

A Doctor of the Old School, Part 2

Ian Maclaren

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A DOCTOR OF THE OLD SCHOOL

by Ian Maclaren

Book II.

THROUGH THE FLOOD

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.

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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.

THROUGH THE FLOOD.

II

THROUGH THE FLOOD

Doctor MacLure did not lead a solemn procession from the sick bed to the dining-room, and give his opinion from the hearthrug with an air of wisdom bordering on the supernatural, because neither the Drumtochty houses nor his manners were on that large scale. He was accustomed to deliver himself in the yard, and to conclude his directions with one foot in the stirrup; but when he left the room where the life of Annie Mitchell was ebbing slowly away, our doctor said not one word, and at the sight of his face her husband's heart was troubled.

He was a dull man, Tammas, who could not read the meaning of a sign, and labored under a perpetual disability of speech; but love was eyes to him

that day, and a mouth.

"Is't as bad as yir lookin', doctor? tell's the truth; wull Annie no come through?" and Tammas looked MacLure straight in the face, who never flinched his duty or said smooth things.

"A' wud gie onything tae say Annie hes a chance, but a' daurna; a' doot yir gaein' tae lose her, Tammas."

MacLure was in the saddle, and as he gave his judgment, he laid his hand on Tammas's shoulder with one of the rare caresses that pass between men.

[Illustration: A' DOOT YIR GAEIN' TAE LOSE HER, TAMMAS.]

"It's a sair business, but ye 'ill play the man and no vex Annie; she 'ill dae her best, a'll warrant."

"An' a'll dae mine," and Tammas gave MacLure's hand a grip that would have crushed the bones of a weakling. Drumtochty felt in such moments the brotherliness of this rough-looking man, and loved him.

Tammas hid his face in Jess's mane, who looked round with sorrow in her beautiful eyes, for she had seen many tragedies, and in this silent sympathy the stricken man drank his cup, drop by drop.

"A' wesna prepared for this, for a' aye thocht she wud live the langest.... She's younger than me by ten years, and never wes ill.... We've been mairit twal year laist Martinmas, but it's juist like a year the day... A' wes never worthy o' her, the bonniest, snoddest (neatest), kindest lass in the Glen.... A' never cud mak oot hoo she ever lookit at me, 'at hesna hed ae word tae say aboot her till it's ower late.... She didna cuist up tae me that a' wesna worthy o' her, no her, but aye she said, 'Yir ma ain gudeman, and nane cud be kinder tae me.' ... An' a' wes minded tae be kind, but a' see noo mony little trokes a' micht hae dune for her, and noo the time is bye.... Naebody kens hoo patient she wes wi' me, and aye made the best o' 'me, an' never pit me tae shame afore the fook.... An' we never hed ae cross word, no ane in twal year.... We were mair nor man and wife, we were sweethearts a' the time.... Oh, ma bonnie lass, what 'ill the bairnies an' me dae without ye, Annie?"

[Illustration: "THE BONNIEST, SNODDEST, KINDLIEST LASS IN THE GLEN"]

The winter night was falling fast, the snow lay deep upon the ground, and the merciless north wind moaned through the close as Tammas wrestled with his sorrow dry-eyed, for tears were denied Drumtochty men. Neither the doctor nor Jess moved hand or foot, but their hearts were with their fellow creature, and at length the doctor made a sign to Marget Howe, who had come out in search of Tammas, and now stood by his side.

[Illustration]

"Dinna mourn tae the brakin' o' yir hert, Tammas," she said, "as if Annie an' you hed never luved. Neither death nor time can pairt them that luve; there's naethin' in a' the world sae strong as luve. If Annie gaes frae the sichot' yir een she 'ill come the nearer tae yir hert. She wants tae see ye, and tae hear ye say that ye 'ill never forget her nicht nor day till ye meet in the land where there's nae pairtin'. Oh,

a' ken what a'm saying', for it's five year noo sin George gied awa, an' he's mair wi' me noo than when he wes in Edinboro' and I was in Drumtochty."

[Illustration]

"Thank ye kindly, Marget; thae are gude words and true, an' ye hev the richt tae say them; but a' canna dae without seem' Annie comin' tae meet me in the gloamin', an' gaein' in an' oot the hoose, an' hearin' her ca' me by ma name, an' a'll no can tell her that a'lve her when there's nae Annie in the hoose.

"Can naethin' be dune, doctor? Ye savit Flora Cammil, and young Burnbrae, an' yon shepherd's wife Dunleith wy, an' we were a sae prood o' ye, an' pleased tae think that ye hed keepit deith frae anither hame. Can ye no think o' somethin' tae help Annie, and gie her back tae her man and bairnies?" and Tammas searched the doctor's face in the cold, weird light.

"There's nae pooer on heaven or airth like luvie," Marget said to me afterwards; "it maks the weak strong and the dumb tae speak. Oor herts were as water afore Tammas's words, an' a' saw the doctor shake in his saddle. A' never kent till that meenut hoo he hed a share in a'body's grief, an' carried the heaviest wecht o' a' the Glen. A' peetied him wi' Tammas lookin' at him sae wistfully, as if he hed the keys o' life an' deith in his hands. But he wes honest, and wudna hold oot a false houp tae deceive a sore hert or win escape for himsel'."

"Ye needna plead wi' me, Tammas, to dae the best a' can for yir wife. Man, a' kent her lang afore ye ever luvied her; a' brocht her intae the world, and a' saw her through the fever when she wes a bit lassikie; a' closed her mither's een, and it was me hed tae tell her she wes an orphan, an' nae man wes better pleased when she got a gude husband, and a' helpit her wi' her fower bairns. A've naither wife nor bairns o' ma own, an' a' coont a' the fouk o' the Glen ma family. Div ye think a' wudna save Annie if I cud? If there wes a man in Muirtown 'at cud dae mair for her, a'd have him this verra nicht, but a' the doctors in Perthshire are helpless for this tribble.

"Tammas, ma puir fallow, if it could avail, a' tell ye a' wud lay doon this auld worn-oot ruckle o' a body o' mine juist tae see ye baith sittin' at the fireside, an' the bairns roond ye, couthy an' canty again; but it's no tae be, Tammas, it's no tae be."

"When a' lookit at the doctor's face," Marget said, "a' thocht him the winsomest man a' ever saw. He was transfigured that nicht, for a'm judging there's nae transfiguration like luvie."

"It's God's wull an' maun be borne, but it's a sair wull for me, an' a'm no ungratefu' tae you, doctor, for a' ye've dune and what ye said the nicht," and Tammas went back to sit with Annie for the last time.

Jess picked her way through the deep snow to the main road, with a skill that came of long experience, and the doctor held converse with her according to his wont.

"Eh, Jess wumman, yon wes the hardest wark a' hae tae face, and a' wud raither hae ta'en ma chance o' anither row in a Glen Urtach drift than tell Tammas Mitchell his wife wes deein'.

"A' said she cudna be cured, and it wes true, for there's juist ae man in the land fit for't, and they micht as weel try tae get the mune oot o' heaven. Sae a' said naethin' tae vex Tammas's hert, for it's heavy eneuch withoot regrets.

"But it's hard, Jess, that money wull buy life after a', an' if Annie wes a duchess her man wudna lose her; but bein' only a puir cottar's wife, she maun dee afore the week's oot.

"Gin we hed him the morn there's little doot she would be saved, for he hesna lost mair than five per cent, o' his cases, and they 'ill be puir toon's cratur, no strappin women like Annie.

[Illustration: "IT'S OOT O' THE QUESTION, JESS, SAE HURRY UP"]

"It's oot o' the question, Jess, sae hurry up, lass, for we've hed a heavy day. But it wud be the grandest thing that was ever dune in the Glen in oor time if it could be managed by hook or crook.

"We 'ill gang and see Drumsheugh, Jess; he's anither man sin' Geordie Hoo's deith, and he wes aye kinder than fouk kent;" and the doctor passed at a gallop through the village, whose lights shone across the white frost-bound road.

"Come in by, doctor; a' heard ye on the road; ye 'ill hae been at Tammas Mitchell's; hoo's the gudewife? a' doot she's sober."

"Annie's deein', Drumsheugh, an' Tammas is like tae brak his hert."

"That's no lightsome, doctor, no lightsome ava, for a' dinna ken ony man in Drumtochty sae bund up in his wife as Tammas, and there's no a bonnier wumman o' her age crosses our kirk door than Annie, nor a cleverer at her wark. Man, ye 'ill need tae pit yir brains in steep. Is she clean beyond ye?"

"Beyond me and every ither in the land but ane, and it wud cost a hundred guineas tae bring him tae Drumtochty."

[Illustration:]

"Certes, he's no blate; it's a fell chairge for a short day's work; but hundred or no hundred we'll hae him, an' no let Annie gang, and her no half her years."

"Are ye meanin' it, Drumsheugh?" and MacLure turned white below the tan. "William MacLure," said Drumsheugh, in one of the few confidences that ever broke the Drumtochty reserve, "a'm a lonely man, wi' naebody o' ma ain blude tae care for me livin', or tae lift me intae ma coffin when a'm deid.

"A' fecht awa at Muirtown market for an extra pound on a beast, or a shillin' on the quarter o' barley, an' what's the gude o't? Burnbrae gaes aff tae get a goon for his wife or a buke for his college laddie, an' Lachlan Campbell 'ill no leave the place noo without a ribbon for Flora.

"Ilka man in the Kildrummie train has some bit fairin' his pooch for the fouk at hame that he's bocht wi' the siller he won.

"But there's naebody tae be lookin' oot for me, an' comin' doon the road tae meet me, and daffin' (joking) wi' me about their fairing, or feeling ma pockets. Ou ay, a've seen it a' at ither hooses, though they tried tae hide it frae me for fear a' wud lauch at them. Me lauch, wi' ma cauld, empty hame!

"Yir the only man kens, Weelum, that I aince luv'd the noblest wumman in the glen or onywhere, an' a' luv'e her still, but wi' anither luv'e noo.

"She had given her heart tae anither, or a've thocht a' micht hae won her, though nae man be worthy o' sic a gift. Ma hert turned tae bitterness, but that passed awa beside the brier bush whar George Hoo lay yon sad simmer time. Some day a'll tell ye ma story, Weelum, for you an' me are auld freends, and will be till we dee."

MacLure felt beneath the table for Drumsheugh's hand, but neither man looked at the other.

"Weel, a' we can dae noo, Weelum, gin we haena mickle brichtness in oor ain names, is tae keep the licht frae gaein' oot in anither hoose. Write the telegram, man, and Sandy 'ill send it aff frae Kildrummie this verra nicht, and ye 'ill hae yir man the morn."

[Illustration: "THE EAST HAD COME TO MEET THE WEST"]

"Yir the man a' coonted ye, Drumsheugh, but ye 'ill grant me ae favor. Ye 'ill lat me pay the half, bit by bit--a' ken yir wullin' tae dae't a'--but a' haena mony pleasures, an' a' wud like tae hae ma ain share in savin' Annie's life."

Next morning a figure received Sir George on the Kildrummie platform, whom that famous surgeon took for a gillie, but who introduced himself as "MacLure of Drumtochty." It seemed as if the East had come to meet the West when these two stood together, the one in travelling furs, handsome and distinguished, with his strong, cultured face and carriage of authority, a characteristic type of his profession; and the other more marvellously dressed than ever, for Drumsheugh's topcoat had been forced upon him for the occasion, his face and neck one redness with the bitter cold; rough and ungainly, yet not without some signs of power in his eye and voice, the most heroic type of his noble profession. MacLure compassed the precious arrival with observances till he was securely seated in Drumsheugh's dog cart--a vehicle that lent itself to history--with two full-sized plaids added to his equipment--Drumsheugh and Hillocks had both been requisitioned--and MacLure wrapped another plaid round a leather case, which was placed below the seat with such reverence as might be given to the Queen's regalia. Peter attended their departure full of interest, and as soon as they were in the fir woods MacLure explained that it would be an eventful journey.

"It's a richt in here, for the wind disna get at the snaw, but the drifts are deep in the Glen, and th'ill be some engineerin' afore we get tae oor destination."

Four times they left the road and took their way over fields, twice they forced a passage through a slap in a dyke, thrice they used gaps in the paling which MacLure had made on his downward journey.

[Illustration]

"A' seleckit the road this mornin', an' a' ken the depth tae an inch; we 'ill get through this steadin' here tae the main road, but oor worst job 'ill be crossin' the Tochtly.

"Ye see the bridge hes been shaken wi' this winter's flood, and we daurna venture on it, sae we hev tae ford, and the snaw's been melting up Urtach way. There's nae doot the water's gey big, and it's threatenin' tae rise, but we 'ill win through wi' a warstle.

"It micht be safer tae lift the instruments oot o' reach o' the water; wud ye mind haddin' them on yir knee till we're ower, an' keep firm in yir seat in case we come on a stane in the bed o' the river."

By this time they had come to the edge, and it was not a cheering sight. The Tochtly had spread out over the meadows, and while they waited they could see it cover another two inches on the trunk of a tree. There are summer floods, when the water is brown and flecked with foam, but this was a winter flood, which is black and sullen, and runs in the centre with a strong, fierce, silent current. Upon the opposite side Hillocks stood to give directions by word and hand, as the ford was on his land, and none knew the Tochtly better in all its ways.

[Illustration: "THEY PASSED THROUGH THE SHALLOW WATER WITHOUT MISHAP"]

They passed through the shallow water without mishap, save when the wheel struck a hidden stone or fell suddenly into a rut; but when they neared the body of the river MacLure halted, to give Jess a minute's breathing.

"It 'ill tak ye a' yir time, lass, an' a' wud raither be on yir back; but ye never failed me yet, and a wumman's life is hangin' on the crossin'."

With the first plunge into the bed of the stream the water rose to the axles, and then it crept up to the shafts, so that the surgeon could feel it lapping in about his feet, while the dogcart began to quiver, and it seemed as if it were to be carried away. Sir George was as brave as most men, but he had never forded a Highland river in flood, and the mass of black water racing past beneath, before, behind him, affected his imagination and shook his nerves. He rose from his seat and ordered MacLure to turn back, declaring that he would be condemned utterly and eternally if he allowed himself to be drowned for any person.

"Sit doon," thundered MacLure; "condemned ye will be suner or later gin ye shirk yir duty, but through the water ye gang the day."

Both men spoke much more strongly and shortly, but this is what they intended to say, and it was MacLure that prevailed.

Jess trailed her feet along the ground with cunning art, and held her shoulder against the stream; MacLure leant forward in his seat, a rein in each hand, and his eyes fixed on Hillocks, who was now standing up to the waist in the water, shouting directions and cheering on horse and driver.

"Haud tae the richt, doctor; there's a hole yonder. Keep oot o't for ony sake."

[Illustration: "A HEAP OF SPEECHLESS MISERY BY THE KITCHEN FIRE."]

That's heap of speechless misery by the kitchen fire, and carried him off to the barn, and spread some corn on the threshing floor and thrust a flail into his hands.

"Noo we've tae begin, an' we 'ill no be dune for an' oor, and ye've tae lay on without stoppin' till a' come for ye, an' a'll shut the door tae haud in the noise, an' keep yir dog beside ye, for there maunna be a cheep about the hoose for Annie's sake."

"A'll dae anything ye want me, but if--if--"

"A'll come for ye, Tammas, gin there be danger; but what are ye feared for wi' the Queen's ain surgeon here?"

Fifty minutes did the flail rise and fall, save twice, when Tammas crept to the door and listened, the dog lifting his head and whining.

It seemed twelve hours instead of one when the door swung back, and MacLure filled the doorway, preceded by a great burst of light, for the sun had arisen on the snow.

[Illustration: "MA AIN DEAR MAN"]

His face was as tidings of great joy, and Elspeth told me that there was nothing like it to be seen that afternoon for glory, save the sun itself in the heavens.

"A' never saw the marrow o't, Tammas, an' a'll never see the like again; it's a' ower, man, without a hitch frae beginnin' tae end, and she's fa'in' asleep as fine as ye like."

"Dis he think Annie ... 'ill live?"

"Of coorse he dis, and be about the hoose inside a month; that's the gud o' bein' a clean-bluided, weel-livin'----"

"Preserve ye, man, what's wrang wi' ye? it's a mercy a' keppit ye, or we wud hev hed anither job for Sir George.

"Ye're a richt noo; sit doon on the strae. A'll come back in a whilie, an' ye i'll see Annie juist for a meenut, but ye maunna say a word." Marget took him in and let him kneel by Annie's bedside.

He said nothing then or afterwards, for speech came only once in his lifetime to Tammas, but Annie whispered, "Ma ain dear man."

When the doctor placed the precious bag beside Sir George in our solitary first next morning, he laid a cheque beside it and was about to leave.

"No, no," said the great man. "Mrs. Macfayden and I were on the gossip last night, and I know the whole story about you and your friend.

"You have some right to call me a coward, but I'll never let you count me a mean, miserly rascal," and the cheque with Drumsheugh's painful writing fell in fifty pieces on the floor.

[Illustration: "I'M PROUD TO HAVE MET YOU"]

As the train began to move, a voice from the first called so that all the station heard. "Give's another shake of your hand, MacLure; I'm proud to have met you; you are an honor to our profession. Mind the antiseptic dressings."

It was market day, but only Jamie Soutar and Hillocks had ventured down.

"Did ye hear yon, Hillocks? hoo dae ye feel? A'll no deny a'm lifted."

Halfway to the Junction Hillocks had recovered, and began to grasp the situation.

"Tell's what he said. A' wud like to hae it exact for Drumsheugh."

"Thae's the eedential words, an' they're true; there's no a man in Drumtochty disna ken that, except ane."

"An' wha's thar, Jamie?"

"It's Weelum MacLure himsel. Man, a've often girmed that he sud fecht awa for us a', and maybe dee before he kent that he hed githered mair luv than ony man in the Glen.

"A'm prood tae hae met ye', says Sir George, an' him the greatest doctor in the land. 'Yir an honor tae oor profession.'

"Hillocks, a' wudna hae missed it for twenty notes," said James Soutar, cynic-in-ordinary to the parish of Drumtochty.

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