

A Doctor of the Old School, Vol. 5 by Ian Maclaren

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A DOCTOR OF THE OLD SCHOOL

by Ian Maclaren

Book V.

THE MOURNING OF THE GLEN

PREFACE

It is with great good will that I write this short preface to the edition of "A Doctor of the Old School" (which has been illustrated by Mr. Gordon after an admirable and understanding fashion) because there are two things that I should like to say to my readers, being also my friends.

One, is to answer a question that has been often and fairly asked. Was there ever any doctor so self-forgetful and so utterly Christian as William MacLure? To which I am proud to reply, on my conscience: Not one man, but many in Scotland and in the South country. I will dare prophecy also across the sea.

It has been one man's good fortune to know four country doctors, not one of whom was without his faults--Weelum was not perfect--but who, each one, might have sat for my hero. Three are now resting from their labors, and the fourth, if he ever should see these lines, would never identify himself.

Then I desire to thank my readers, and chiefly the medical profession for the reception given to the Doctor of Drumtochty.

For many years I have desired to pay some tribute to a class whose service to the community was known to every countryman, but after the tale had gone forth my heart failed. For it might have been despised for the little grace of letters in the style and because of the outward roughness of the man. But neither his biographer nor his circumstances have been able to obscure MacLure who has himself won all honest hearts, and received afresh the recognition of his more distinguished brethren.

From all parts of the English-speaking world letters have come in commendation of Weelum MacLure, and many were from doctors who had received new courage. It is surely more honor than a new writer could ever have deserved to receive the approbation of a profession whose

charity puts us all to shame.

May I take this first opportunity to declare how deeply my heart has been touched by the favor shown to a simple book by the American people, and to express my hope that one day it may be given me to see you face to face.

IAN MACLAREN. Liverpool, Oct. 4, 1895.

THE MOURNING OF THE GLEN

V.

THE MOURNING OF THE GLEN.

Dr. MacLure was buried during the great snowstorm which is still spoken of, and will remain the standard of snowfall in Drumtochty for the century. The snow was deep on the Monday, and the men that gave notice of his funeral had hard work to reach the doctor's distant patients.

On Tuesday morning it began to fall again in heavy, fleecy flakes, and continued till Thursday, and then on Thursday the north wind rose and swept the snow into the hollows of the roads that went to the upland farms, and built it into a huge bank at the mouth of Glen Urtach, and laid it across our main roads in drifts of every size and the most lovely shapes, and filled up crevices in the hills to the depth of fifty

feet.

On Friday morning the wind had sunk to passing gusts that powdered your coat with white, and the sun was shining on one of those winter landscapes no townsman can imagine and no countryman ever forgets. The Glen, from end to end and side to side, was clothed in a glistening mantle white as no fuller on earth could white it, that flung its skirts over the clumps of trees and scattered farmhouses, and was only divided where the Tochty ran with black, swollen stream. The great moor rose and fell in swelling billows of snow that arched themselves over the burns, running deep in the mossy ground, and hid the black peat bogs with a thin, treacherous crust.

[Illustration.]

Beyond, the hills northwards and westwards stood high in white majesty, save where the black crags of Glen Urtach broke the line, and, above our lower Grampians, we caught glimpses of the distant peaks that lifted their heads in holiness unto God.

It seemed to me a fitting day for William MacLure's funeral, rather than summer time, with its flowers and golden corn. He had not been a soft man, nor had he lived an easy life, and now he was to be laid to rest amid the austere majesty of winter, yet in the shining of the sun. Jamie Soutar, with whom I toiled across the Glen, did not think with me, but was gravely concerned.

"Nae doot it's a graund sicht; the like o't is no gien tae us twice in a generation, an' nae king wes ever carried tae his tomb in sic a cathedral.

"But it's the fouk a'm conseederin', an' hoo they'll win through; it's hard eneuch for them 'at's on the road, an' it's clean impossible for the lave.

[Illustration: "TOILED ACROSS THE GLEN"]

"They 'ill dae their best, every man o' them, ye may depend on that, an' hed it been open weather there wudna hev been six able-bodied men missin'.

"A' wes mad at them, because they never said onything when he wes leevin', but they felt for a' that what he hed dune, an', a' think, he kent it afore he deed.

"He hed juist ae faut, tae ma thinkin', for a' never jidged the waur o' him for his titch of rochness--guid trees hae gnarled bark--but he thotched ower little o' himsel'.

"Noo, gin a' hed asked him hoo mony fouk wud come tae his beerial, he

wud hae said, 'They 'ill be Drumsheugh an' yersel', an' may be twa or three neeburs besides the minister,' an' the fact is that nae man in oor time wud hae sic a githerin' if it werena for the storm.

[Illustration]

"Ye see," said Jamie, who had been counting heads all morning, "there's six shepherds in Glen Urtaeh--they're shut up fast; an' there nicht hae been a gude half dizen frae Dunleith wy, an' a'm telt there's nae road; an' there's the heich Glen, nae man cud cross the muir the day, an' it's aucht mile round;" and Jamie proceeded to review the Glen in every detail of age, driftiness of road and strength of body, till we arrived at the doctor's cottage, when he had settled on a reduction of fifty through stress of weather.

[Illustration: "ANE OF THEM GIED OWER THE HEAD IN A DRIFT, AND HIS NEEBURS HAD TAE PU' HIM OOT,']

Drumsheugh was acknowledged as chief mourner by the Glen, and received us at the gate with a labored attempt at everyday manners.

"Ye've hed heavy traivellin', a' doot, an' ye 'ill be cauld. It's hard weather for the sheep an' a'm thinkin' this 'ill be a feeding storm.

"There wes nae use trying tae dig oot the front door yestreen, for it

wud hae been drifted up again before morning. We've cleared awa the snow at the back for the prayer; ye 'ill get in at the kitchen door.

"There's a puckle Dunleith men-----"

"Wha?" cried Jamie in an instant.

"Dunleith men," said Drumsheugh.

"Div ye mean they're here, whar are they?"

"Drying themsels at the fire, an' no without need; ane of them gied ower the head in a drift, and his neeburs hed tae pu' him oot.

"It took them a gude fower oors tae get across, an' it wes coorse wark; they likit him weel doon that wy, an', Jamie, man"--here Drumsheugh's voice changed its note, and his public manner disappeared--"what div ye think o' this? every man o' them has on his blacks."

"It's mair than cud be expeckit" said Jamie; "but whar dae yon men come frae, Drumsheugh?"

Two men in plaids were descending the hill behind the doctor's cottage, taking three feet at a stride, and carrying long staffs in their hands.

"They're Glen Urtach men, Jamie, for are o' them wes at Kildrummie fair wi' sheep, but hoo they've wun doon passes me."

"It canna be, Drumsheugh," said Jamie, greatly excited. "Glen Urtach's steikit up wi' sna like a locked door."

[Illustration: "TWO MEN IN PLAIDS WERE DESCENDING THE HILL"]

"Ye're no surely frae the Glen, lads?" as the men leaped the dyke and crossed to the back door, the snow falling from their plaids as they walked.

"We're that an' nae mistak, but a' thocht we wud be lickit ae place, eh, Charlie? a'm no sae weel acquaint wi' the hill on this side, an' there wes some kittle (hazardous) drifts."

"It wes grand o' ye tae mak the attempt," said Drumsheugh, "an' a'm gled ye're safe."

"He cam through as bad himsel' tae help ma wife," was Charlie's reply.

"They're three mair Urtach shepherds 'ill come in by sune; they're frae Upper Urtach an' we saw them fording the river; ma certes it took them

a' their time, for it wes up tae their waists and rinnin' like a mill lade, but they jined hands and cam ower fine." And the Urtach men went in to the fire. The Glen began to arrive in twos and threes, and Jamie, from a point of vantage at the gate, and under an appearance of utter indifference, checked his roll till even he was satisfied.

[Illustration]

"Weelum MacLure 'ill hae the beerial he deserves in spite o' sna and drifts; it passes a' tae see hoo they've githered frae far an' near.

"A'm thinkin' ye can colleck them for the minister noo, Drumsheugh. A'body's here except the heich Glen, an' we mauna luke for them."

"Dinna be sae sure o' that, Jamie. Yon's terrible like them on the road, wi' Whinnie at their head;" and so it was, twelve in all, only old Adam Ross absent, detained by force, being eighty-two years of age.

"It wud hae been temptin' Providence tae cross the muir," Whinnie explained, "and it's a fell stap roond; a' doot we're laist."

"See, Jamie," said Drumsheugh, as he went to the house, "gin there be ony antern body in sicht afore we begin; we maun mak alloances the day wi' twa feet o' sna on the grund, tae say naethin' o' drifts."

"There's something at the turnin', an' it's no fouk; it's a machine o' some kind or ither--maybe a bread cart that's focht its wy up."

"Na, it's no that; there's twa horses, are afore the ither; if it's no a dogcart wi' twa men in the front; they 'ill be comin' tae the beerial."

"What wud ye sae, Jamie," Hillocks suggested, "but it micht be some o' thae Muirtown doctors? they were awfu' chief wi' MacLure."

"It's nae Muirtown doctors," cried Jamie, in great exultation, "nor ony ither doctors. A' ken thae horses, and wha's ahind them. Quick, man, Hillocks, stop the fouk, and tell Drumsheugh tae come oot, for Lord Kilspindie hes come up frae Muirtown Castle."

Jamie himself slipped behind, and did not wish to be seen.

"It's the respeck he's gettin' the day frae high an' low," was Jamie's husky apology; "tae think o' them fetchin' their wy doon frae Glen Urtach, and toiling roond frae the heich Glen, an' his Lordship driving through the drifts a' the road frae Muirtown, juist tae honour Weelum MacLure's beerial.

[Illustration: "TWA HORSES, ANE AFORE THE IOTHER"]

"It's nae ceremony the day, ye may lippen tae it; it's the hert brocht

the fouk, an' ye can see it in their faces; ilka man hes his ain
reason, an' he's thinkin' on't though he's speakin' o' naethin' but the
storm; he's mindin' the day Weelum pued him out frae the jaws o' death,
or the nicht he savit the gude wife in her oor o' tribble.

"That's why they pit on their blacks this mornin' afore it wes licht,
and wrastled through the sna drifts at risk o' life. Drumtochty fouk
canna say muckle, it's an awfu' peety, and they 'ill dae their best tae
show naethin', but a' can read it a' in their een.

"But wae's me"--and Jamie broke down utterly behind a fir tree, so
tender a thing is a cynic's heart--"that fouk 'ill tak a man's best wark
a' his days without a word an' no dae him honour till he dees. Oh, if
they hed only githered like this juist aince when he wes livin', an' lat
him see he hedna laboured in vain. His reward has come ower late".

During Jamie's vain regret, the castle trap, bearing the marks of a wild
passage in the snow-covered wheels, a broken shaft tied with rope, a
twisted lamp, and the panting horses, pulled up between two rows of
farmers, and Drumsheugh received his lordship with evident emotion.

"Ma lord ... we never thocht o' this ... an' sic a road."

"How are you, Drumsheugh? and how are you all this wintry day? That's
how I'm half an hour late; it took us four hours' stiff work for sixteen

miles, mostly in the drifts, of course."

"It wes gude o' yir lordship, tae mak sic an effort, an' the hale Glen wull be gratefu' tae ye, for ony kindness tae him is kindness tae us."

[Illustration: HE HAD LEFT HIS OVERCOAT AND WAS IN BLACK]

"You make too much of it, Drumsheugh," and the clear, firm voice was heard of all; "it would have taken more than a few snow drifts to keep me from showing my respect to William MacLure's memory." When all had gathered in a half circle before the kitchen door, Lord Kilspindie came out--every man noticed he had left his overcoat, and was in black, like the Glen--and took a place in the middle with Drumsheugh and Burnbrae, his two chief tenants, on the right and left, and as the minister appeared every man bared his head.

The doctor looked on the company--a hundred men such as for strength and gravity you could hardly have matched in Scotland--standing out in picturesque relief against the white background, and he said:

"It's a bitter day, friends, and some of you are old; perhaps it might be wise to cover your heads before I begin to pray."

Lord Kilspindie, standing erect and grey-headed between the two old men, replied:

"We thank you, Dr. Davidson, for your thoughtfulness; but he endured many a storm in our service, and we are not afraid of a few minutes' cold at his funeral."

A look flashed round the stern faces, and was reflected from the minister, who seemed to stand higher.

His prayer, we noticed with critical appreciation, was composed for the occasion, and the first part was a thanksgiving to God for the life work of our doctor, wherein each clause was a reference to his services and sacrifices. No one moved or said Amen--it had been strange with us--but when every man had heard the gratitude of his dumb heart offered to heaven, there was a great sigh.

After which the minister prayed that we might have grace to live as this man had done from youth to old age, not for himself, but for others, and that we might be followed to our grave by somewhat of "that love wherewith we mourn this day Thy servant departed." Again the same sigh, and the minister said Amen. The "wricht" stood in the doorway without speaking, and four stalwart men came forward. They were the volunteers that would lift the coffin and carry it for the first stage. One was Tammas, Annie Mitchell's man; and another was Saunders Baxter, for whose life MacLure had his great fight with death; and the third was the Glen Urtach shepherd for whose wife's sake MacLure suffered a broken leg and three fractured ribs in a drift; and the fourth, a Dunleith man, had his

own reasons of remembrance.

"He's far lichtler than ye wud expeck for sae big a man--there wesna muckle left o' him, ye see--but the road is heavy, and a'il change ye aifter the first half mile."

"Ye needna tribble yersel, wricht," said the man from Glen Urtach; "the'll be nae change in the cairryin' the day," and Tammas was thankful some one had saved him speaking.

Surely no funeral is like unto that of a doctor for pathos, and a peculiar sadness fell on that company as his body was carried out who for nearly half a century had been their help in sickness, and had beaten back death time after time from their door. Death after all was victor, for the man that had saved them had not been able to save himself.

As the coffin passed the stable door a horse nieghed within, and every man looked at his neighbour. It was his old mare crying to her master.

Jamie slipped into the stable, and went up into the stall.

"Puir lass, ye're no gaen' wi' him the day, an' ye 'ill never see him again; ye've hed yir last ride thegither, an' ye were true tae the end."

[Illustration: "DEATH AFTER ALL WAS VICTOR"]

After the funeral Drumsheugh came himself for Jess, and took her to his farm. Saunders made a bed for her with soft, dry straw, and prepared for her supper such things as horses love. Jess would neither take food nor rest, but moved uneasily in her stall, and seemed to be waiting for some one that never came. No man knows what a horse or a dog understands and feels, for God hath not given them our speech. If any footstep was heard in the courtyard, she began to neigh, and was always looking round as the door opened. But nothing would tempt her to eat, and in the night-time Drumsheugh heard her crying as if she expected to be taken out for some sudden journey. The Kildrummie veterinary came to see her, and said that nothing could be done when it happened after this fashion with an old horse.

[Illustration]

"A've seen it aince afore," he said. "Gin she were a Christian instead o' a horse, ye micht say she wes dying o' a broken hert."

He recommended that she should be shot to end her misery, but no man could be found in the Glen to do the deed and Jess relieved them of the trouble. When Drumsheugh went to the stable on Monday morning, a week after Dr. MacLure fell on sleep, Jess was resting at last, but her eyes were open and her face turned to the door.

"She was a' the wife he hed," said Jamie, as he rejoined the procession,
"an' they luv'd ane anither weel."

The black thread wound itself along the whiteness of the Glen, the coffin first, with his lordship and Drumsheugh behind, and the others as they pleased, but in closer ranks than usual, because the snow on either side was deep, and because this was not as other funerals. They could see the women standing at the door of every house on the hillside, and weeping, for each family had some good reason in forty years to remember MacLure. When Bell Baxter saw Saunders alive, and the coffin of the doctor that saved him on her man's shoulder, she bowed her head on the dyke, and the bairns in the village made such a wail for him they loved that the men nearly disgraced themselves.

"A'm gled we're through that, at any rate," said Hillocks; "he wes awfu' taen up wi' the bairns, conseederin' he hed nane o' his ain."

There was only one drift on the road between his cottage and the kirkyard, and it had been cut early that morning. Before daybreak Saunders had roused the lads in the bothy, and they had set to work by the light of lanterns with such good will that, when Drumsheugh came down to engineer a circuit for the funeral, there was a fair passage, with walls of snow twelve feet high on either side.

[Illustration.]

"Man, Saunders," he said, "this wes a kind thoct, and rael weel dune."

But Saunders' only reply was this: "Mony a time he's hed tae gang round; he micht as weel hae an open road for his last traivel."

[Illustration: "STANDING AT THE DOOR"]

When the coffin was laid down at the mouth of the grave, the only blackness in the white kirkyard, Tammas Mitchell did the most beautiful thing in all his life. He knelt down and carefully wiped off the snow the wind had blown upon the coffin, and which had covered the name, and when he had done this he disappeared behind the others, so that Drumsheugh could hardly find him to take a cord. For these were the eight that buried Dr. MacLure--Lord Kilspindie at the head as landlord and Drumsheugh at his feet as his friend; the two ministers of the parish came first on the right and left; then Burnbrae and Hillocks of the farmers, and Saunders and Tammas for the plowmen. So the Glen he loved laid him to rest.

When the bedrel had finished his work and the turf had been spread, Lord Kilspindie spoke:

"Friends of Drumtocty, it would not be right that we should part in

silence and no man say what is in every heart. We have buried the remains of one that served this Glen with a devotion that has known no reserve, and a kindliness that never failed, for more than forty years. I have seen many brave men in my day, but no man in the trenches of Sebastopol carried himself more knightly than William MacLure. You will never have heard from his lips what I may tell you to-day, that my father secured for him a valuable post in his younger days, and he preferred to work among his own people; and I wished to do many things for him when he was old, but he would have nothing for himself. He will never be forgotten while one of us lives, and I pray that all doctors everywhere may share his spirit. If it be your pleasure, I shall erect a cross above his grave, and shall ask my old friend and companion Dr. Davidson, your minister, to choose the text to be inscribed."

"We thank you, Lord Kilspindie," said the doctor, "for your presence with us in our sorrow and your tribute to the memory of William MacLure, and I choose this for his text:

"Greater love hath no man than this,
that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Milton was, at that time, held in the bonds of a very bitter theology, and his indignation was stirred by this unqualified eulogium.

"No doubt Dr. MacLure hed mony natural virtues, an' he did his wark weel, but it wes a peety he didna mak mair profession o' releegion."

"When William MacLure appears before the Judge, Milton," said Lachlan Campbell, who that day spoke his last words in public, and they were in defence of charity, "He will not be asking him about his professions, for the doctor's judgment has been ready long ago; and it is a good judgment, and you and I will be happy men if we get the like of it.

"It is written in the Gospel, but it is William MacLure that will not be expecting it."

"What is't Lachlan?" asked Jamie Soutar eagerly.

The old man, now very feeble, stood in the middle of the road, and his face, once so hard, was softened into a winsome tenderness.

"Come, ye blessed of My Father
... I was sick and ye visited Me."

[Illustration: GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.]