Heroes

I did not see Lannes at Ratisbon
nor MacLennan at Auldearn
nor Gillies MacBain at Culloden,
but I saw an Englishman in Egypt.

A poor little chap with chubby cheeks
and knees grinding each other,
pimply unattractive face -
garment of the bravest spirit.

He was not a bit "in the pub
in the time of the fists being closed,"
but a lion against the breast of battle,
in the morose wounding showers.

His hour came with the shells,
with the notched iron splinters,
in the smoke and flame,
in the shaking and terror of the battlefield.

Word came to him in the bullet shower
that he should be a hero briskly,
and he was that while he lasted
but it wasn't much time he got.

He kept his guns to the tanks,
bucking with tearing crashing screech,
until he himself got, about the stomach,
that biff that put him to the ground,
mouth down in sand and gravel,
without a chirp from his ugly high-pitched voice.

No cross or medal was put to his
chest or to his name or to his family;
there were not many of his troop alive,
and if there were their word would not be strong.
And at any rate, if a battle post stands
many are knocked down because of him,
not expecting fame, not wanting a medal
or any froth from the mouth of the field of slaughter.

I saw a great warrior of England,
a poor manikin on whom no eye would rest;
no Alasdair of Glen Garry;
and he took a little weeping to my eyes.
**Curaidhean**

Chan fhaca mi Lannes aig Ratasbon
no MacGill-Fhinnein aig Allt Eire
no Gill-Iosa aig Cuil-Lodair,
ach chunnaic mi Sasunnach 'san Eiphit.

Fear beag truagh le gruaidhean pluiceach
is ghiinian a'bleith a cheile,
aodann guireanach gun tachd ann -
comhdach an spioraid bu tréine.

Cha robh buaidh air "'san tigh-osa
'n am nan dorn a bhith 'gan dunadh",
ach leoghann e ri uchd a' chatha,
anns na frasan guineach mugach.

Thainig uair-san leis na sligean,
leis na spealgan-iaruinn bearnach,
anns an toit is anns an lasair,
ann an crith is maoim na haraich.

Thainig fios dha 'san fhrois pheileir
e bhith gu spreigearra 'na dhiunach:
is b'e sin e fhad 's a mhair e,
ach cha b'hatha fhuar e dh'uine.

Chum e ghunnachan ris na tancan,
a'bocail le sgriach shracaidh stairnich
gus an d' fhuaire fhein mu 'n stamaig
an deannal ud a chuirt ri lar e,
bial sios an gainmhich 's an greabhal,
gun diog o ghuth caol grannda.

Cha do chuireadh crois no meadal
ri uchd no ainm no g'a chairdean:
cha robh a bheag dhe fhdimh maireann,
's nan robh cha bhiodh am facal laird;
's co dhiubh, ma sheasas ursann-chatha
leagar moran air a shailleabh
gun duil ri clu, nach iarr am meadal
no cop 'sam bith a bial na h-araich.

Chunnaic mi gaisgeach mor a Sasuinn,
fearachan bochd nach laighheadh suil air;
cha b' Alasdair a Gleanna Garadh -
is thug e gal beag air mo shuilean.