

Cultural Traditions and Military Interests

WE are very grateful to a valued correspondent for sending a translation of an article by Reidar Th. Christiansen, Professor of Folklore in the University of Oslo which appeared in the Norwegian paper *Dagbladet* in January.

Some of our readers will recall with pleasure Professor Christiansen's lecture to the newly formed Folklore Institute of Scotland in Glasgow a few years ago. Many, we hope, are familiar with his book, "*The Vikings and the Viking Wars in Irish and Gaelic Tradition*," published in 1931.

Professor Christiansen remarks how in all countries military defence has become a dominant factor, demanding an increasing amount of money and also more and more land, and often coming into conflict with other interests. He goes on to describe South Uist and discusses the possible effects of the proposed Rocket Range.

"If you go to South Uist," writes Professor Christiansen, "you will soon discover that the island is inhabited by unusual people." This, he explains, is the result of their past history and their isolation. He outlines the story of the prehistoric dwellers, the Gaels, and the Norsemen, and describes the legacy these peoples have left behind—brochs and towers, language and place-names, and a rich tradition.

"This tradition, with its historical background, its heroes and legends, may be regarded as the last living link with the Middle Ages In a society of this kind story-telling has an important function. In order to realise this fact it is enough to listen to one of the good story-tellers, such as Duncan Macdonald (of South Uist), who died last year. He told his stories in a quiet, dignified manner, and he was conscious of his ability to give his stories a worthy form. They were not the short, simple type of tale, but quite long; they took about two hours to tell and fill 20-30 printed pages. Their style was extremely artistic and with a literary flavour; they were told in a form which can be traced back to Old Irish literature. . . . The subject matter is partly derived from the Irish heroic literature, and partly from international folk-tales which are here retold in a new manner."

Professor Christiansen shows how inseparably related are this kind of tradition and the type of society that has fostered it, and which is threatened by the pressures of the modern age. The old-fashioned techniques and terminologies are gradually disappearing as new methods are adopted and old implements disposed of. "The people are not sentimental dreamers; they need a keen realistic sense of values in order to exist, and in speech and deeds they give incisive expression to this outlook."

Notes and Comments

The **Balmacara branch** of An Comunn held a successful ceilidh and dance. A two-minute's silence was observed in tribute to the late Mr. Donald Macphail, to whom tribute was also paid by the branch President, Rev. M. M. MacSween. Mr. D. J. Maclean, Northern Organiser, was Fear-an-tighe, and was accompanied from Inverness by Miss Chrissie Mackinnon and Mr. A. J. Maclean, and all three contributed to the programme, others taking part being Donnie Finlayson, Mrs. M. MacRae, Mrs. Eric Gillies, Katie Ann Morrison, Mr. T. Matheson, Master Iain Matheson, and the Kenraeson Band. Mr. I. R. Mackay, Inverness, convener of the northern propaganda sub-committee, was present, accompanied by Mrs. Mackay, and they were given a cordial welcome.

Bowmore Gaelic Choir are making energetic efforts to raise funds to send both their senior and junior choirs to the National Mod at Largs, and a very successful ceilidh-dance was held recently.

The **Kilmeny branch** held "a real old-fashioned ceilidh" in the Keills School, the audience being seated round the school room, which had a big fire at one end. The branch President, Mr. Gilbert MacPhail, Mod Gold Medallist, was Fear-an-tighe.

At a ceilidh organised by the **Bowmore Branch** the chairman was Mr. John Forrest, who was introduced by Mr. Tom Crawford, branch President. All the artistes were from the Ballygrant district, with the exception of Piper Rodger MacDougall and a team of young Highland dancers from Bowmore.

Mr. A. H. MacPhail was Fear-an-tighe at the December ceilidh of the **Cornaig (Tiree) branch** of An Comunn. An interesting programme of song, story, and music was submitted and was greatly enjoyed.

At the November ceilidh of the **Dunoon branch**, Mr. Gilbert MacAllister presided, and Mr. James Weir, Greenock, gave a lecture on "The Highlands in Photograph," showing a view of beautiful Highland scenery. Gaelic and English songs were sung by Mr. Neil Maclean, accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Maclean, while Mr. James Henderson gave piping selections.

At a ceilidh in Stornoway Town Hall under the auspices of **Comunn Gaidhealach Leodhuis**, a much