scotland in 1806, James Macdonald and Clanranald had been forced by the political situation in Europe to make a detour by way of Gothenburg, and it may have been on this occasion that Clanranald first met the beguiling Anna Gustava Constantia Koskull, wife of the Gothenburg-based Scottish merchant John Hall. By the autumn of 1808, the two twenty-year-old lovebirds were immersed in a scandal of such epic proportions that it had already involved the King of Sweden, King George III of Great Britain and Foreign Secretary Canning, to mention only the most notable participants. Briefly, the young chieftain is said to have offered the cuckolded husband the sum of £20,000 for his wife: an unconventional move made no more respectable by the fact that the Clanranald estate was now heavily encumbered by debt, thanks to Ranald George's thoughtless extravagance. Even worse, the lady's relations were petitioning the Swedish king to grant her a divorce from her unprepossessing husband, "for the avowed purpose" – claimed Clanranald's long-suffering guardians – "of having her married to Clanranald who from his fortune is an object and from his youth and inexperience promises to be an easy prey". Neither the Guardians nor the British Minister at Stockholm, let alone the Consul at Gothenburg, had been able to prevail on the delinquent to "desist from so scandalous a pursuit". It was clearly another case for troubleshooter James Macdonald.

When the approach was made to him Macdonald had been married for

only one month; but he seems to have accepted the commission without demur. As Alexander Gillies comments, "Janet Macdonald's thoughts are not recorded. The behaviour of the couple, almost on the very morrow of the marriage, was astonishingly unselfish."

The Travels

Macdonald sailed from Leith on 10th or 11th November aboard the brig *Johns*, Captain Hutton master, unaware that the adventures he was about to become embroiled in would be the cause of his early death. During his absence he kept an almost daily diary, mostly written in the heat of the moment when events, impressions, agonies and joys were fresh in his consciousness. This he succeeded in publishing on his return, without altering or editing out any of the spontaneity of the original entries, and the result was a documentary travelogue of startling immediacy which reads as freshly today as it did on the day of publication.

His return to Scandinavia was a traumatic one, as the opening lines of his *Travels* make clear:–

> "Skagen or Scaw, a village in North Jutland, November 24, 1808.
>
> Confined here in a Danish prison, I have abundance of time to commit to writing what I can remember of the last four most unfortunate days of my life. For two days past I have been in a sort of fever, and scarcely able to arrange my ideas, but to-day I am better, and think I can recollect the most essential particulars of my misfortune."

In the early hours of Sunday, 20th November, the *Johns* had gone aground off the coast of Jutland. The crew had mistaken the Scaw light for the *Fury* bomb ship, and had ignored Macdonald's repeated warnings that they were mistaken. When the ship started taking on water the captain completely lost his nerve, and Macdonald himself had had to take control of the situation. A small boat managed to approach within fifty yards of them, whereupon Macdonald, who alone was "accustomed to athletic exercise", contrived to throw them an oar with a rope attached. Three crewmen of the *Johns* were saved by this means, but Macdonald and six companions were forced to spend a miserable and terrifying night in the mast-tops. It is questionable whether the others felt more comfortable with their new "captain" that they had with the old one. A young German boy started to bewail his fate, but soon thought better of it:–

> "... when I told him I would throw him, or any other person overboard, from whom a single complaint should escape, he became

more collected."

Once they were up in the tops, Macdonald kept sleep at bay by a regime of pinching anyone who looked likely to drop off, in both senses of the term.

After nearly thirty hours of exposure to the elements Macdonald and his companions were finally taken off, only to be escorted under armed guard to the nearest prison: for Denmark and Great Britain were now at war. There he fell into a fever, but on recovering he proceeded to write to his wife in Edinburgh, to the King of Denmark – asking to be allowed to go on board the *Fury* – to General Bardenfleth, Commander-in-chief for North Jutland, and to an influential Danish acquaintance in Copenhagen. James Macdonald was not the kind of man to suffer tamely the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

After a week's incarceration Macdonald and the other prisoners were marched along the seashore towards Aalborg. At this point the *Travels* proper begin, and Macdonald's initial impressions were distinctly unfavourable:–

> "In the whole district around us, as far as the eye could reach on a clear day, there was not a tree, or even a bush or blade of grass to be seen.
>
> Where the snow had been drifted off the ground by the storm, bare sand or short coarse heath appeared. The few scattered cottages that now and then appeared in sight, corresponded with the universal wretchedness of the scene. They are constructed of the wood of the shipwrecked vessels, ill compacted, and clumsily put together, and are alike unfit to shelter their inhabitants from the heat of summer or the frost of winter."

To add insult to injury, the food offered to the travellers was unpalatable:–

> "At the distance of about eight miles from Scaw ... we rested for half an hour, and endeavoured to procure some refreshment. Here, as at Scaw, there was no other bread than a coarse mixture of rye, barley, and fish-bones, pounded and mixed together, and baked into loaves of different sizes, of a snuff colour, and scarcely eatable by persons who have not been accustomed to the very worst food. I had not tasted bread for the nine preceding days, and unluckily tried to force some of this kind down my throat, but nearly lost my life in consequence of the experiment."

Luckily some peasants found him two eggs and four potatoes, "which proved the most seasonable and delicious repast I ever made." A young Norwegian merchant encountered in an inn along the way forced some cold pork on Macdonald, who overcame his Highland prejudice against the pig sufficiently to devour it "with no little gratitude and relish." The Norwegian performed a further service for Macdonald when, to calm his still shaky nerves, he assured him that he bore no outward signs of derangement. It seemed that Macdonald was suffering from what nowadays might be termed "delayed-action shock", and it was a considerable relief to learn that, despite his worst fears, he was not in danger of losing his reason. His already high regard for the Norwegian people was increasing by leaps and bounds:–

> "It is impossible to convey in words the gratitude I felt towards this young Norwegian; and ... I shall consider myself under obligations to him while I live, and even cherish a greater regard than heretofore for all his countrymen."

But before long, Macdonald was thrust back into the grisly maw of the Jutland tourist industry. Having passed through Fladstrand the little party came to Saebye, where the burgomaster procured them lodgings:–

> "It turned out a most unpleasant one; for, as I was eating my miserable supper of bad fish and four greasy potatoes, in came, without any ceremony, six masters of Danish privateers, half drunk, together with their mates and some comrades belonging to the place, and sat down at the same table with me ... They were each armed with a brace of pistols and a cutlass, clad in furred jackets, and wore long mustaches and whiskers. Their total number was about twenty."

His fellow dinner-guests were demonstrably suspicious of Macdonald, who realized with growing apprehension that they regarded him as a spy. The atmosphere was decidedly hostile, and the demeanour of his hosts also provided naught for his comfort ("The landlord and landlady were a silly pair, and intoxicated with brandy into the bargain".) Macdonald retired to bed in an uneasy state of mind, and spent a sleepless night enlivened by the sounds of revelry mingled with muttered threats and curses filtering through from the parlour. His guard, rather heartlessly, had gone to a farm some three miles away to ensure himself of a good night's sleep. When he returned in the morning for his prisoner, he was treated to a diatribe on his shortcomings as an escort, culminating in a threat to abscond if he did not take his duties more seriously. The unfortunate soldier's response is not recorded.

The journey towards Aalborg continued by sledge, to Macdonald's manifest discomfort:–

> "This was the first day I ever travelled on sledges in a cart, and it was not very propitious. I was twice overturned in snow, and once in two or three feet water, in the middle of a river. No sooner did I get out of the water, after escaping a very serious danger, than all my clothes froze round my body, even to my neckcloth, which had on its surface a crust of ice an inch thick."

But at the next inn there was an unexpected reunion with an old friend:–

> "In the inn where I stopped, I found poor Captain Hutton's dog which I had saved from the shipwrecked Johns, and which his master had left here rather than suffer him to perish on the road. The creature knew me, and I have kept honest *Chance* ever since."

The following day Macdonald arrived at Aalborg, where General Bardenfleth had arranged lodgings for him. Once settled in, Macdonald sat down to record his first impressions of the town; and the tenor of his remarks demonstrates both his powers of observation and his determination to aid his country's war effort by supplying useful intelligence: always assuming that his secret diary could somehow be smuggled back to London:–

> "It would not be easy to take or destroy the vessels in the harbour, for besides the bar at the mouth of the Liimfiord, sixteen miles below the town, and which has scarcely nine feet water when the wind is calm or moderate, our ships would have a battery to oppose them, and that within a quarter of a mile of the deepest part of the channel. The battery in question is about ten miles below Aalborg, and consists of twelve or fourteen pieces of cannon of a large calibre. This, however, I have from report, for I have not myself had the opportunity of seeing the battery."

Ever the linguist, Macdonald noted that "the people of rank and education, and indeed all the middling classes, speak German; a few understand English or French." His landlady's lack of German did not endear her to him:–

> "I am quartered in a widow's house, whose husband was a German, and whose children speak that language: it is singular that she herself does not know a word of it, though in other respects she seems to be sufficiently acute."

At Aalborg, Macdonald met with the survivors of the British 36-gun frigate *Crescent*, which had been lost near Aalborg. These bedraggled prisoners-of-war were a far cry from the jolly Jack Tars of popular imagination, and Macdonald's initial feelings were of mortification as a fellow-Briton in enemy hands:–

> "Were a stranger to form his opinion of British soldiers and sailors from seeing them marched as prisoners through an enemy's country, he would have a very erroneous notion of their appearance at home. Never was there a more wretched set of human beings seen than the poor remains of the Crescent's gallant crew. Some of the men had neither hats on their heads, nor shoes on their feet. Some had one boot, and some one shoe, some jackets of their own, and some Danish jackets or great coats, lent them in charity by the peasants or soldiers. They all looked meagre, shrivelled and diminutive. A person would have imagined that one of their present guards was as bulky as four of them, and that half a dozen Danes would have driven the whole fifty men into the sea. I must confess I felt mortified as well as grieved at their appearance."

The modern reader, brought up on newsreel films from the world's war fronts, will have little difficulty imagining the resignation and despair that James Macdonald witnessed in the streets of Aalborg.

To their great credit the people of Aalborg "never uttered a single harsh word or an illiberal reflexion" as these tattered remnants of Nelson's navy straggled past; although, as Macdonald recorded, "they are very much exasperated against us since the bombardment of Copenhagen and the capture of their fleet; and because their government does all in its power to cherish and increase the national hatred."

But the government had no need to stir up the people after the events at Copenhagen earlier that year. As James Macdonald stood among the crowds in the Aalborg streets, did his mind perhaps turn back to his former parish in Fife, whose seamen had played a conspicuous part in the infamous bombardment? We know that the fishers of neighbouring Cellardyke were there, for a local history of that village written in 1879 paints a vivid portrait of men who simply perceived a duty to be done:–

> "Such was the call to the fishers of Fife enrolled as Naval Volunteers to serve in the expedition sent under Gambier to seize the Danish fleet, in the Lammas of 1807.
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> 'It's the foulest blot in the history of the nation. You first steal from, and then stab a friend in the dark,' hissed the black nebs (i.e. political radicals) in the famous or infamous Sabbath-day conference

at Kilrenny. But here is the other side. 'Self-preservation is the first law of nations, as of individuals. The Dane is the sworn, if secret, ally of this Napoleon, the scourge of the world,' the sitting member, Sir John (i.e. Sir John Anstruther, the local laird) went on to say, in his great speech on the Tolbooth stair, amidst the deafening hurrahs of old and young; but, without one thought of politics, resolved only to do their duty to their King and country, the fishermen embarked in the fleet."

Before long the Cellardyke men had won the respect and thanks of their superiors:–

"'We are kindly received by the officers, let us try to deserve it,' writes Michael Doig; and how well the resolution was fulfilled you see in the fact that not many days go by till they are thanked from the quarter-deck.

'The best foretopmen in the ship, by G – ,' said old Commodore Keats, as he saw those with so little to say on the deck ever foremost at brace or sheet, where the indecision of an instant might have wrecked the squadron on the thousand and one perils of the channel, till then never attempted, as any Baltic sailor will tell you, by a square-rigged ship. They were likewise the first to be "piped" away to man the boats employed to land Sir Arthur – by and by one of the heroes of all time as the Duke of Wellington – and the troops in the brilliant operations which cut off the last hope of rescue for the citizens of Copenhagen, exposed during those four days to that terrific storm of shot and shell, with the death-cry of women and children, perishing in hundreds amidst the ashes of the once happy home, hushed in the deafening thunder of the battle.

'Yes, it was a fearful sight, and I see it yet in my dreams,' David Rodger said, long years after, on the Sabbath before he and his gallant son were drowned in the Forth."

Even this jingoistic account of the seizure of the Danish fleet betrays some doubt as to the morality of the enterprise. A modern historian of Denmark, Professor W. Glyn Jones, has no such doubts:–

"Had [the British] played their cards better and been less impatient, it may well be that they would have gained what they wanted, for on the whole the Danes sympathised with their cause. But by behaving in so high-handed a manner, and by cowing the city into surrender and then taking the fleet, they made themselves the object of hatred and resentment in Denmark for a long time to come. The bombardment of Copenhagen was felt deeply by the Danes as a national humiliation, and it gave rise to an upsurge of nationalism

which ... had already been there in embryo since the domination of the court by German administrators in the middle of the eighteenth century."

It was Macdonald's misfortune to be imprisoned in Denmark during the worst winter in living memory:–

> "The harbour here (i.e. at Aalborg) has been completely frozen since the 3d instant, and the people tell me that it is the same all along the coasts of Norway, Sweden and the Danish dominions. The frost has set in five weeks earlier than usual, and that with a degree of severity unparalleled during the last hundred years."

It was typical of the man that he could not simply settle for being uncomfortable, but had to actually measure the extent of his discomfort:–

> "Reamur's thermometer stood in this house twelve degrees below the freezing point at two this morning, and sixteen degrees in the northern exposure on the outside of the house. The ice is already in many places from eight to fourteen inches thick, and on this arm of the sea, with a *strong current* and *salt water*, loaded carts are going in all directions. The cold is much more intense that I ever experienced in the British Isles."

But at least it was a benign captivity. At midnight on December 9th Macdonald noted in his diary that he had just returned from supper with, among others, General Bardenfleth and his staff; adding complacently: "I have now several invitations from different gentlemen of this town, and shall have some opportunities of hearing the national opinions and prejudices."

On the 16th, he tells us he is waiting for a reply to a petition he has sent to the King of Denmark, but it seems that some bungling civil servant has lost his confiscated papers. There is a decided testiness of tone as he complains that the prices of "the common necessaries of life" in Aalborg are "as bad as London, or even worse."

This passage is followed by some sarcastic comments on the patriotic fervour of the local Danish gentlemen, with an account of one in particular whom Macdonald – with breathtaking tactlessness – had managed to offend:–

> "I chanced to say in joke to a gentleman here, who perpetually annoys me with harangues on the bravery and power of the Danish nation, and is sometimes absolutely rude in his comparisons of his

countrymen with the British, that no serious analogy could be drawn between the two states, for they were as wide of one another in political existence, as the fly is from the elephant or the whale in the animal kingdom."

The gentleman in question had become quite livid, Macdonald noted with mild surprise, adding "[The incident] taught me more caution for the future, in venturing to joke with people who have neither delicacy to spare the feelings of others, nor sense to moderate their own."

The copy of Macdonald's *Travels* read for this article was formerly in the possession of the Advocates' Library, and some of the page margins contain amusing comments of a pejorative nature. At this particular passage the pencilled scrawl in the margin reads: "You sh^{d} have been kicked for your impertinence M^{r} McD." One is forced to concur with the anonymous critic.

Our "hero" led a charmed life for a so-called "prisoner-of-war". He had been "at two balls and evening entertainments", he noted for posterity, "and upon the whole was tolerably well amused." The local belles would have been less amused if they could have read their Scottish guest's strictures on them, for Mr. Macdonald had decided that the Aalborg women "... want that elegant and easy mode of address, which so conspicuously adorns the fair sex in England, Sweden, Germany and France." The "lower class" of females in particular took great pains to conceal any charms they had from the casual observer:–

"They are not only wrapped up, but literally screwed or twisted in, from the hips to the nose, in innumerable volumes of cloth and linen; and below the waist, they are of such a tremendous bulk, that at a distance they look like moving hogsheads."

Macdonald found it hard to imagine how Danish babies were breast-fed, "... for the pressure on the parts in question must certainly impede the circulation and secretion of the fluids, which are so essentially necessary to the health both of mother and child."

The local men were tolerably well-dressed, except for their clumsy-looking clogs, to which Macdonald devoted three pages of invective. Though assured by those who wore them that they were "warm and cheap", Macdonald was not to be convinced. The ungainly footwear certainly did not improve the military prowess of the Jutlanders:–

"They have ... given the natives such a drawling, hobbling, duck-like walk, that officers whose business it is to drill the North Jutland

regiments of infantry complain bitterly of the difficulty of their task. Even after their men get shoes and boots of the common kinds from Government, they still retain their old habits of dragging their feet transversely, and they must be drilled for years before they can decently be exhibited and reviewed with other troops."

To their clogs alone, Macdonald concluded, "... may be attributed the general sluggishness perceptible in all the operations of this people", adding: "Were I king of Denmark, I would lay a heavy tax on them, and give a bounty for leather tanned with the bark of the wood, which is so abominably wasted in the manufacture of them."

This is quintessential Macdonald; and not only in the *Travels* but also in the later study of agriculture in the Scottish Highlands he is at his most querulously impatient when coming up against the brick wall of entrenched custom and comfortable, ancestor-hallowed tradition. How *could* people be so blinkered as to reject his eminently sensible schemes for their advancement? To those of us who have learned to be fashionably cynical about "progress", and correspondingly sentimental about the pre-industrial past, Macdonald appears as an insufferably arrogant prig; but this is to do him an injustice. He was in fact a classic product of an age of enlightenment which promulgated the notion that things did not *have* to stay as bad as they had always been in the past. By the application of intellect and energy, and freed from the mental shackles of religion at its most stiflingly dogmatic, Man's condition could actually be improved. James Macdonald was not always right – for one thing, the Scandinavian clog, in its stylish modern manifestations, continues to flourish and to attract admirers even from this side of the North Sea! – but his "improving" suggestions for the world at large were at least inspired by altruistic motives and securely grounded in logic and good sense.

On December 21st Macdonald noted that General Bardenfleth had advised him to make his way to Nyborg in Funen, there to await a reply to his petition to the King. Nyborg was convenient for the Elsinore – Hälsingborg ferry, the only possible passage to Sweden at that time of the year. But this still lay some time in the future. In the meantime, Macdonald was delighted by a chance encounter with a fellow-countryman:–

"Walking round town this morning, I met a farmer much superior in equipage and dress to the common peasantry of this country, and entered into conversation with him. He had the Banffshire accent as strong as if he had yesterday left Cullen. I therefore addressed him in Lowland Scotch, in which he answered me with evident satisfaction. His father came to this country forty years ago, and remained in

Jutland until he acquired an independency, part of which he left to his son here, and with the rest he has removed to Zeeland, and become a great farmer and proprietor of land."

The farmer's name was Ogilvy, and his farm lay some three and a half miles south-east of Aalborg. One of his neighbours had tried to introduce "Scotch farming and Scotch servants", but "... both he and ... Mr. Ogilvy complain much of the stupidity and inveterate prejudice of their neighbours." Clearly Mr. Ogilvy belonged to that enterprising band of Scottish farmers who had recently revolutionised their country's agriculture, to the extent that historians now talk with hindsight of the Scottish Agricultural Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By the year 1830, according to T.C. Smout: "Scotland had an agrarian society broken into sharply defined classes of capitalist farmers and landless labourers, carrying on a sophisticated agricultural system with a flexible and empirical attitude towards new techniques which was the envy of Europe. This was the agricultural revolution, the great divide which meant the end of rural life as it had been lived since time immemorial, and the beginning of rural life as it has been lived ever since."

Mr. Ogilvy's couthy Banffshire accent, together with his comments on the Jutland peasantry, suggest that he had learned his farming back home in the north-east of Scotland rather than in his family's adopted homeland.

On page 94 Macdonald tells us, with unusual modesty: "I am not ... as yet sufficiently acquainted with the rural or political economy of this province to state any thing decisively on the subject." This is followed by about ten pages of detailed and largely derogatory comment on the local agriculture, and the peasants who practice it. There has been some little progress, to be sure – e.g. in the cultivation of bent-grass to prevent sand-drift, and the abandonment of runrig in favour of larger farms – but "the want of books on the rural economy of Denmark is a disgrace to the nation", and the available agricultural implements are so derisory "that they deserve no mention." Macdonald is also scathing about the Danish custom of yoking three or four horses abreast to pull a heavy load: further proof of peasant obscurantism:–

"This is, by the way, an ancient custom of yoking horses, and holds to this day in many parts of Europe and the East. It furnishes a proof, if any proof were wanting, of what I have already remarked, that many habits, however generally followed and obstinately retained, are neither founded in utility, reason, nor expediency. To a man accustomed to see the improved British mode of applying the power of draught cattle, nothing can be more distressing than to witness the

laborious tugging, opposite pulling and ill-directed exertions of the generous and abused animals."

One is constantly reminded, while reading passages like this one, that James Macdonald M.A., the scholar and academic, was also the product of a farming background and in every respect a very typical "lad o' pairts": to use a hackneyed and rather discredited epithet. Although the scholar and the practical man of affairs were later to become very distinct beings, to say nothing of the gulf which would develop in academic circles between the arts man and the man of science, these would have seemed very limited and narrow-minded parameters to Macdonald's generation, which included the clerical authors of the first Statistical Account. If he often appears to be overbearingly knowledgeable and opinionated on every subject under the sun, perhaps we ought to re-examine our own predilection for specialization rather than cavil at James Macdonald's unselfconscious polymathy.

The misuse of draught horses seems to have really rankled with Macdonald:–

"Should he, however, attempt to explain to the Jutlander, or the Brandenburgher, the absurdity of condemning a horse to draw sideways, when he might be made to draw lengthways, with at least one-third more power, he must expect either to be laughed at, or to hear the old jargon, 'You have one way, we have another as our fathers had, and we think it the best.'"

The gentlemen, he concluded, were no better for not prevailing on their servants to drive their animals "in the British and rational manner". It was presumably also their fault that the recently-introduced Spanish sheep were so badly kept, that the locally-produced cloth was "wretched" and the Jutland cheese was "beyond comparison the worst I have ever seen."

Macdonald found that the peasants were resentful of the policy of forced conscription, but Britain's high-handed treatment of the Danes had helped them overcome their scruples:–

"They all have the idea that the war with England could not have been avoided, and firmly believe that we began it merely to obtain possession of their fleet, and keep to ourselves the Danish ships and property which have been sold, or are detained in our ports. Hence they all, without exception, look upon us as robbers, and frequently make no ceremony of calling us so, without any notion of our taking such a compliment amiss."

Macdonald's purpose here is to make us share his outrage at these wounding allegations of British perfidy, but in the process he throws some interesting light on our conduct of the war against Napoleon, as seen from the viewpoint of a once-friendly European neighbour. Incidentally, it will be noticed that Macdonald – the proud Hebridean and keen Gaelic scholar – is the perfect North Briton in his use of "England" and "English" when referring to his native land. Also, it is rather amusing to witness his indignation at the insults of his Danish captors, given his own fondness for insulting them.

The standard of living of the Danish officer corps had recently declined, according to Macdonald, and commissions were now granted "without discrimination to men from the inferior orders of society." The devaluing of the military profession was a serious matter for the aristocracy in Denmark, for in that "unlimited, despotic, continental monarchy" only the army and the church were considered suitable professions for the younger sons of landed families, whereas in Great Britain they did not scorn the professions, farming or even trade.

Macdonald next turns his attention to the currency of Jutland, which is the same as that in other parts of Denmark. In Aalborg, however, coinage was simply unobtainable:–

> "You cannot procure any coin in Aalborg; all is grey paper dollars; and if you go into a shop to buy a pennyworth of bread, or a glass of brandy, you must either leave a paper dollar in deposit, or purchase at different times, or of other things, what will amount to its value."

As a result, the peasants were hoarding all the silver and copper coins they could get.

We have already encountered James Macdonald's prejudices regarding the Jutland peasantry. On page 112-3 he returns to the attack:–

> "The Jutlanders are not a handsome race, but the men are tall and tolerably good-looking, though in general in-kneed, and slender in the limbs. The fair sex (as they may certainly be called, on account of their hair and complexion, which are white even to insipidity) are not so handsome in proportion as the men. Young girls, middle-aged, and old women, use the same kind of dress, so that it requires some more attention than, perhaps, an uncomplaisant stranger will give himself of paying, to distinguish between a woman of sixteen and sixty."

Our anonymous critic has bracketed these last few lines in the National

Library copy of the *Travels*, adding the single word "fool"!

To give him credit, Macdonald goes on to say that the women are "uncommonly good-humoured and obliging", with "true feminine softness of manners, and sweetness of disposition". It would be interesting to know how this intimate knowledge of Jutland's womenfolk was acquired.

Tribute is also paid to General Bardenfleth and his staff, as well as to the "principal merchants and citizens" of Aalborg, who have ensured that British prisoners in Aalborg jail have been well treated. But Macdonald was incensed by rumours that Danish prisoners had been ill-treated by the British and by Denmark's "auld enemy" across the Sound:–

> "All the indignation I expressed at hearing such abominable calumnies against two of the most magnanimous nations in the world produced not the slightest effect. The Danes actually believe the very worst that they hear of our nations, and especially of Sweden; of which country their hatred seems to be deep-rooted and implacable."

Those who claim that bad feeling between Denmark and Sweden in recent times is simply a legacy of World War II are clearly mistaken.

At last the day came to set off, under escort still, for Zealand. On the evening of December 22nd they reached Hobroe, a village about 30 miles from Aalborg, and Macdonald lost no time in bringing his diary up-to-date. The little party had foolishly omitted to bring a supply of food with them, and none was to be had in the villages. Macdonald's chivalrous notions of the "uncommonly good-humoured and obliging" fairer sex did not, it seems, extent as far as the average Jutish landlady:–

> "It seems likely, from the appearance of my landlady, that I shall get nothing till ten; and even at that late hour, I am promised only a bit of cold veal re-warmed, and some rye bread, the universal food of the Peninsula. It is impossible to conceive the apathy and frozen indifference of the Danish landlady, in a country village."

Like most of us, Macdonald was always at his most charitable when well fed and watered, and in other respects as comfortable as circumstances made possible. It is debatable whether a similar party to his own would have received a heartier welcome in the wilds of England or Scotland some dark, cold December evening: but such thoughts do not seem to have occurred to him.

On the 23rd they reached Randers, "a neat little town, containing 4,600 inhabitants." They had been forbidden to travel by way of Aarhus, for reasons which elicited a typically sarcastic response from Macdonald:–

> "The reason is, that at Aarhus, which is a considerable sea-port town, containing 4,300 souls, there is a battery, and they are afraid, forsooth, that we should take the battery, or at least make some dangerous discoveries."

Two days later, on Christmas Day, they came to Vejle, where Macdonald was impressed by the many tumuli which littered the barren landscape. Surprisingly, the local people seemed to have no trustworthy traditions regarding them:–

> "The Danes have no answer when asked about them, but that they were made long, long ago, perhaps at the creation. ... Some have been levelled of late years, ... and it is said that arms and ancient coins have been found in them, and likewise human skeletons in stone coffins; but by a singular fatality in inquiry, I have not been able with all my patience and activity, to meet one person who has actually seen these objects. Nor are any arms or skeletons so discovered, preserved in any cabinets of curiosities, or in any other repository of which I can hear."

On the subject of Vejle itself, Macdonald was unusually effusive. It lay in "one of the loveliest situations that can be imagined", and would have been reckoned romantic even in Upper Austria or Switzerland.

The next entry in his diary is headed "Middelfahrt, in the Island of Funen, (pronounced Feeyn,) 26th December 1808." The journey from the mainland had been accomplished by packet-boat, and had not been without incident. Noting that the boat was dangerously overcrowded, Macdonald had as usual been unable to keep his opinions to himself, and had upbraided the owner of the boat, who swore " ... that he knew his duty, and would perform it, in spite of all the arrogant English in the universe; that I ought to recollect I was not now in England, but in Denmark; and that I should do well to remember my situation, and not put on any bullying airs."

But James Macdonald was never more lordly than when insulted by a foreigner. In England, he retorted, " ... if a man wearing a king's uniform used ungentlemanly language to a prisoner, he would be ruined in his character, and scorned by every one as a coward, who availed himself of his accidental power to add insult to misfortune, and to threaten those in his own country whom he would not elsewhere venture to look in the

face."

One feels for the poor boatman, who "ran on shore with horrid imprecations against myself and my *murderous* countrymen."

At Middelfahrt, Macdonald learned from his landlord of the hatred still felt there for the French who had been billeted on the townspeople. The Spanish troops had been much better behaved, and were correspondingly more popular.

On 27th December Macdonald arrived at Odense, and two hours later he sat down to write his diary. The island of Funen was certainly more productive than Jutland, but its fertility had been greatly exaggerated, he concluded. It was not as advanced agriculturally as the duchy of Holstein, to say nothing of the English counties. Also, the locals were foolish enough to grow rye, " ... a species of grain the culture of which it would perhaps be advisable to forbid in every country where any thing else will grow." There was very few dykes to be seen, and the few drains in evidence were "miserably ill made". As with most other subjects, Macdonald was no mean expert on drainage:–

> "Instead of our mode of forming a passage for the water, by building the bottom and sides carefully with stones, and securing the roof of the drain from falling in, or even from admitting any earth or sand into the channel, the Funen drains are rumbling syvers only about eight inches below the surface of the ground, and cannot be expected to remain unchoked about one or two years."

The island horses were also "miserable and unsightly", though unexpectedly hardy. But on the credit side, Funen's postilions were extremely obliging, and there was government legislation to ensure the traveller's comfort:–

> "The hour and minute of the traveller's arrival and setting off are noted down in a book kept at every post-house, and the law enjoins the driver not to keep his employer waiting above half an hour, and to travel at the rate of one Danish mile per hour. If he fail in any respect, the traveller marks his complaint in the billet which the driver must give his master on his return home with his horses.
>
> It is a convincing proof, that this check upon the post-boys is not an empty form, that I have often seen them exhibit considerable fear and anxiety when a stranger found fault with them, or used any threat. How different from the mulish Saxon and the brutal Prussian postilions!"

Odense itself was "a straggling town" of 5,400 inhabitants, which presently contained 2 infantry and 8 cavalry squadrons. According to Macdonald the self-appointed town-planning expert, the site of the town had been badly chosen, being a mile or two from the sea. The only manufacture was that of leather, especially in the form of gloves, "very far inferior to the English". Some of the monuments in the cathedral were "not inelegant", but generally speaking Macdonald had a Calvinistic dislike for funereal ostentation. The Danes were particularly blameworthy in this respect, for even the obscurest country churchyards were adorned with fine tombstones. "Is this a proof of affection for the deceased", asked the Reverend James, "or of vanity in the living? Perhaps both causes have united in this country with the constitutional melancholy of the people to produce the effect in question." If Macdonald's judgement seems a harsh one, it should be borne in mind that he came from a religious tradition which did not regard the burial of the dead as a sacrament comparable to baptism or marriage. It is perhaps just as well that he did not survive to see the vainglorious funerary monuments of late Victorian Scotland.

Macdonald's attitude to women is one of the most interesting facets of his personality. We have already seen him at his most sarcastic ("bitchiest" might be an apter word) when describing the swaddled wenches of Jutland, yet there is ample evidence to suggest that he could also draw on reservoirs of charm when the occasion demanded. He tells us as much himself when deploring the initial comfortlessness of his lodgings in Odense:–

> "My quarters here promised at first very little comfort; for when I arrived, there was nobody in the house who spoke any other language than common *peasant* Danish. In this predicament, I, as usual, had recourse to the mistress of the dwelling.
>
> It is always ten to one but what you succeed in making a woman understand you, if you have a quarter of an hour's time and a little portion of patience to explain yourself.
>
> I do not, in a case of this kind, remember one instance of a rude answer from a woman; but I have had fifty such answers, or perhaps no answer at all, from men. To the young landlady, therefore, I went, and we had not been five minutes together before she completely understood all my wants. ... I got an excellent dinner, good wine, and a clean room; and in short, fared like a prince."

The lady introduced Macdonald to her husband, who was also civil, although "his nature had not in it the amiable friendliness of his better half." One is not surprised to hear it, in the circumstances.

If Macdonald's pre-dinner constitutionals took him along Odense's

Munkemøllestraede, he may have seen shoemaker Andersen's three-year-old son Hans Christian playing outside his parents' house. In his biography of the writer, Elias Bredsdorff reminds us what exciting times those must have been for the sleepy little town:–

> "One of Andersen's earliest recollections of 1808, when he was only three, was seeing Spanish soldiers in the streets of Odense. In March of that year Denmark, as an ally of Napoleon, had declared war on Sweden, and French and Spanish auxiliary troops under the command of Marshal Bernadotte were on their way via Denmark to Sweden. As a grown-up Andersen still remembered 'the almost black-brown men', the noise they made in the streets, and cannons being fired in the market-place and in front of the bishop's palace. He also remembered how one day a Spanish soldier picked him up and pressed a silver coin he was wearing round his neck against the boy's lips – to the horror and disgust of his mother who strongly disapproved of this 'Roman Catholic nonsense'."

Despite some fine old buildings, and a sprinkling of nobles, army officers and civil servants among the population, Odense was a town where many people lived in the most abject poverty. As for the island of Fyn or Funen itself, Macdonald found it less wooded than he had expected, and thought that it resembled "the worst part of Wiltshire". He saw none of the peas and beans which were reputedly grown there; and as for the noblemen's seats, "I have seen none", he sniffed, "distinguished for size or elegance."

On December 28th James Macdonald reached Nyborg, a fortress town where foreigners' movements were restricted; and barely twenty-four hours later he was ferried across to Korsør in Zealand. The heading of his diary entry there warns the reader that he is in for another bout of testy invective!:–

> "Corsöer in Zeeland – Zealand, Sjelland, Seland, &c. &c. December 29, 1808.
>
> The name of this island is scarcely by any two persons spelt alike.
>
> After one of the most teazing and fatiguing day's work that can well be conceived, we have accomplished our passage of about nineteen or twenty English miles from Nijborg to this wretched place; and though it is now ten at night, and we have been in motion since two in the morning, we are ordered to march immediately two mortal Danish miles to a place called Slagelse. The weather is cold to excess; and it is very likely that at the place just named we shall have no lodgings prepared for us, although there being none here is the pretext urged by the commanding officer for our removal.

A prisoner, travelling in winter over Danish ferries, ought to be supplied with patience and philosophy."

Not until the following day did Macdonald feel up to describing the full horror of the ferry crossing. This time he had had the foresight to bring some food with him, in the shape of salted beef, ham and bread, together with some brandy. Then came the discovery that nowhere on the boat was there a drop of water to be had. The sailors were contentedly swigging neat spirits from their own supply, but Macdonald was unable to get his brandy down without the aid of water, and had to endure nine hours of raging thirst.

When told of the danger of crossing the Great Belt in a severe winter, he felt he had the key to the poor material development and political insignificance of Denmark:–

"What inconveniences would Britain not be subject to, were Middlesex, Kent, and Essex, with the navigation of the Thames (and these form the Zeeland of England) cut off from all intercourse with the rest of the United Kingdom for nearly half of the year? Nay, would not a Little and a Great Belt, such as I have described, dissevering Yorkshire and Lancashire (the Funen of England), or Norfolk and the corn counties (our Holstein and Jutland), from the rest of the nation, be followed by most fatal consequences to our general resources!"

The island of Sprogø seemed to offer a welcome halfway house, but it was *not* recommended by the captain:–

"It seems to be a place of such wretched accommodation, though containing a kind of royal inn and hotel, that a residence on it is become a proverbial expression, used as our Highlanders do *'Droch comhail ort'*; Evil befal you. 'May you be detained a day and two nights at Sprogoe', is tantamount to wishing a man the speediest road to the gallows."

At Slagelse Macdonald met with another "fresh and pleasing instance of female humanity":–

"The landlady having observed me retire to an adjoining room, from the noise and confusion of the room in which my fellow-travellers drank coffee, and not seeing me return, suspected what was in fact the case, that I had laid me down in the first convenient spot for sleeping. I had taken possession of an armchair, a valuable property in my situation. She found me fast asleep, and wrapped me

carefully up in pillows and cloaks (no blankets are used *in* Denmark), and put one of her warmest handkerchiefs and a cap on my head. I awoke in the morning in good health, and greatly refreshed, and felt very grateful to the unknown person who had so kindly arrayed me in my grotesque, but comfortable, habiliments. A man, I was convinced, would not have done it."

Macdonald was all the more moved to learn that this woman had lost a brother in the battle between the Danes and Sir Arthur Wellesley's forces.

If Macdonald had found Fyn disappointing, he was even less impressed by Zealand:–

"Almost all the peasants' houses are of wood, painted red, green, or yellow, raised on foundations of granite blocks, to the height of a foot and a half from the ground; betwixt which blocks and the wooden parts of the walls the wind has free entrance into three-fourths of the dwelling. The windows are small, and mostly glazed with glass panes of a blueish tinge."

Ringsted was an even poorer place than Slagelse, although it boasted a church of outsize proportions. One might think that Macdonald the man of God would have approved of this outward sign of piety, but the stern Presbyterian in him was appalled by the lax ways of the local Lutherans:–

"[The church] would, I think, be too large for the village of Ringsted, were all the horses, cows, and pigs of the place as well as the human population, to become good church-going Lutherans. The magnitude of this church struck me the more forcibly, because the people of this country do not seem very zealous devotees; but, on the contrary, pay at least to the external observances of religion very little attention. They buy and sell, and amuse themselves on Sundays, as on other week days, and very few of them frequent the churches, especially in the towns."

But the roads of Zealand were better than those almost anywhere else, thanks to obligatory peasant labour:–

"That the peasants may be kept strictly to their duty, the portion of road to be repaired by each is measured, and the initials of the peasant's name are engraved upon the piece of stone or of durable wood, and fixed in the ground beside the portion of road thus allotted him. The best proof of the efficacy of this regulation is the incomparable excellence of all these roads."

The last day of the year found Macdonald in Roskilde, musing sadly on

his fate:–

> "Little did I expect to pay it such a visit when, half a dozen years ago, I left this melancholy place, with no intention of ever seeing it again."

He was in no mood to be charitable towards the ancient burial place of Denmark's kings. The cathedral was "a mortifying disappointment", and Roskilde itself was "a poor decaying town". The monuments to the royal family were "upon the whole, as dull as can easily be conceived". The huge coffins were covered in black velvet which had become very "tattered" and "beggarly". The tassels were green, and "may be called really shabby". At this point our anonymous reader, becoming impatient with the disgruntled author, has scribbled in the margin: "Really! did you imagine velvet to have lasted for ever?"

Even the marble of the coffins failed to please, being not white but "dusky yellow", and "of a disagreeable and greasy surface".

Roskilde seemed to have been long in decline, Macdonald noted gloomily, for "the houses are almost antediluvian in form and size, the streets narrow and ill laid out, and the population is scanty." ("What is ante diluvian?", our marginal critic asks plaintively).

If Macdonald was spoiling for a fight, he did not have long to wait. When he complained to a Danish officer about the strict guard placed upon the British prisoners, the Dane retaliated with some heat. (Anon. "I dare say you met with nothing but what you deserved"). As luck would have it, Macdonald had picked on a Royal Chamberlain, no less. To punish him for his presumption the official detailed an escort to take Macdonald and his servant to Copenhagen, while the rest of the party were sent on as planned to Elsinore. Macdonald threatened to complain to the King of Denmark about this treatment, which sent the chamberlain's blood pressure soaring to new heights:–

> "I never saw a face so hideous as the gentleman's was at this moment."

This was too much for our anonymous friend, who has gleefully scrawled in the margin: "I sh^{d} have liked to have seen your own, M^{c}D."

As they approached Copenhagen Macdonald was shown the damage inflicted by the British army, and was told that "there lay the infamous batteries of the English robbers, who murdered our women and children." On reaching the capital itself, which he knew well from previous visits, he

was struck by the devastation caused by the British bombardment:–

> "On my entrance into the town, I was much struck with the number of houses which the bombardment has left in a wretchedly ruinous state, and few of which have as yet been begun to be rebuilt. The streets which are nighest to the western gate have suffered the most; some in the vicinity of the Nicolai church being almost totally destroyed; and I was informed, and *now* believe it to be no exaggeration, that two hundred and fifty houses shared that fate. It is no wonder, that persons who have this spectacle constantly before their eyes, and who are irritated by their late disasters, are exasperated against a nation, which, they believe, has attacked them unjustly."

It is as near as Macdonald has yet come to humility, and to an understanding of his unwilling hosts' feelings towards him and his fellow-countrymen.

Macdonald knew the city well enough to realize that he was not being taken to the army commandant's headquarters, as he had expected. To his dismay he was taken instead to a heavily-guarded hospital-cum-prison, where the superintendent informed him that his recent adversary, the Royal Chamberlain, had ordered him to be kept in close confinement. He was put in a stinking room fourteen feet square, where for company he had five Swedish prisoners. There were only three beds for six men.

We have already seen that Macdonald had a high opinion of the Swedes. His unfortunate fellow-prisoners soon enhanced this view by their attentions to his every need:–

> "The poor Swedes behaved with all possible affection and sympathy. I asked them for a glass of wine, and for paper, pen and ink, which they instantly gave; and I wrote the King a note in German to the following purport and likewise two other letters, to the same effect, to gentlemen at Copenhagen with whom I was formerly acquainted."

Macdonald's letter to the King concluded as follows:–

> "Your Majesty will be pleased, agreeably to your order to General V. Bardenfleth, to set me at liberty, and to punish the man who has at once persecuted a defenceless stranger, and set at defiance your Majesty's well known liberality and justice."

(One might question just how "defenceless" James Macdonald was, as

long as he had a tongue in his head and a pen somewhere to hand!).

This account of his literary efforts is soon followed by an exultant cry of relief, with the usual touch of pedantry thrown in for good measure:–

> "Copenhagen, (in Danish Kiobenhavn, pronounced Koebenhaun) Jan. 2, 1809.
>
> I may say with Young Norval, in the tragedy of Douglas,
> Eventful day,
> How hast thou changed my fate!"

About five hours after the despatch of his letters, one of the recipients, Mr. Duntzfelt, had come to see him, and had procured his release. Mr. Duntzfelt was a personal friend of the physician to the hospital, who promptly invited Macdonald to a supper party that same night, "... so that instead of pining in prison, I spent the evening until midnight, in one of the most rational and agreeable conversations I ever had in my life."

When the King expressed his displeasure at what had happened, Macdonald's cup of happiness was full and running over; and in an access of gratitude mixed with relief he retrospectively forgave all (bar one!) of the Danes he had encountered during his traumatic travels:–

> "With the exception of one individual, every Dane in an office of trust, or possessed of the education of a gentleman, had behaved towards me as I could have wished, from the moment of my being shipwrecked at the extremity of Denmark, to that in which the Sovereign gave the assurance in his metropolis, that I had nothing further to dread, and that I was free to return to my own country."

With these words we come to the end of Book 1 of James Macdonald's *Travels*. Amazingly, it was less than two months since he had set sail from Leith. Although the wheel of fortune had turned full circle again for him, there were yet more travels and traumas ahead, as we shall see in Book 2.

* * * * * * * * * * *

The second book opens a mere three days later, on January 5th 1809, and we find Macdonald in pensive mood as he waits for an opportunity to cross the ice-bound Sound to Sweden. Reflecting that the island of Zealand is "the key to the Baltic", he offers the opinion that the British – having conquered it in 1807 with the seizure of the Danish fleet – ought to have held on to it. With his usual unselfconscious chauvinism, he observes that "nine-tenths of the lower orders of the natives wish to have us for their

fellow-citizens, or if you please, their masters", and states that, in British hands, the trees, soil, horses and cattle "would be prodigiously improved in quality, and increased in numbers."

He is rather more interesting on Copenhagen, which he has obviously studied with great attention. After a résumé of the city's recent history, he comments on such aspects of the town's appearance as "the new method of turning the corners of rectangular streets":–

> "It is a very judicious and convenient one in a crowded capital. Instead of the usual right angles formed by the corners of the houses, at the extremities or divisions of streets, the builders of Copenhagen have squared them off in a semi-octangular form, and thereby secured various advantages. Carriages and horses cannot so frequently run foul of each other, or run down persons on foot at the turnings of the streets; the space gained gives a free circulation of air, and the look of as many handsome squares as there are street-divisions in the city."

Macdonald approved of the Amaliengade, which should be visited by the stranger "on account of its uncommon grandeur"; but he had stern words for the unfinished marble church at the east end of the street. Having measured one of the blocks, he was able to state that they were nine feet in diameter and twenty-seven in circumference: an immense expense. The Danes ought to have eschewed marble in favour of "our common freestone".

The Observatory and the Royal Library received their due share of praise, but Macdonald could hardly contain his contempt for the Danish missionaries to India:–

> "The Bible used by the Danish Missionaries at Tranquebar in India was shewn me. By an unaccountable stupidity, they have translated only the Old Testament, leaving in oblivion the divine morality of the Gospel!"

Here in the Royal Library James Macdonald had his first encounter with the Icelandic tongue, but his informant seems to have left him with an overly pessimistic view of that country's decline:–

> "There is an extensive collection of manuscripts in the Icelandic tongue, written between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Contrary to my expectation, I found a considerable analogy betwixt that language and the Danish. They were certainly of the same origin, and were once the language of one and the same people.

It is melancholy to view the decay, and to anticipate the destruction of any people. Iceland, which once contained, as I am credibly informed, half a million of inhabitants, in a high state of civilization, and of comfort, is now reduced to a tenth part of that population, who are known to exist in a condition of progressive degradation, both corporeal and intellectual.

Their literature has departed, and that so totally, that the natives do not know of its former existence. The arts and sciences have abandoned their frozen coasts, and left nothing behind, but penury and ignorance, desolation and death."

These are extraordinary claims that Macdonald makes. To be sure, the early years of the nineteenth century were hardly a Golden Age of Icelandic literature, but in retrospect they marked the transition from the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century to the National Romanticism of the eighteen-twenties. *Pace* Macdonald, the last few years had seen a flood of popular scientific writing in Icelandic, and an accompanying spurt of translations from a variety of European languages. Far from forgetting their mediaeval heritage, contemporary writers such as Eggert Ólafsson, Benedikt Gröndal, Jón Þorlákssson, Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Jón Espólín saw nothing anachronistic in adapting for their own purposes the metres and complex diction of the skalds (Eggert Ólafsson), the *fornyrðislag* of the Edda (Benedikt Gröndal, Jón Þorlákssson), or the narrative style of the sagas (Jón Espólín).

Eggert Ólafsson's brother Jón Ólafsson Svefneyingur (1731-1811) had published the first modern treatise on Old Icelandic poetry in 1786. Another contemporary, Magnús Stephensen, has been described by Snaebjörn Jónsson as "an unusually versatile writer and the most eminent man of his nation" ("óvenjulega fjölhaefur rithöfundur og hinn mesti nysemdarmaður þjóð sinni".) But as James Macdonald pored over Icelandic manuscripts in Copenhagen's Royal Library in the winter of 1809, he had no way of knowing of this ferment of literary activity in the faraway island of Iceland. One suspects that his informant on this occasion was a Danish scholar with little knowledge of or respect for this poorest of Denmark's colonies. It is fascinating to speculate what James Macdonald himself would have made of the contemporary state of Iceland had he been able to include it in his itinerary.

With unusual modesty, Macdonald forebore to comment on the merits or otherwise of Danish literature, claiming that he had too imperfect a command of the language. Enlightened Danes to whom he had spoken on the subject were inclined to be disparaging about it, and for once he was sufficiently prudent to say neither yea nor nay in response.

He was more inclined to be opinionated on the subject of whether or not Denmark ought to set about rebuilding the navy which had been decimated by the British, warning that the biggest fleet she could afford would bankrupt the country, and would still be inadequate to withstand the British, French or Russian fleet. There follows a detailed statistical breakdown of Denmark's population, land and resources, with an account of the ruinous effects of the war to date. But Danish patriotism is very strong, he notes, with unpopular legislation invariably attributed to the government alone, and the king absolved of all blame. Denmark has many natural advantages, not least the extensive coastline of Norway:–

> "In possession of Norway, Zeeland, and the Isles, she will be a respectable Power both on account of her commanding natural position, so often mentioned, and likewise of the character of her people.
>
> The Norwegians are unquestionably as virtuous, brave, and worthy a people as any in the world. Their country cannot be attacked with advantage by any enemy; or, in other words, its conquest will cost more than the result of such conquest can benefit the captors.
>
> The natives of Zeeland and the other Isles, though not so well liked by us, or perhaps by their neighbours, as the Norwegians, are much the same in point of civilization, activity, and wealth, as the other Northern European tribes; but they have in a conspicuous degree the spirit of nationality and patriotism which is so effectual a support of national independence."

A few days later, Macdonald was safe in friendly Sweden. On January 12th., in Hälsingborg, he wrote:–

> "Being now on Swedish ground, I feel myself at full liberty to write what I please, without any dread of being persecuted for my opinions, or of being deprived of my papers."

Macdonald's always ambivalent attitude towards his Danish captors had not been improved by his enforced eight-day stay in Elsinore, where he had had to wait for a ferry across the ice-bound Öresund. A map of Denmark which he had bought in Aalborg, and on which he had kept a record of his route through the country, had been confiscated by the Danish police, "with an admonition of a very serious kind." To the last the Danish authorities seemed bent on regarding him as a dangerous spy, to his undisguised scorn.

There follows a section which the aforesaid authorities would most certainly have taken exception to, in which Macdonald gives a detailed

description of Elsinore, "one of the most bustling little towns in Europe", and of the local shore batteries and the number and size of the local gunboats.

Macdonald was forcibly struck by the differences between the Danes and the Swedes:–

> "The animosity betwixt the two countries is greater than I had conceived possible, considering the long duration of peace between them – a great misfortune to both.
>
> A stranger must be a good deal struck with the difference of appearance, which the people, and more especially the military, exhibit to each side of the Sound. The Swedes have, in general, sallow complexions, dark skins, discontented faces, a melancholy drawling accent, are fond of yellow and blue colours, and are a tall, athletic-looking race of men. ... The Danes, on the other hand, delight in red and purple colours, have blooming complexions, round faces of good colour, but not much expression, smooth good skins, talk in a barking Buchan, Aberdeenshire accent, and are neither so tall, nor of so athletic an appearance as the Swedes."

Although Macdonald had felt like kissing the ground on reaching Sweden, his critical faculty was not long in abeyance. Hälsingborg, with its two thousand inhabitants, had "a bad harbour, a scanty trade", and was "of very little importance in any point of view." Much more interesting was the nearby watering-place of Ramlösa, which in summer was "usually frequented by great numbers of invalids, or idle fashionables, from Denmark and Sweden."

A local aristocrat, Count Ruth, had opened up a colliery and a pottery to give the locals some employment, but "had very up-hill work with such new manufactures and operations in this country."

Macdonald next offers some sound advice for travellers, which the modern tourist would do well to heed:–

> "I have great reason to be pleased with the custom-house officers on both sides of the Sound; for, contrary to my expectations, they searched my baggage with great politeness, and spoiled and tossed about nothing that belonged to me. Travellers have frequently themselves to blame for the incivility of these people, who may easily be prevented from every species of rudeness by a few gentle words, and by a discreet demeanour."

One of the major delights of James Macdonald's *Travels*, for this reader

at least, is the man's serene lack of self-awareness. Given the number and variety of his recent clashes with authority, and the abundant instances of his arrogance and asperity, James's advice to the traveller in Scandinavia is pretty rich!

If small change had been hard to come by in Denmark, it was quite unobtainable in Sweden, where there was no metal coinage of any kind. Only banknotes were available, in denominations ranging from the equivalent of tenpence to "some hundred pounds".

By January 14th Macdonald was at Ängelholm, where he penned an appreciative panegyric on the Swedish transport system. The roads were excellent, the horses fast and hardy, and the peasants good-natured. Some hours before a traveller set off on the next stage of his journey, a courier or *forbod*was sent on ahead to warn the next stage-house of his coming, the number of horses he would be requiring, etc. A servant from that stage-house, "a *hall-karl*, pronounced *Hoal-karl*", would then go to the peasant whose turn it was to furnish horses for that day, and would fetch them. All these people had to be paid for their services, but – Macdonald concluded – "It is, indeed, easy to satisfy them all; and I would rather pay a dozen of them than one Prussian or Saxon postilion."

On approaching Ängelholm, he had been impressed by the solid elegance of the bridge which spanned the local river. In an inn in the town he plucked up courage to ask a well-dressed young man how Ängelholm came to have a bridge as good as any in Scotland?

> "'No wonder', answered he in the Forfarshire dialect, and with eyes sparkling with pleasure, 'for I, Blackwood, from Angus-shire, in Scotland, built it; and I reckon it, without exception, the best bridge in Sweden'."
>
> "This was the sixth Scotchman I had already met with in Sweden", Macdonald continues, "which led one of my travelling companions, an Englishman, to make some remarks on the industry and sagacity of a nation, the natives of which, in every country in the world, and even in poor Sweden, distinguish themselves by a peculiar felicity in making fortunes, and rising to places of eminence and power."

Scottish-built bridges apart, the architecture Macdonald saw around him did not impress, and he thought the peasants' wooden cottages "small and paltry ... and by no means equal to those of the peasants through the greater part of the Danish dominions." As for agriculture, it was "in the rudest and most imperfect state imaginable." He seems to ignore the fact that the fields in January could hardly be expected to look their best. The stage-houses were few and far between which forced the traveller to take

his own supplies with him on the road, but it would be unreasonable to expect anything else in this part of the world. Unfortunately, there was no shortage of just such unreasonable travellers in southern Sweden, with English people in particular being rather prone to boorish behaviour in the inns: like one "gentleman" Macdonald had encountered that very day in an inn between Hälsingborg and Ängelholm. The trouble began when this individual called for a glass of water:–

> "A mild-looking, handsome girl brought him a wine-glass empty. He raised his voice in apparent anger and told her to fetch him a glass full of water. The young woman, wishing to oblige, but not understanding any more of his meaning than the word *glass*, went out of the room, and, after a considerable delay, brought him a tumbler full of Swedish brandy. The colour was the same with that of water. I shall never forget the frightful grimaces which he made on swallowing the first drop of this horrible beverage. In the utmost fury and horror, like a man convinced of being poisoned, he dashed the glass and brandy against the ground, and, with an oath equally ludicrous and earnest, swore that the Swedes were the greatest savages, and the most incorrigible brutes in nature."

Those of us who can still remember our first encounter with Swedish "snaps" will sympathize with the unfortunate Englishman! However, James Macdonald was not the kind of man to sit by and watch while a member of the fair sex was humiliated in this way. He called back the by now thoroughly frightened girl and asked her "... in my broken Swedish to fetch a glass of *drickes-watten* (drinking-water). This she flew to do, but a bucketful of water lately drawn from the nearby well had turned into ice, which had to be melted to satisfy the importunate Englishman's thirst."

Having gone to all this trouble, the maid then quite melted the heart of her boorish taskmaster by displaying another typically Swedish characteristic:–

> " ... and she concluded by *apologizing to us for the extreme frost, and uncomfortableness of a Swedish winter*. This last was not expected by either of us; and being delivered in good Swedish, with great sweetness, and with somewhat of a melancholy cadence, it sensibly affected my Englishman."

Many another traveller to Sweden has commented on the Swedes' propensity for belittling their country: a sign, perhaps, of a mild inferiority complex caused by their distance – in every sense of the word – from the centre of world events. A pupil of the present writer's once described his fellow-Swedes as "tysta och rädda" (quiet and timid), which certainly

seems to fit the case of this poor servant-girl who so captivated our hero in an obscure inn in Skåne.

The next chapter begins with the pedantic heading "Gothenburgh, Götheborg, (pronounced by the Swedes, Yaeteborgh), Feb. 22d, 1809." After a diatribe on the "meanly cultivated" countryside between Hälsingborg and Gothenburg, Macdonald returns to his bugbear of ingrained peasant stubbornness. Why do the Swedish peasants persist in building their houses out of wood when the local granite would be more durable and far more fireproof?

> "The answer is always ready, and is always given with all the modest self-sufficiency of vulgar prejudice, viz. 'that may do very well in your country, Sir, but we know better than strangers what suits Sweden, and our fore-fathers did not want common sense.'"

The neatness and cleanliness of the average peasant house was highly commendable, although he was puzzled by the extravagant fondness of both Danes and Swedes for mirrors. But his descriptive powers are at full stretch when he broaches the subject of that peculiarly Scandinavian dainty, the crispbread:–

> "The next object of attention is the family bread, consisting of thin cakes, like the oaten cakes of Scotland, and some northern English and Irish counties. These cakes are of various diameters, from ten to twenty inches, and are perforated in the middle, and suspended from the roof in rows along the sides of the ceiling, by ropes or willow twigs run through the perforation in their centre.
>
> These cakes are hard and tough, of a dark brown colour, composed of two-thirds rye, and one third oats, or sometimes, in the better provinces, one third wheat, and are baked only *once* a year."

These crispbreads were not to the taste of the average English traveller, but Macdonald of course had no trouble with them:–

> "An Englishman is seldom able to swallow this kind of bread; but I myself have found no inconvenience from it, further than the severe labour to which it condemns the teeth."

The suspended rounds of crispbread reminded Macdonald that Swedish infants seemed to have no objection to being swaddled in bandages "like cylindrical wicker baskets", and hung up on the wall like an old coat:–

> "They are suspended from pegs in the wall, or laid in any convenient part of the room, without much nicety, where they exist in great silence, and good humour. I have not heard the cries of a

child since I came to Sweden. How different from the horrible squabbling, so often the annoyance of Scottish inns!"

Clearly Swedish equanimity and self-control were inculcated at an early age!

As for the female sex, they passed muster with Macdonald, despite lacking the generous proportions he obviously preferred in his women:–

"The women may, in general, be called handsome, though they are rather lean, and their bosoms rarely display that charming luxuriance which is so conspicuous in the sex, in Germany and France."

He also has an interesting comment on the intonation of the local speech:–

"Their accent in speaking, is melancholy in the highest degree, and approaches to the singing cadence of the Highlanders of Argylshire, in Scotland."

Macdonald remarks that while the upper classes in Sweden are not markedly different from their counterparts elsewhere, "the peasants are universally allowed to be the most innocent and harmless in Europe." Their houses had no locks on the doors, which stood open day and night. However, he was sorry to note the high degree of illiteracy among the peasants: far worse than in Denmark and Germany. In addition, the young noblemen, landed proprietors and military officers were "miserably deficient in those branches of knowledge to which in the aggregate we commonly give the title of liberal education."

But this was not James Macdonald's severest stricture on the privileged classes in Sweden. Deeply conservative politically, and imbued as he was with the Highlander's ingrained respect for the concept of chieftainship, he was troubled by the cynicism and seeming disloyalty he encountered there:–

"There is a great deal of the disposition among them which disgraced Scotland during the reign of the Stewarts, before her union with England; I mean a sour spirit of disloyalty, pride, and discontent, of venality and faction among the higher orders, and of indifference or despair among the peasantry."

Swedish trade had suffered since the outbreak of the Continental war, and the Swedes were disposed to blame England for this rather than

France or Denmark. They were nostalgic for their former alliance with France, distrustful of "England" (Macdonald's usual way of referring to Britain), and contemptuous of their own king and government:–

> "In most companies here, when the majority are natives, a studied silence, bordering on the contemptuous, is observed, every time the King's health is proposed by an Englishman, or when any allusion chances to be made to his person and administration."

But this was very much a middle- and upper-class trait, and Macdonald was gratified to observe that the lower orders "partake of the habitual or mechanical loyalty which we generally find among their equals in all ancient monarchies." Their main vice, he concluded, was drunkenness, for he had seen more people intoxicated with ardent spirits in Sweden in one month than he had seen in the Austrian Empire in fifteen months.

James Macdonald was a prescient observer of the political scene, for a little over a fortnight later King Gustaf IV Adolf was placed under arrest by a group of military men and civil servants led by General Adlercreutz. The monarch's refusal to open peace negotiations with the enemy, and his determination to fight to the last man to win back Finland from the Russian invader, had brought Sweden to the brink of civil war. On the 29th of March he abdicated in favour of his uncle, Duke Karl, and began what would be a long and sordid exile in various parts of mainland Europe. Rather like our own Bonnie Prince Charlie, Gustaf was to end up as an alcoholic misanthrope, alienated from his wife, and notorious for his series of fleeting affairs with a variety of women friends. It was as plain "Colonel Gustafsson" that he died in an inn at Sankt Gallen in Switzerland in 1837.

But all this lay far in the future in 1809. James Macdonald's personal view was that the monarch was much misunderstood and misrepresented, and that his subjects were too prone to believe what they read in the French press:–

> "The great rabble of Northern Europe are entirely guided by the sentiments expressed twenty times a week by the French official and minor newspapers, and repeated with servile adulation by the four hundred miserable gazettes of prostrate Germany. The very words of the Moniteur are heard respecting the King of Sweden, even from the lips of his own subjects; and are retailed with all the *sang-froid* of malice, and the insufferable impertinence of self-sufficient complacency for having uttered them."

The king's only crime, he considered, was to have understood the significance of the French Revolution only too well. There follows a list of

all the king's measures to modernize and improve his country, along with sideswipes at the less worthy rulers of Sweden's neighbours.

Macdonald's reflections on the state of Sweden, and his exhaustive account of every aspect of life in contemporary Gothenburg, are far too long and detailed to go into here. The city had some fine buildings, but its inns and theatres were lamentable. The sole bookshop in the city was closed all day except for the dinner-hour, when the worthy owner returned briefly from his main employment in a counting-house.

James Macdonald had a positive genius for damning with faint praise, and this talent is nowhere more evident than when he tells us that the traveller in this city, as long as he remembers that he is in a society of agents and brokers, and as long as he does not look for "erudition, comprehension, enlightened views of human society, or of general history ... a profound knowledge of the sciences or an intimate acquaintance with the belles-lettres ... will enjoy himself moderately well in Gothenburgh society(!)"

Britons who have experienced the literalmindedness of modern Swedes regarding punctuality (an invitation for 8 p.m. *means* exactly that!) will be pleased to learn that even in 1809 it was "not reckoned vulgar to be punctual to the hour of appointment."

As usual, Macdonald was more appreciative of the local women than of their menfolk, the women having "more reading, elegance, and even more knowledge of the world, and much better address in company ... Their expressions and faces, their eyes, gait, and movements, betoken kindness; and I think there is something very engaging even in the melancholy cadence and long protracted articulation of their voices."

Macdonald the pedant and polymath becomes very engaging and human himself in such passages, which remind us that he had left behind a young bride in Scotland. The note of wistfulness which creeps in whenever he is describing the attractive women he came across probably conceals a fair amount of erotic and emotional frustration. It would be nice to imagine that he allowed himself the occasional fling, but such lapses would have been very out of character for such a moral and upright man as James Macdonald. He was evidently the very antithesis of what in modern parlance we might call the "macho male", who boasts of his conquests and generally treats women as objects for his gratification. The women of Gothenburgh "enjoyed" a rather dubious reputation, largely because of the lurid stories about them retailed by the city's menfolk. Macdonald's attitude to this scandal-mongering is refreshingly enlightened and modern in tone, and does him great credit:–

"Here ... as in other places, I have generally found that nine-tenths of the reports are lies, and that of the remaining tenth part, those very men who brag most loudly of being concerned in it, are generally very innocent."

With regard to Sweden in her present hour of crisis, Macdonald concluded that things were not as bad as some commentators made out, and he counselled against overestimating the importance of the loss of Finland: a remote and poverty-stricken land which was of little benefit to Sweden. It was to be hoped that Sweden and Britain would soon settle their differences:–

"The same heroism which, a century ago, made her the terror and admiration of the North, still exists in her remote valleys, and may yet display scenes similar to those of Lützen and Narva. Let Britain, therefore, not despise her because she is now poor, nor abandon her because she is now unfortunate. The present fever cannot last long. It is her interest and ours to be friends, and that interest will sooner or later induce her and Denmark to forget every past cause of irritation, and to return to their ancient connections and relations with this country."

Meanwhile, what of young Macdonald of Clanranald, whose infatuation with Mrs. Hall had led to James Macdonald's setting out for Sweden in the first place? Although he does not mention the fact in his *Travels*, he had written a letter on the subject to the British Minister at Stockholm shortly after his arrival at Gothenburg. By that time, Clanranald had left the city, intending to return in the near future and consummate his marriage plans with the fair Constance. Approaches were made behind the scenes to the Swedish government, who reluctantly agreed to forbid the marriage when the time came. In the event this proved unnecessary, as absence – in this case – failed to make the heart grow fonder, and Clanranald never returned to claim his beloved. Presumably there were more enticing distractions to be found at home.

James Macdonald also penned an exhaustive appreciation of the political and military state of Denmark as he had witnessed it at first hand, and forwarded it to Merry, the British Minister in the capital, who sent it on to Foreign Secretary George Canning with the comment that it was "the most accurate account he had been able to obtain of the state of affairs in Denmark." There was nothing more to detain James in Sweden, and he set out for home with a light heart.

On March 18th., at Harwich, he wrote in his diary:–

"After four days sailing from the frozen coast of poor convulsed Sweden, I find myself in the Green Isle of the Free. What a wonderful change in a few hours' time?"

He had left behind a land where winter still held sway, the rivers and canals were ice-bound, and the streets were covered with snow. Work in the fields was at a standstill. In England, the fields were green, the trees were in bud, there were cows and sheep in the open air, and "the lark sings merrily", while "the fat, well-fed children bask half naked in the genial sun, and all around is warm, charming and comfortable."

Inspired by his own rhetoric, Macdonald closes his *Travels* with a burst of patriotic fervour:–

"Oh, may no daemon of Discontent, no fiend, blasting the nations with political rancour, or the maddening spirit of faction, ever make us forget our precious advantages! Firm as the rocks of our sea-girt isle, which withstand the tempests and the waves, may our hearts repel every attack of every enemy; and may we always remember, that as to us much has been given, so of us also shall much be required."

* * * * * * * * * * *

On April 18th 1809 James Macdonald sent the manuscript of his *Travels* to the publisher Richard Phillips of Blackfriars. The covering letter which went with it was included as a preface in the printed edition, and it shows that Macdonald, once safely back in his own country, was quick to forget the insults and injuries he had suffered in captivity. Indeed, his remarks about his Danish captors are commendably conciliatory, and were obviously designed to avert the danger of retribution being visited on those Britons still languishing in Danish prisons:–

"I have committed to paper my own opinions, and those of persons with whom I conversed, in the countries just mentioned; and I have done it with frankness and impartiality, and with the feelings of a man who, in an hour of misfortune, experienced equally from the enemies and the allies of his country, the humanity of Christians and the kindness of friends; and who, after five different journies through various parts of the continent of Europe, has at last written, without assistance of a single paper, or a single book, the observations made on the spot upon what he saw and felt during a period peculiarly eventful to the kingdoms to which his Journal refers. ... I have only to add, as another motive for publishing what to many readers may appear uninteresting, that the treatment

experienced from the Danes by myself, and my fellow-sufferers, as well as by the survivors of the crew of his Majesty's late ship the Crescent, imposes it upon me as a duty to give all possible publicity to circumstances so honourable to that nation, and which may eventually soften the spirit of mutual hostility, which at present subsists between the two countries, and procure for the Danish prisoners in Britain as kind a treatment as the circumstances of the time permit."

Macdonald never recovered from the stress and strain of his travels in Scandinavia, and died barely a year after his return to these shores. But it was a year filled with activity, as he strove to complete his *General View of the Agriculture of the Hebrides*, for which he had done field work in 1808, and to write from scratch two articles for Sir David Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*. Of the *General View*, the Victorian scholar J. Donaldson wrote: "No better report has ever appeared on any special subject and it stamps the author as a superior person." Macdonald's father-in-law Principal Playfair of St. Andrews considered that it far surpassed Pennant's account of the Hebrides. In general it is a sober work of detached scientific observation, but occasionally there creeps in the impatient tone of the Macdonald we knew so well in Denmark and Sweden. Commenting on the cultivation of the soil in the Hebrides, he promises to give his suggestions for improved management in the proper place, "... without paying much deference to the causes commonly urged by the natives, of the present neglected appearance of their country, – or to the reasons which they are pleased to assign, for what we conceive to be nothing else but the perverseness of prejudice, and the obstinacy of rude and ancient habits."

The two articles for the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* were on the Bavarian city of Augsburg, and the state of Austria. In a footnote to the latter article, Brewster spoke of his friend Macdonald as "a gentleman who was distinguished by the extent of his learning and the native acuteness and vigour of his mind", and commented sadly that he had looked forward to having his assistance with later parts of the *Encyclopaedia*.

James Macdonald died in Edinburgh on April 18th 1810, and was buried four days later in the grave of his old teacher, Professor James Robertson, in St. Cuthbert's churchyard. In life, like many another notable Scot, he had been a seething mass of contradictions. A staunch "North Briton" apparently devoid of anti-English sentiment, he was also a patriotic Highlander with all his race's fierce loyalty to the clan chief. Provokingly haughty and arrogant in the face of officialdom at its most officious, he could be the personification of charm in female company, and the "melancholy cadences" of a pretty Swede could disarm him completely.

Though we may smile at his frequent discomfitures, he is never ludicrous, and preserves his dignity intact through every tribulation. Intelligent, knowledgeable, practical, opinionated, thrawn and sentimental by turn, James Macdonald was a quintessential Scot who rather puts one in mind of the late Hugh MacDiarmid. But for his early death, he might have become one of the great men of his age, and it is high time his reputation was rescued from the undeserved obscurity into which it has sunk.

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