John Stuart to Thomas Pennant: supplementary to his descriptions of islands

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From: John Stuart
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Killin Jan$^{y.}$ 7$^{th.}$ 1774

Dear Sir

Yours of Dec$^{r.}$ 24$^{th.}$ has come safely to my hands ———

I have little doubt but the 500 £, which we were told that M$^{r.}$ Campbell of Shawfield pays of feu duty for Ilay, is Sterling and not Scotch money. It was the old rent paid for all that island.

Almost all the W. islanders, as far as I could learn, still observe Pasch and Yule or Christmas, as they did in *Martin*'s days.

Eight days ago I sent you such remarks relative to Iona as I thought would be of any service to you — As for the notes which I had taken down when I visited that island formerly, which was as far as I remember in Aug$^{t.}$ 1769, to prevent your being led into any mistake I would only again beg of you to remember that all the lengths and distances mentioned in them were only guessed at. Such as I told you of in my last letter may I think be depended upon, as I was at the pains to measure them all, excepting the length and breadth of Reilig-Ourain^{x} [1] which I hope you have marked down with accuracy in your own notes.

I unluckily neglected to make any enquiry as to the name of the little island, that forms the harbour on the E. side of the sound of Iona, so that I cannot give you information as to that particular —

South of Ouran's Chapel lies the grave stone of one of the old Mull Doctors with the following inscription around it:

Hic jacet Isannes Betonus Maclenorum familæ medicus qui mortuus est 19 nowembris anno Domini 1657, et ætatis suæ 63. Donaldus Betonus facit 1674.

Near the head of the stone is cut the Coat-of-arms of the Betons, and below is the following epitaph:

Ecce cadit iaculo victrici mortis iniquæ
Qui toties alios solveral ipse malis.
Soli Deo gloria.

I have great doubts as to the justice of the interpretation given of the Galic inscription upon the stone in I-colm-kill now not to be seen, but a print of which is preserved in the *Phil. Trans.* Vol. 22. p.790: The meaning of the other Galic inscription, which is still visible there, is tolerably clear ———

If I mistake not, you carried along with you specimens of the granite used in the buildings in Iona. It was taken, they told us, not from Mull, but from an island in the sound.

I wrote you in my last the principal anecdotes I knew relative to the rural œconomy of the inhabitants of I-colm-kill — They are all poor. They live much upon fish, various kinds of which are caught in great quantities round the island. Black or graddan meal is mostly used. A quern or hand-mill is kept in every family; but all the possessions are multured to a water miln in Mull.

Their houses are mean. They are all built near one another, and hard by the ruins of the Nunnery. They are thatched with bear straw, which is always for this purpose pulled by the roots.

As there does ^not a single tree grow in the island, they are at a loss for wood, even for the purposes of agriculture.

Peats and turf are their only fuel.

In some of the higher grounds there is moss, but it has no depth, and it is mixed with much earth and sand.

I imagine there must certainly be a mistake, either in my information, or, in the notes I gathered down, relative to the encrease of bear in Iona. It must surely be greater at an average than four or five-fold. — Indeed I see great reason to suspect that this is not the only instance in which there may have been a danger of being led into a mistake. Notwithstanding the greatest care and attention in making all proper inquiry, and the having recourse to the best mediums of information which the different places visited could at the time afford, yet in countries where few even of the better and more intelligent people are accustomed to make any nice observations of this kind, the falling in some instances into error seems indeed unavoidable. Any inconsiderable mistakes however which may thus creep ~~into~~ into *your work*, can, upon better information afterwards be easily amended in a second edition; and in the mean time must be readily excused by all who are possessed of any degree of candour —

I shall endeavour to send you the remarks relative to Cana by to-morrow eight day's Post, or sooner, if there is an opportunity —

In the mean time, wishing you a good new-year, and many happy returns,

I remain
Dear Sir
Your most obliged & humble Serv$^{t.}$

John Stuart

P.S. with regard to any distances &c. in Iona as have not been measured by any certain medium, it is certainly better not to descend to any particulars —

M^{r} J. Stuart Dec^{r} 31. & Jan. 7 th 1774.

on Iona Tiends, &c.

Authorial Notes

[1] x Reilig-Ourain i.e. the burying-place of S$^{t.}$ Ouran.