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### Macpherson's Fragments Of Ancient Poetry and Lord Hailes

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Leiden.

A. A. PRINS.

## Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* and Lord Hailes

When John Home returned to Edinburgh from Moffat in the autumn of 1759, taking with him James Macpherson's supposed translations from Gaelic poetry for Hugh Blair's reading, he took the first step in introducing Macpherson to the literary society of Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> The Edinburgh *literati*

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the Poems of Ossian.* (Edinburgh, 1805) Appendix IV, pp. 56-69. (This work hereinafter referred to as *Report 1805*.) The letters from Hugh Blair, Adam Fergusson, and Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, along with the note from John Home, are the basis of all later accounts of the first discovery and support of Macpherson. The best known modern accounts are those in the *Life and Letters of James Macpherson*. Bailey Saunders. London 1895. pp. 65-69; and *James Macpherson An Episode in Literature*. J. S. Smart. London. 1905. pp. 87-95. (hereinafter referred to as *Smart*.)

were stimulated to examine the manuscript translations of the unknown Highland tutor by the eager enthusiasm of the learned divine,<sup>2</sup> and they were largely converted to Blair's belief that here was a literary find of the first importance before the appearance in print of Macpherson's first slim volume of translations, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Galic or Erse language.*<sup>3</sup> With the inspiring thought of a national epic, worthy of comparison with the work of Homer, spurring them on, the literary men of Edinburgh took practical steps to ensure that Macpherson continued his work of collecting and translating, and individuals such as Lord Hailes, David Hume and John McGowan aroused interest in the work in England by writing enthusiastic letters to literary friends concerning the discoveries.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this article is to state precisely the important dual role played by Sir David Dalrymple, best known by his legal title of Lord Hailes,<sup>5</sup> in the popularisation and support of James Macpherson. Hailes stood a little apart from the others who interested themselves in this project. He was on bad terms with David Hume,<sup>6</sup> for though they were both historians, the young lawyer was a devout Christian and disapproved of Hume's atheism. Hailes's correspondence with Adam Smith, William Robertson and Hugh Blair was polite rather than cordial.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Hugh Blair*. R. M. Schmitz. (New York. 1948.) p. 46 et seq. Schmitz gives a concise readable account of Blair's enthusiastic support of Macpherson.

<sup>3</sup> This slim volume appeared in June 1760, and was printed by Hamilton and Balfour, Edinburgh. 'Macpherson's Ossian; A Contribution towards a Bibliography.' G. F. Black. *New York Public Library Bulletin* Vol. XXX. pp. 424-39.; 508-24. gives a full list of editions of the *Fragments* volume.

<sup>4</sup> John McGowan, the Edinburgh antiquarian and correspondent of Shenstone, was responsible for one fruitful line of contact with England. He sent two copies of the *Fragments* to Shenstone, and he told him in a letter of the scheme to rescue a Scottish epic. cp. *The Letters of William Shenstone*. ed. M. Williams. (Oxford 1934.) p. 556. and *Smart*. p. 97. fn. Knowledge of Macpherson's work spread to Percy, Lord Lyttelton and Mrs. Montague. The last named became a strong supporter of Macpherson. David Hume's efforts in furthering Macpherson's interests in England are incidentally dealt with in the course of this article. For a fuller account, cp. *The Forgotten Hume Le Bon David*. E. C. Mossner. (New York. 1953.) Ch. IV. pp. 82-102.

<sup>5</sup> Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes. (1726-92) Lawyer, judge, historian and editor. The best short account of Hailes in print is that by David Laing. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 7th ed. (1833.) Laing's list of Hailes's publications is incomplete.

<sup>6</sup> In 1753, Hume and Hailes had politely corresponded on historical matters. cp. *The Letters of David Hume*. ed. J. Y. T. Greig. (Oxford 1937.) 2 vols. Vol. I. pp. 174-176. (Hereinafter referred to as *Greig*.) But about the same time, Hailes offended Hume by a slighting reference in an undated pamphlet called *Proposals for carrying out a certain Public Work in the City of Edinburgh*. He compared Hume's *Essays* with almanacs and cookery books. Hume further resented the fact that Hailes did not support his application to become Librarian of the Advocates' Library. *Greig*. Vol. I. p. 167. The estrangement was completed by the fact that Hailes was one of the Curators of that library who objected to his purchase of certain books — the incident which led, a few years later, to Hume's resignation from the librarian's post. *Greig*. Vol. I. p. 211. n. 3. But the basic cause of disagreement was the strong Christianity of Hailes.

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence between Robertson and Hailes is printed in the Appendix to the *Life*

At first sight Hailes's part in sponsoring Macpherson would seem to be unimportant for Hugh Blair does not mention him by name in the letter he wrote to Henry Mackenzie in 1797 giving an account of the first discovery and publication of the Ossian poems,<sup>8</sup> and he must presumably be included amongst the many others whom Blair said he had now forgotten and who 'were very zealous in forwarding the discovery proposed'. Blair's lapse of memory showed little gratitude for the efforts made on the behalf of his protégé, for Hailes introduced the *Fragments*, before publication, to an influential group of English men of letters, and, what is less well-known, he played a major part in raising the funds necessary to subsidize Macpherson's further expeditions to the Highlands.

It was to Horace Walpole,<sup>9</sup> his correspondent on historical and antiquarian matters, that Hailes sent, in January 1760,<sup>10</sup> some months before the publication of the *Fragments* volume, specimens of Macpherson's work, with the suggestion that Thomas Gray might like to see them. Walpole and Gray had been at Eton some years before Hailes had attended that famous school.<sup>11</sup> The Scots lawyer's initial familiarity with these two men may well have arisen from this connection, though Hailes started to correspond with Walpole by sending some notes on the *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors*.<sup>12</sup> When Gray saw the poems he was thrilled and fascinated by them, but at this stage he had considerable doubts as to their authenticity. He wrote to Walpole requesting further information, stressing that he particularly wanted to see a few lines of the originals. Walpole's next letter to Hailes, in April, 1760, incorporated this request *verbatim*,<sup>13</sup> and the latter promptly contacted Macpherson, who wrote him

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of Robertson. D. Stewart. (Edinburgh. 1801.) Unpublished letters are preserved amongst the Newhailes MSS and in the National Library of Scotland. *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*. W. R. Scott. (1937.) p. 265. prints a letter from Smith to Hailes. For another see *Life of Adam Smith*. J. Rae. (1895.) p. 246. Eight letters from Blair to Hailes are preserved in the Newhailes Collection. One letter to Blair is printed in *Notes and Queries*. 4th Series. Vol. 5. p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> *Report*. 1805 Appendix IV. pp. 56-62.

<sup>9</sup> cp. *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*. ed. W. S. Lewis and others. Vol. XV. 1952. (page references to British printing). The correspondence with Hailes has not completely survived but it is the most considerable in this volume. It covers the period 1758-92. Walpole thanks Hailes in his letter of 3rd Feb. 1760 for the specimens of Macpherson's translations. (*Yale XV*. p. 61.) Macpherson is first mentioned anonymously as 'the young translator' in Walpole's letter, 4th April 1760. (*Yale XV*. p. 64.) Both Mason and Lyttelton are mentioned here as admirers of the poems.

<sup>10</sup> This date is conjectural. Hailes's letter is missing. Walpole's reply is dated Feb. 3rd. 1760.

<sup>11</sup> It was unusual for a Scot to be educated at Eton in the 18th Century. Hailes may have intended to study English law, for he was registered at the Middle Temple. *Records of the Middle Temple*. ed. H. T. McGeach. (London 1949.) He did not study there, but proceeded to Utrecht, a not unusual course for a Scots lawyer.

<sup>12</sup> *Yale XV*. pp. 26-27. Hailes's notes were included, almost in his own words, in the second edition of the *Catalogue* printed by Dodsley in 1759. cp. *Yale XV*. p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*. ed. Toynbee and Whibley. (Hereinafter referred to as *Toynbee and Whibley*. (Oxford. 1935.) 3 vols. Vol. II. pp. 664-5 and notes.

a letter on the subject of 'Irish' versification. This was forwarded to Walpole, with two specimens enclosed,<sup>14</sup> for which 'obliging kindness' Hailes received Walpole's gracious thanks. Gray was now sufficiently interested to contact Macpherson directly, and he received further specimens. But Macpherson was an unsatisfactory correspondent. Gray believed the poems to be ancient rather in spite of Macpherson than because of him and the evidence contained in his evasive letters.<sup>15</sup> A letter from David Hume to some unknown correspondent,<sup>16</sup> which somehow reached Gray, further allayed the latter's doubts, for Hume, who was at this time an admirer of Macpherson, and a believer in the antiquity of Macpherson's materials, assured his correspondent that there was good evidence to support the claims made on behalf of the *Fragments*.

Macpherson owed a great deal to the sponsorship of such public figures as Hume, Blair and Hailes. It created an atmosphere of confidence in his work which was only partly dissipated by the remarkable behaviour of Macpherson himself, while the straightforward speaking and unhesitating opposition of Samuel Johnson inclined to make patriotic Scots more anxious than ever to prove *Ossian* ancient. Hume was one Scot who early changed his mind, and by 1763, he was impatient of Macpherson as a 'perverse and unamiable man'.<sup>17</sup> But his earlier support, like that of Hailes, had had its effect in England. Walpole, an early doubter, wrote to Hailes in April 1761 that his doubts had temporarily vanished.<sup>18</sup> The famous

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The part of Gray's letter which was sent to Hailes is printed here. Also *Yale XV*, pp. 64-65, and again in *Yale XIV*, p. 106. The connections between Gray and Macpherson are summed up by Whibley in Appendix L, Vol. III, pp. 1123-1127.

<sup>14</sup> The letter from Macpherson to Hailes is quoted by *Toynbee and Whibley*, Vol. II, p. 665, n. 3. I have not been able to trace the present whereabouts of this letter, which was formerly in the Waller collection.

<sup>15</sup> *Toynbee and Whibley*, Vol. II pp. 677-82. Letter to Wharton, June 20, 1760. The same letter is quoted in Bailey Saunders, *Life and Letters of James Macpherson*, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> This letter by Hume has been printed several times. *European Magazine*, Vol. V, 1784; *Toynbee and Whibley*, Vol. III, p. 1224; *Greig*, Vol. I, p. 328. Greig conjectures that the unknown recipient of the letter was Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, but his reasons for this attribution are unsatisfactory. Whibley gives some general reasons against the suggestion. The following points should also be noted. By Aug. 16., the date of the letter, Hailes already knew all about the scheme for forwarding Macpherson's work, and was taking an active part in it. He would not require to be told all this, or indeed that his correspondent Adam Smith was the 'celebrated Professor at Glasgow'. I would conjecture from the type of information contained in the letter that it was written to someone completely outside the Edinburgh literary circle, who was a friend of both John Home and of David Hume and who was also in touch with Gray. He would probably be a Scot living in England, or an Englishman.

<sup>17</sup> In *The Forgotten Hume*, Note F, p. 217. Mossner suggests that Hume's tract on the *Authenticity of Ossian's Poems*, unpublished during Hume's lifetime, (cp. Hume's *Philosophical Works*, [London 1874-5.] pp. 415-424.) was inspired by Johnson's comment that Scotsmen loved Scotland better than the truth. Hume found it necessary, while suggesting that Macpherson's work was unreliable, to vindicate the integrity of the Edinburgh critics who had been deceived by him. On Hume's growing dislike of Macpherson as a person cp. *Greig*, Vol. I, p. 398. Letter 19th Sept. 1763.

<sup>18</sup> *Yale XV*. Walpole to Hailes, 14th April, 1761, p. 71-2, n. 5.

letter-writer had forgotten this burst of confidence, or perhaps preferred to forget it, when he wrote to Cole in 1780:<sup>19</sup>

There is another trifling mistake of still less consequence. The Editor supposes that it was Macpherson who communicated with me. It was Sir David Dalrymple who sent the first specimens. Macpherson did come to me but my credulity was then a little shaken.

Walpole wished it to be clearly understood that his first source was a respectable one, and he implies that Macpherson had failed to impress him. Yet we know that he gave a kindly reception and friendly advice to the translator when he came to London in the Spring of 1761 to arrange for the publication of *Fingal*.<sup>20</sup> In successfully approaching the eminent Walpole, Macpherson achieved more than did his fellow-Scot, James Boswell.<sup>21</sup> Walpole claimed to have a strong partiality in favour of Scots, which was in striking contrast to the widespread English dislike of that nation at this time. Hailes's support of Macpherson would count a great deal with Walpole, for it is obvious from the correspondence of the two men that Walpole added a considerable respect for the Scottish lawyer's literary and historical judgement to his theoretical partiality in favour of his race.<sup>22</sup>

Hailes's part in raising funds to send Macpherson to the Highlands to find a Scottish epic is less well-known and less clearly defined. All printed accounts of the scheme derive from that given by Hugh Blair, its chief mover, in his letter to Henry Mackenzie,<sup>23</sup> but the correspondence printed below adds several details previously unknown. It has been convincingly argued by Smart that while the scheme was Blair's idea, Macpherson had implanted the general suggestion in his mind, and the same scholar describes the project thus:<sup>24</sup>

It was proposed that a collection should be made to enable Macpherson to travel in the Highlands in search of ancient poetic remains; and a dinner was held at which the enterprise was set on foot. Much interest was shown by Blair himself, Robertson the historian, John Home, Lord Elibank and Adam Fergusson; Lord Hailes was friendly, and Hume gave some help. There was a subscription of a guinea or two guineas apiece, a mercurial young man named James Boswell being one of those who contributed.

This account is clear enough, but is inaccurate in one or two details, and underestimates Hailes's activity on Macpherson's behalf. He was more than just 'friendly', for he made himself responsible for a collection of money from the professional men with whom he was in daily contact

<sup>19</sup> *Yale Correspondence of Horace Walpole*. Vol. II (1934- ) p. 206 and n. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Yale XV*. p. 71-2. n. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Boswell wrote to Hailes in 1760: 'I am afraid that Mr Walpole moves in rather too high a sphere for your humble servant, whose company would be of consequence rather burdensome to *him*.' cp. 'Boswell's letters at Newhailes' A. Hoover. *University of Toronto Quarterly* Vol. XXII. 1952-3. p. 248. For Boswell's later unsuccessful efforts to be friendly with Walpole cp. R. Ketton-Cremer. *Horace Walpole*. London (1940) p. 265. and note.

<sup>23</sup> *Report*. 1805. Appendix IV. pp. 56-62.

<sup>24</sup> *Smart*. Ch. IV. p. 98.

at the Court of Session — his fellow-lawyers and the writers to the Signet. Blair had personally requested Hailes to take an active part in the work in the letter which is given in full below :<sup>25</sup>

Dear Sir,

I intended to have waited of you this day, but was hinder'd by some accidents, that we might have had some conversation about any scheme that can be fallen upon for encouraging Mr. Mcpherson to apply himself to the making of a further Collection of Erse poetry and in particular for recovering our Epics. As the Specimens are so highly relish'd don't you think that a pretty considerable Collection might be made for bearing his Expeince? In case you think this practicable, the sooner it is thought off the better. As without something of this kind we will not, I am afraid, gett him persuaded to go on, I desired him to write me an ostensible letter concerning his Situation, and the reasons why without some Encouragement he could not adventure on such an Undertaking. This I enclose to you in case you think it proper to make any use of it just now; as I am going into the Country for 2 or 3 weeks. I believe it might be proper that there should be a meeting of some 4 or 5 persons who would lay themselves out among the Circle of their Several Acquaintances for promoting this design. Dr Robertson,<sup>26</sup> and Stuart,<sup>27</sup> Jack Dalrymple,<sup>28</sup> have spoke to me as being very willing to take some trouble about it. John Balfour<sup>29</sup> thinks he could raise some money, and is desirous to contribute himself.

I shall certainly wait of you as soon as I return to consult with you on this Subject. In the meantime as your being at the head of such a design will give it weight, I thought it might be proper to send you McPherson's letter. I have already spoke to Ld Kames<sup>30</sup> on the Subject and hinted it to the Chief Baron both whom are favourably inclined.

I am

Dr Sir

Your Faithful and Affectionate Humble Servt.

Hugh Blair.

23 June Bruntfield.

I congratulate you upon your brother being safe in this unhappy affair of Quebec.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This letter is preserved amongst the Newhailes MSS and is printed here, as is Macpherson's letter to Blair, by kind permission of Sir Mark Dalrymple, Bart., of Newhailes. It was transcribed from the microfilm copies of the Newhailes MSS housed in the National Library of Scotland. It was at one time seen by Malcolm Laing, who prints the first two sentences only in a footnote to p. xvi of his Preface to *The Poems of Ossian containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson Esq. in Prose and Rhyme*. (Edinburgh 1805.) 2 vols.

<sup>26</sup> I have not found any exact record of the part played by Robertson. His name is mentioned by Blair. *Report*. App. IV.

<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to be certain to which Stewart this refers. The date is much too early for Dugald Stewart, and a little too early for Gilbert Stuart, (1742-86.) the irascible historian and reviewer, who was a correspondent of Hailes. It may have been the latter's father, George Stuart (1715-93.) who was Professor of Humanity at Edinburgh University. cp. *D.N.B.* 1921-2 reprint. Vol. XIX. pp. 81-82.

<sup>28</sup> Sir John Dalrymple. (1726-1810) Lawyer and historian. He was a cousin of Hailes. cp. *D.N.B.* 1921-2 reprint. Vol. V. pp. 424-425.

<sup>29</sup> cp. *Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers*. Plomer, Bushnell and Dix. (Oxford. 1932.) p. 281. It is interesting to remember that Balfour had employed Macpherson as a corrector of the press. *Bailey Saunders*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames. (1696-1782.) The best account of this interesting man is that given by A. F. Tytler. *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames*. (Edinburgh 1807.) 2 vols. Hailes and Kames do not seem to have been friends.

<sup>31</sup> This letter which is dated June 23, obviously belongs to the year 1760. The 'unhappy

This letter makes several interesting points. Blair was unfortunately to be out of town at the time when Macpherson most needed his support in collecting money. As Macpherson was to leave towards the end of August, time was fairly short. Again it seems that Blair was not averse to the project gaining prestige by the fact that a socially prominent young lawyer, who had a reputation as a coming man of letters, was to be temporarily in charge. Thirdly, though Macpherson had obviously first made it clear to Blair that he could not collect further poems unless he was financially supported, Blair himself was responsible for the 'ostensible' letter in which this fact was to be announced to all who might be interested. The letter itself has survived and answers fairly closely to Blair's description of it. While it inevitably has something of the tone of a begging letter, knowledge of the circumstances of its composition slightly lessens the initial impression it gives a modern reader that Macpherson was trying to blackmail the Edinburgh enthusiasts into financially supporting him by the threat that the Ossianic poetry would be lost for ever if he was not sent out to save it. But it remains, under the circumstances, a striking example of literary impudence.<sup>32</sup>

Revd Sir

None would be more willing to undertake the work you and others, my friends, recommend, did it suit with my interests than I. I certainly admire the poetry of my country much; and would with eagerness seize on every opportunity to make its beauties known.

But, Sir, a journey thro' the Highlands and Isles is attended with risque and Expence that are not proper for me to incur on my own bottom.

I would be obliged to throw up the business I pursue;<sup>33</sup> devote myself for twelve month, at least, to that work, and, besides my travelling expences, be obliged to gratify some persons who are in possession of the original poems.

All which put together makes it too great a venture for me to go on such a design without some assistance and encouragement.

Did all things answer I could make a large, and I hope a valuable, collection of our ancient poetry; but as I cannot well spare the expence and time I must give over all thoughts of the matter.

It were to be wished however that these remains of genius were not lost, And I am extremely sorry it does not suit with my present circumstances to have the pleasure of preserving them. With great Respect I am

Revd Sir

Your most Obedient Humble Servant  
James Macpherson.

Balgowan 16th June 1760.

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affair at Quebec', in which Hailes's brother James Dalrymple (1729-1801) was concerned was probably the unsuccessful attack made by Murray against Levis, Montcalm's successor who was besieging Quebec. cp. *Toynbee and Whibley*. Vol. II. p. 679. n. 14.

<sup>32</sup> This letter was transcribed from the microfilms of the Newhailes MSS in the N.L.S. cp. n. 25. As far as I know, it has not been printed before.

<sup>33</sup> Macpherson was employed as a tutor in the family of Graham of Balgowan. It was, according to Hume, a way of life of which he was not fond. *Greig*. Vol. I. p. 329.

Blair's later insistence that Macpherson was *most reluctant*<sup>34</sup> to undertake the expedition does not seem to me to be borne out by this letter. The financial side of the question is the *only* obstacle concerning which Macpherson makes a major point. Whether Hailes made any use of this odd document when supporting the scheme we cannot tell, for his reply to Blair's letter does not seem to have survived. But he did accept the responsibility thus thrust upon him. Amongst his papers<sup>35</sup> is a list of subscribers to a fund for Macpherson, with the amount subscribed by each person annexed to his name. As I have already indicated, the collection was made largely amongst lawyers and writers to the Signet, and is obviously a separate collection to that mentioned by Blair, made under the Treasurership of Robert Chambers.<sup>36</sup> From the two professions named above Hailes raised some twenty guineas, the average subscription being half a guinea, in comparison with Hume's suggested 'guinea or two'. The name of James Boswell is the most illustrious in Hailes's list, though many others in it were to far outshine Lord Auchinleck's errant son in his chosen profession of lawyer, and were to become judges in the supreme Courts of Scotland.<sup>37</sup>

A man of Hailes's high moral calibre and literary integrity — and these two qualities were well known to be two of his outstanding characteristics — would not have supported Macpherson in this double way if he had had any doubt as to the authenticity of Macpherson's originals. But Hailes chose not to take an active part in the controversies which raged over the *Ossian* poems. He had his own views, but, as he told Boswell in 1775,

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<sup>34</sup> M. Laing, in his *Poems of Ossian*, cited above, is most suspicious of Macpherson's supposed reluctance to continue the work. He suggests that if it was at any time real, it was due to the fact that Macpherson was startled at the magnitude of the imposture on which he was now engaged, but that Blair's enthusiasm prevented withdrawal.

<sup>35</sup> Newhailes MSS. (N.L.S. microfilms) The list is headed by the following statement: 'The Gentlemen after mentioned having paid into my hands the sums subjoined to their names for the behoof of Mr. James Macpherson now residing at Balgowan in Perthshire, in order to enable him to collect, translate and publish remains of Ancient Gaelic Poetry.' Dav: Dalrymple.

There are forty names of which two are illegible. Subscriptions were in a few cases a guinea, but usually half a guinea.

<sup>36</sup> *Report, 1805*. App. IV. p. 58. As far as I know, Chambers' subscription list has not survived, or at least, has not been printed. *Bailey Saunders*. (p. 94.) says that the list was opened in Parliament House and brought in sixty pounds, and he quotes Mrs. Montague to the effect that Macpherson received 100 Pounds to defray the expenses of his journey. R. M. Schmitz. *Hugh Blair*, suggests that there would be some forty names on the list on the basis of Hume's suggested 'guinea or two', and includes Hume and Boswell as subscribers. As Boswell was on Hailes's list, it seems unlikely that he would appear on any other.

<sup>37</sup> Amongst the best known names are Andrew Crosbie; Sir Adam Fergusson; George Dempster, Frances Garden and James Burnett. All these men were lawyers; Dempster was a Member of Parliament, and the last two were to become judges as Lord Gardenstone and Lord Monboddoo respectively. A 'John Home' appears on the list. If this is the clergyman-dramatist, he is one of the very few persons listed who was not either a lawyer or a writer to the Signet. Hailes's own name is not listed.

he preferred to keep them to himself.<sup>38</sup> We know that he remained keenly interested in the matter for he was behind the investigation of possible Ossianic manuscript sources made by Lord Bannatyne, a fellow lawyer and judge, a report of which Bannatyne later sent along with his finds, to the Highland Society.<sup>39</sup> Bannatyne says:

The public are no strangers to the desire with which the late *Lord Hailes* was always actuated for informing himself of whatever respected the history and antiquities of this country. The course of my duty, while I was Sheriff of Bute, frequently led me to meet with his Lordship when holding Circuit at Inverary. On one of these occasions, our conversation turning on the different opinions entertained as to the authenticity of the Poems published by Mr. McPherson, his Lordship expressed a particular desire to know how far any Gaelic manuscripts of tolerable antiquity were preserved in the Highlands of Scotland, and particularly whether any of them contained remains of ancient poetry connected with or similar to those which Mr McPherson had published.

Bannatyne goes on to tell us that Hailes examined a manuscript which was brought to him and assigned it to the Reformation period on palaeographical grounds. This particular MS is now lost, but Bannatyne was inspired to investigate further and discovered valuable material which he sent to the Highland Society Committee.<sup>40</sup> The above incident is undated, though it must have occurred after Hailes's elevation to the judicial Bench in 1766. In 1770, Hailes had quietly announced his belief in the authenticity of the Ossianic poems, though not in Macpherson's talents as a scholar, in a note to his *Ancient Scottish Poems*. He described this volume in his letters as an 'obscure duodecimo'.<sup>41</sup>

Here let me observe, that to doubt of Fingal and Temora being ancient compositions, is indeed a refinement in scepticism. They contain various allusions to the manners of other times, which have escaped the observation of Mr. Macpherson himself.<sup>42</sup>

The satirical tone of this reference to Macpherson is our first evidence that Hailes's friendship with the translator of Ossian had become strained. Macpherson's historical work certainly offended Hailes, both because it was of poor quality, and because it contained passages which personally annoyed him. Hailes wrote a sharp letter, which was printed in two London periodicals and one Edinburgh magazine, defending the reputation of his grandfather, the first Sir David Dalrymple of Newhailes, against charges made in *The History of Great Britain from the Restoration till the*

<sup>38</sup> Letter Boswell to Johnson. Febr. 1775. *Life of Samuel Johnson*. (Oxford 1934-) ed. Hill-Powell. Vol. II. p. 295. and note.

<sup>39</sup> *Report*. 1805. App. XVIII. pp. 281-2. Letter from Lord Bannatyne to Mackenzie.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 283.

<sup>41</sup> The first edition of this work is scarce. An octavo edition (1817?) with an unaltered title-page, is much commoner, and the two are often confused. The octavo reprints has a colophon: Reprinted for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown. London; and Robinson, Lacy and Holdsworth, Leeds; by J. B. Dewhirst. The pagination of the two volumes, is, as one would expect, quite different.

<sup>42</sup> *Ancient Scottish Poems*. (Edinburgh 1770.) Note p. 302. to the poem printed on p. 173. (Page references to first edition.)

*Accession of George I.*<sup>43</sup> London 1775. By this time Hailes may well have deeply regretted that he had taken so much trouble to further the interests of the author of one of the most fascinating impostures in English literary history.

Dundee.

ROBERT HAY CARNIE.

## Notes and News

### 'To Have God by the Toe'

In *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke Beeyng Long in Continual Discension...*<sup>1</sup> Edward Hall tells an anecdote concerning William Tyndale's difficulties in distributing his translation of the New Testament.

The Bishop of London, not pleased with the translation thereof, debated with hymself, how he might compass and devise, to destroye that false and erroneous translation, (as he saied). And so it happened that one Augustine Packyngton, a Mercer and Merchant of London, and of a greate honestie, the same tyme was in Andwarp, where the Bishope then was, and this Packyngton was a man that highly favored William Tyndale, but to the bishop utterly shewed hymself to the contrary. The bishop desirous to have his purpose brought to passe, commoned of the New Testamentes, and how gladly he would bye them. Packyngton then hearyng that he wished for, saied unto the bishop, my Lorde, if it bee your pleasure, I can in this matter dooe more I dare sale, then moste of the Merchautes of Englande that are here, for I knowe the Dutche men and straungiers, that have bought theim of Tyndale, and have them here to sell, so that if it be your lordshippes pleasure, to paye for them, for otherwise I cannot come by them, but I must disburse money for them, I will then assure you, to have every boke of them, that is imprinted and is here unsolde.

The Bishop thinkyng that he had God by the too, when in deede he had (as after he thought) the Devell by the fiste, saied, gentle Master Packyngton, do your diligence and get them and with all my harte I will paie for them, whatsoever thei cost you, for the bokes are erroneous and naughtes, and I entende surely to destroy them all, and to burne them at Paules Crosse.

And Packyngton did so. As it turned out, the bishop's eagerness to destroy all the copies of Tyndale's translation was more than paralleled by Tyndale's eagerness to have the money — in order to pay his debts and to bring out a new, better translation of the New Testament, on which he had been working for some time. 'And so forward went the bargain, the bishop had the bokes, Packyngton had the thankes, and Tyndale had the money'.

<sup>43</sup> cp. *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*. August. 1775. Vol. IV. p. 474; *London Magazine*. July 1775. Vol. XLIV. p. 330.; *London Chronicle*. April 1775. Boswell was responsible for the insertion of Hailes's letter into the *London Magazine*.

<sup>1</sup> London 1548. The anecdote occurs on fol. 186 recto and verso (*Kyng Henri the .viij.*).