

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh

Alasdair from Glengarry

Le Sileas na Ceapaich

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh,
Alasdair from Glengarry,
Thug thu 'n-duigh gal air mo shùilibh;
You brought today tears to my eyes;
'S beag iognadh mi bhith fo chreachdaibh
It is little wonder I am sorely hurt
'S gur tric gan reubadh às ùr iad;
And often they (my wounds) are torn anew;
'S deacair dhomhsa bhith gun osnaich
It is difficult for me not to sigh
'S meud an dosgaidh th' air mo chàirdibh;
So great the loss that is upon my friends;
Gur tric an t-eug uainn a' gearradh
Often death from us will cut
Rogha nan darag as àirde.
The best of the tallest oaks.

Bu tu ceann air cèill s' air comhairl'
You were a leader in sense and council
Ann gach gnothach am biodh cùram,
In every undertaking that needed responsibility,
Aghaidh shoilleir sholta thlachdmhor,
A bright face, comely, pleasant,
Cridhe fial farsaing mun chùinneadh;
A generous heart, liberal with money;
Bu tu roghainn nan sàr ghaigeach,
You were the best of the true heroes,
Ar guala thaice, 's tu b' fhiùghail;
Our supporting shoulder, as you were worthy to be;
Leòmhann smiorail fearail feumail,
A lion, courageous, manly, useful,
Ceann feachda chaill Seumas Stiùbhart.
A military leader lost to James Stuart.

Guidham t' anam a bhith sàbhailt
Let me pray that your soul will be saved
On a chàireadh anns an ùir thu;
Now that you have been laid in the ground;
Guidheam sonas air na dh'fhàg thu
Let me pray for happiness for those you have left
Ann ad àros 's ann ad dhùthaich:
In your home and your country:
Gum faic mi do mhac ad àite
To see your son in your place
Ann an saidhbhreas 's ann an cùram:
In wealth and responsibility:
Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh,
Alasdair from Glengarry
Thug thu 'n-duigh gal air mo shùilibh.
You brought today tears to my eyes.

Gal – weeping; **shùilibh** (shùilean) – eyes; **beag** – little; **iognadh** – surprise, wonder; **chreachdaibh** – wounded, sorely hurt; **tric** – often; **reubadh** – wounding, tearing; **às ùr** – anew; **deacair** – difficult; **dhomhsa** – for me; **osnaich** – sighing; **meud** – greatness, extent; **dosgaidh** – misfortune; **chàirdibh** (chàirdean) – friends; **eug** – death; **uainn** – from us; **a' gearradh** – cutting; **Rogha** – best; **darag** – oak tree; **as àirde** – highest, tallest;

ceann – head, leader; **cèill** – sense, wisdom; **comhairl'** – council; **gach** – every; **gnothach** – business, undertaking; **cùram** – trust, responsibility; **Aghaidh** – face; **shoilleir** – bright; **sholta** – comely; **thlachdmhor** – pleasant; **Cridhe** – heart; **fial** – hospitable, generous; **farsaing** – liberal; **chùinneadh** – coinage, money; **roghainn** – choice, best; **sàr** – great, high degree; **ghaigeach** – heroes, warriors; **guala** – shoulder; **thaice** – help, support; **fhiùghail** – worthy; **Leòmhann** – lion; **smiorail** – courageous; **fearail** – manly; **feumail** – necessary, useful; **feachda** – military; **chaill** – lost; **Seumas Stiùbhart** – James Stuart (King James III);

Guidham – let me pray; **anam** – soul; **sàbhailt** – saved; **chàireadh** – place, bury; **ùir** – earth, soil; **sonas** – happiness; **dh'fhàg** – left; **àros** – home, abode; **dhùthaich** – country, land; **faic** – see; **àite** – place; **saidhbhreas** – wealth; **cùram** – responsibility;

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Notes

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh translates as Alasdair from Glengarry but elsewhere he is styled Alasdair a Glinne-Garaidh or Alasdair of Glengarry. These are grammatical niceties but both refer to Alasdair Dubh who was the 11th chief of the MacDonalds of Glengarry succeeding his father in 1705. During the first Jacobite rising and before his father's death he led the Glengarry men at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689. One report states, "at the head of one large battalion towered the stately form of Glengarry, who bore in his hand the Royal Standard of James VII [James III of Great Britain - The Old Pretender]". Later he was seen mowing down two men at every stroke of his broad sword. In the 1715 rising Alasdair fought at the Battle of Sherrifmuir. He distinguished himself when the MacDonalds faltered after seeing their Clanranald chief, Ailean Dearg (Red Alan), fall mortally wounded. Alasdair rallied them by calling "*buillean an-diugh, tuiream a-màireach*" (blows today, mourning tomorrow).

Although he was pardoned after the 1715 rising, his lands were plundered and his castle at Invergarry was burnt down. In the rising of 1719 he was outwardly loyal to the Hanoverian regime but sent 150 of his Glengarry men to fight for King James at the Battle of Glenshiel. As a result of this he encountered a great deal of government harassment.

He died in 1721. His contemporaries had high praise for him. MacGregor of Balhaldie said "He was loyal and wonderfully sagacious and long-sighted, and was possessed of a great many shining qualities, stained with few vices, which, like patches on a beautiful face, seemed to give more *éclat* to his character". The Clan Donald historians, the Revs A and A MacDonald, call him "one of the most picturesque and striking personalities in the whole history of his race. Of towering stature and undaunted courage, he was one of the most celebrated warriors of his age, while his high talents and generous disposition commended him to the respect and affection of his clan". Others, however, are less flattering. Duncan Forbes of Culloden, a Hanoverian, called him "the worthlessst rogue living".

The song was written by Sileas na Ceapaich, a daughter of MacDonald of Keppoch. She married Alexander Gordon of Camdell and went to live in Beldorney Castle in Bannffshire. She kept in close touch with her kinfolk in Lochaber and would therefore be well acquainted with Alasdair's reputation. Her name is sometimes anglicised to Cicely or Julia MacDonald. She lived between c.1660 and c.1729 and is recognised as a fine bard who, on this occasion, produced a great poem which followed the intricacies of the Gaelic panegyric code where various standard references are made to enhance the reputation of the subject.

The full poem has some thirteen stanzas of which we sing only three. Examples of the panegyric code are found in rann 1 where he is likened to an oak and in rann 2 where his leadership and generosity are highlighted, his support for his kin is valued and in courage he is seen as a lion.