

# **A' CHOILLE GHRUAMACH**

(The gloomy forest)

## **Verse 1**

Gu bheil mi `m ònrachd sa choille ghruamaich ,  
**How alone I feel in the gloomy forest,**  
Mo smaointean luaineach cha tog mi fonn,  
**My thoughts are restless, I can't raise a tune,**  
Fhuair mi'n t-àite seo `n aghaidh nàdair,  
**I have found this place so unnatural,**  
Gun thrèig gach tàlant a bha nam cheann,  
**That every talent in my head has deserted me,**  
Cha dèan mi òran a chur air dòigh ann,  
**I can't organise myself to compose a song,**  
Nuair nì mi tòiseachadh bidh mi trom.  
**Whenever I start I become depressed.**  
Chaill mi Ghàidhlig seach mar a b' àbhaist dhomh  
**I've lost my Gaelic compared with how it used to be**  
Nuair a bha mi san dùthaich thall.  
**When I was back in the country over there.**

## **Verse 2**

Chan fhaigh mi m'inntinn leam ann an òrdugh  
**I can't get my thoughts in order**  
Ged bha mi eòlach air dèanamh rann;  
**Though I was experienced in composing poetry;**  
'S e mheudaich bròn dhomh `s a lùghdaich sòlas  
**It has increased my misery and diminished my happiness**  
Gun duine còmhla' rium a nì rium cainnt.  
**That there is no-one with me to talk to.**  
Gach latha `s oidhche `s gach car a nì mi,  
**Every day and night and in everything I do,**  
Gum bi mi cuimhneachadh anns gach àm  
**I am constantly reminded**  
An tìr a dh'fhàg mi bha `n taic an t-sàile,  
**Of the land I left behind that was close to the sea,**  
Ged tha mi `n dràst' ann am bràighe ghleann.  
**Though now I live high on the brae above the valley.**

## **Verse 3**

Gur h-iomadh caochladh tigh'nn air an t-saoghal,  
**Many changes have come over the world,**  
'S ro bheag a shaoil mi nuair bha mi thall,  
**And little did I think of it when I was back home,**  
Bu bheachd dhomh nuair-sin, mun d'rinn mi gluasad,  
**I imagined at that time, before I made my move,**

Gum fàsainn uasal nuair thiginn ann,  
**That I would become an aristocrat when I came here,**  
An car a fhuair mi cha b' ann gum bhuannachd,  
**The change that came over was not to my advantage,**  
Tigh'nn thar a' chuain air a' chuairt bha meallt',  
**Coming across the ocean on this journey of deception,**  
Gu tìr nan craobh anns nach eil an t-saorsainn,  
**To this land of trees where there is no freedom,**  
Gun mhart, gun chaora 's mi dh'aodach gann.  
**Without cattle, without sheep, and even short of clothing.**

#### Verse 4

Chan fhaigh mi innse dhuibh anns an dàn seo,  
**I can't tell you in this poem,**  
Cha dèan mo nàdur a chur air dòigh  
**My nature won't permit me to express it**  
Gach fios a b' aill leam thoirt do na càirdean,  
**The news I would like to give to my friends,**  
San tìr a dh'fhàg mi rinn m' àrach òg,  
**In the land I left behind where I was brought up as a child,**  
Gach aon a leughas e tuigibh reusan,  
**But all who read this, understand and reason,**  
'S na tugaibh èisteachd do luchd a' bhòst,  
**And don't listen to the propagandists,**  
Na fàidhean brèige a bhios gur teumadh,  
**The lying prophets who will beguile you,**  
Gun aca spèis dhuibh ach dèidh ur n-òir.  
**With no other motive than to get your money.**

#### Verse 5

Ged bhithinn dìcheallach ann an sgrìobhadh,  
**Though I were diligent in my writing,**  
Gun gabhainn mìosa ris agus còrr,  
**Though it would take me a month or more,**  
Mun cuirinn crìoch air na bheil air m'inntinn  
**To finish everything that's on my mind**  
'S mun tugainn dhuibh e le cainnt mo bheòil.  
**And present it to you in my own words.**  
Tha mulad dìomhair an dèidh mo lìonadh,  
**Secret sorrow has overwhelmed me,**  
Bhon 's èiginn strìochdadh an seo rim bheò,  
**For I have to struggle here for the rest of my life,**  
Air bheag thoil-inntinn sa choille chruim seo,  
**With little pleasure in this maze of a forest,**  
Gun duine faighneachd an seinn mi ceòl.  
**And nobody asks me to sing my song.**

John Maclean, also known as Iain MacAilein or Bàrd Thighearna Chola, (1787-1848), was born in Caolas, Tiree. He trained as a shoemaker, and in addition to composing local verse, became family bard to the Laird of Coll - a prestigious if unpaid role which required him to celebrate local events in poetic mode. In 1819, the poet decided to begin a new life in Nova Scotia. He settled first in Pictou and later moved to Glenbard, Antigonish County.

The 18 verses of *A' Choille Ghruamach* paint a picture of the hardships endured by the pioneer settlers as they cleared acres of the dense forest before cultivation could begin. Like many other Highland settlers in the New World, he was ill prepared for the hard physical labour, as well as for the social and psychological changes he faced in a new land. However, he chose to remain in Canada, and became in time a popular and respected citizen and a poet of international significance.