

DECEMBER TIMELINE AND ARTICLES 1894

The PlayActress had been published on November 30th and December began with Crockett dictating to his secretary...

Bank House

4th Dec

Dear Sir,

I am directed to state that the disposal of Mr Crockett's books are not in his hands but entirely in those of the publisher whose property they are, who is the proper person to whom to refer such a request as yours

Faithfully yours

William G. Brown.

He then wrote to Unwin about a book he'd been asked to review.

Bank House

Dec 5th

Re Vanna MS by Stewart sent me to read

Private and Confidential.

Dear Unwin,

I ought to have written to you about 'Vanna' before. But I could not grip it when I first read it and I wanted another look. So this forenoon I sat down again and went through the book.

And what do I think? Well I think, dealing with Galloway characters, you might sell a small edition, following in the wake of other things in that field.

With even good will the book did not grip me at all, though it interested me, being as a background well known to me. Perhaps I am not quite the right person to ask. I felt at the time the desire to correct or to do the thing better.

The book is quaintly and stiffly written and the writer has some knowledge of the period but he has not been able to make us live with the characters and the Mr's and 'Dr' and Misses weary me.

I am not much taken either with the characters so far as I can make them out. They are dim and unrealised, specially Vanna. The smuggling chapters are very poor stuff.

A word of praise is due to the crisp references to scenery which are in good taste. The book is to me pleasant though of no very definite flavour.

But I think it might have a small sale. I should not think of it for the Pseudonym but rather issue at 3/6 say a thousand copies.

This is just what I think, exactly as I think it, and very likely may be of no value

Ever yours

SRC

I return it by this post.

And finally the Illustrated Stickit is published!

Bank House

7th December

Dear Unwin

The Stickit Minister is all that I could desire - a sumptuous book in every way. I am glad to hear they are going off so well. If not much money there is a good deal of honour in the thing of which you deserve the greater share. Will you kindly send copies on my behalf to the following:

- 1. A.E Denholm-Young, 11 Melville Place, Edinburgh*
- 2. W C. Burn -Murdoch, University Settlement, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh*
- 3. W.S. MacGeorge, 11 Melville Place, Edinburgh*
- 4. William Manley, Artist, Kirkcudbright*
- 5 Earnest Waterlow, ARA (address you will find in the London directory)*
- 6. James Paterson RWS Moniaive, Dumfriesshire*

Please have it noticed in some paper that the frontispiece is by 'Denholm-Young' of Glasgow or he will worry the life out of me. The name has been left out both from the plate and from the index. When I made up the index I had not the picture. I should like to send him the paper in which the notice appears. Kindly send the other copies including the two fine copies as soon as possible to Penicuik. Did you see the Lang review of the Lilac in the Times?

With Kind Regards

Faithfully yours

SRC

I haven't been able to place Lang's review of the Lilac Sunbonnet.

Bank House

8th Dec

My Dear Unwin,

Many thanks for sending on the Earl of Pembroke's letter. I shall drop him a note to thank him for his kind criticism on my books, and especially on the Lilac. As you say there are quite a number of interviews and I suppose more to come. We have at least two or three interviews every week. R.H.Sheppard has just gone to Paris after spending two days with me. He wrote from Aquitaine to say that he had been commissioned by two American publishers of journals to write a study of my books. Will you kindly send a copy of the Illustrated Stickit to Dr Nicoll, if you have not already done so. He writes me a very enthusiastic letter this morning about the Play Actreess which I enclose. Kindly return it at your convenience. No doubt the little book will be slated, because slating is in the air just now, but it will sell and all that will pass away. Kindly also send a copy of the Illustrated Stickit to Robert Dinwiddie and J. Maxwell, Esq, Stranraer, Dumfries on my account.

With Kind Regards

Faithfully yours

SR.Crockett

On December 14th the Literary World offered some redress on the plagiarism 'feast' that had been rumbling on:

*The Literary World December 14th
Table Talk*

We are sorry to see the attacks that have been made upon Mr Crockett. The greatest poets, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, helped themselves freely to whatever material they required; we are not aware that even the late Lord Tennyson ever apologised for the wholesale extracts from Sir Thomas Malory digested into the 'Idylls of the King.' Surely, if he does his predecessor no injury, and has sufficient genius to make what he borrows his own by the way in which he handles it, the adapter is in the same boat with the very respectable rogues mentioned above, with Dante, and, to go further back, with Homer, who is considered by the best authorities to have compiled his famous poem from the popular songs of the day.

For Crockett, life went on... though he was coming incredibly close to leaving the ministry... Note also that by 17th news of Stevenson's death had reached Scotland.

Bank House

17th Dec 1894

Private

Dear Unwin,

Many thanks for your kind letter and for the cyclopedia of news which duly arrived. It is a splendid work and will be of great service to me. I send you a letter from Wylie, in which, as you will observe, he asks me to speak to you about the Raiders and the Stickit Minister. Of course do exactly as you feel about the matter. But it is a worry to me to get his letters. He has been writing to me every two or three days to mention it to you. Of course you have only to say to him that in spite of Mr Crockett's note you must, of course, conduct your business in your own way.

With regard to the matter of Stevenson's poem in the Pall Mall, I have a letter from Sidney Colvin explaining the whole thing, which I shall send you in a day or two. Kindly send it back at your convenience. I think we might well give permission to these student people to publish the 'tutor of Curleywee.' I am rejoiced to hear that you are to publish 'The Grey Man.' I think it should be my best work.

With kind regards

Faithfully yours

SRC

Please don't publish my letter about Becke. It was meant to be private. I shall write about him somewhere.

Bank House

20 December 1894

Dear Unwin,

I also was very much taken with the Pennell drawings, in fact I had them framed. Please send him a copy on my behalf, and of course I should also be glad to pay for the drawings if necessary.

I have written to Wylie in terms of your letter so that is all right. I think I would not make a row about the poem in the Pall Mall in the circumstances of Stevenson's death. I enclose a private letter (not for publication) from Sidney Colvin which explains the whole matter. However, if you are very keen on the subject you might write and say that the poem was sent to me eighteen months ago for the purpose of reproducing in the Illustrated Edition and was based upon my dedication, Mr Stevenson turning my prose into verse for the purpose of sending it to me. I think you should not trouble further about the 'Student' people. I have lost their letter and if they write again you might answer for me. I get about sixty letters in a morning and even an extra one is a horrid bother. I am rejoiced that the Play-Actress is with second edition and that the entire Illustrated edition of Stickit has been sold. I wish you would hurry up and print either eight or ten thousand of a third edition of Lilac so that we might be in a position to beat some other people's advertisements. The Bonny Briar of Hodder & S I mean. They say 18,000! Believe it, I do not.

With every kind regard

Faithfully yours

SRC

And just before Christmas he found time to write to the Macmillans again. The letter gives an account of the past several months:

Bank House

Dec 21st

My dear Friend,

I am ashamed to have been so long in writing to you but you know how I am driven, and since you have been here I have done an immense deal of work. I do not know how many places I have been. I was in Manchester speaking and a week with Mr Ruskin, and I have been in Dundee and a week with Lang in St Andrews. I see there is no chance for me getting away till the week either before or the week after the 17th of January when I shall go to lecture in Glasgow. I shall let you know in time at any rate before, and appoint John to meet me in Ayr if he will come and be my guest for a few days gallivanting, then we will take our course as soon as we have seen the places for the Glen. I should think that two or three big days would do the thing. I have got all the permissions so I shall want a rest by that time badly. I have much to do before that – finish the ‘Men of the Moss hags’ which is still in process of being recast and corrected.

I rejoice to think of our beautiful time at the Glen. The wonderful mornings, the happy days, the delicious evenings. It was a Quiet Isle of Bliss in my life’s busy sea. And so I would like to keep it. And so I look forward to coming to you again before long. It is like a dream to think that I shall again be driving up the long Glen and through the woods to the Lodge. Perhaps some day I shall live nearer you and so see you oftener. We keep well happily here, although there is still much sickness. It needs a long frost to set us right.

I have a phonograph now and find it of great use for my letters and for sketches of stories.

I wonder if John is busy now and what time he gets off to the hill. Has it been a good backend among the sheep? You will be glad to hear that the whole first edition of the ‘Play actress’ has been sold already and it was a large one, while all the Illustrated Stickit are sold out and it will become a very scarce book.

We have had any number of interviewers. The latest one was in last week’s Black and White. It was exceedingly well written. I have not a copy or I should sent it, Mr Jolly would get you one.

Dear people at the Glen. You keep a good part of my heart up with you. I send you my love and hope to come and look for it soon myself.

Don’t quite forget

Your affectionate friend

SRC

And the final reviews of the year were more positive than some he'd been subjected to recently:

**Longman's Magazine, December 1894.
At the Sign of the ship.**

The following review, perhaps, may count among the curiosities of criticism. It is from the Spectator, which thus notices, in October, a book published in April, and at present in its fortieth thousand, there or thereabouts - Mr Crocketts 'The Raiders'. 'This is also a Scottish tale, not from Fifeshire, but from the Western Coast. We are bound to say we have found it a little long; graphic as they are, *the descriptions in particular are drawn a little too much*, in our judgment; but there is no lack of force and freshness in it, while both the hero who tells the story, and 'May Mischief' who may be called the heroine, are individualised with a good deal of power.' The style is curious. How can descriptions 'be drawn a little too much?' Mystery! The novel has given a good deal of pleasure, and has flooded Galloway with pilgrims, but, if all critics were as dilatory and as laconic as the Spectator, what chance would any new book have? Poor authors would perish of inanition, and expire in a conspiracy of silence, and even the public, apparently, would be sufferers.

The Spectator December 22nd 1894.

The Lilac Sunbonnet.

It is really very hard to review a book like this of Mr Crockett's. One takes it up determined to be before all things a conscientious and discriminating critic, but insensibly all thought of criticism melts away from the mind like morning mists before the strengthening sunlight, and one reads on and on for the pure pleasure of doing so. The book sets forth no theory of life, inculcates no new moralities, nor does it attempt in any way to put a strain on our intellectual faculties, which, in these days of Heavenly Twins, Yellow Asters, and Green Carnations, is, in itself, a great recommendation. Yet for all that, we venture to say that it will long survive them, though for the moment it has not created such a stir as they did on their first appearance. Whatever may be said of their merits, it cannot be claimed that they are works of art; and, moreover, they deal with view and questions of society peculiar to this generation, which will in all probability entirely cease to interest the generation now growing up. This little idyll, on the other hand, dealing with the ever universal subject of pure and 'true love, and fearlessness and faith unfeigned' and of how this brought with it the hope of forgiveness to one bowed beneath the consciousness of an old and

unforgiven sin, may undoubtedly claim to be a genuine work of art, - if not a very profound one. Not that the deeper notes of tragedy and pathos are wanting in it either. After so much, both in literature and on the stage, of men and women with dark pasts and dreary futures, it is very pleasant to be called upon to follow such a course of true love as that of Winsome Charteris and Ralph Peden, the young probationer of the Marrow Kirk, who 'had been trained by his father to think more of a professor's opinion on his Hebrew version than of a woman's opinion whatever on any subject;' and though 'he had been told that woman was an indispensable part of the economy of Providence' had come to the conclusion that 'she could not have been created when God looked on all that he had made and found it very good.' 'Very good,' in spite of this previous theories, Ralph speedily finds Winsome, who is quite worthy of their name. She is, besides, a clever practical young woman of affairs and manages the farm that belongs to her grand-parents with signal success, at the same time looking after the old people with filial tenderness and care. Here is a picture of them as they sit together day after day:

Within the shadowed 'ben'-room of Craig Ronald all the morning this oddly assorted pair of old people had been sitting—as indeed every morning they sat, one busily reading and often looking up to talk; while the other, the master of the house himself, sat silent, a majestic and altogether pathetic figure, looking solemnly out with wide-open, dreamy eyes, waking to the actual world of speech and purposeful life only at rare intervals.

It is not difficult to guess from whom Winsome Charteris inherits her charm. It is from the old grandmother with the snowy folds of lawn about her throat and breast, looking in her venerable and sweet old age like a portrait of Raeburn's while 'the twinkle in her brown eyes alone told of the forceful and restless spirit that was imprisoned within,' so wise and gay withal and so ready with the rippling silver laughter so deliciously provocative to those who heard it, and a hand so white and shapely that it might have been envied by the Lady Elizabeth Greatorix of the Big House, who used to lend her those marvellous stories of the Great Unknown. It was only when kept waiting for her third volume that the old lady ever got seriously vexed. The farm life with its doings weaves itself in and out of the story, and could only have been described by one intimately acquainted with the smallest details, who has studied carefully the ways of the creatures he describes. Here is an account of the cows coming down from the pasture to be milked:

Down the brae face from the green meadowlets that fringed the moor came the long procession of cows. Swinging a little from side to side, they came—black Galloways, and the red and white breed of Ayrshire in single file—the wavering piebald line following the intricacies of the path. Each full-fed, heavy-uddered mother of the herd came marching full matronly with stately tread, blowing her flower-perfumed breath from dewy nostrils. The older and staidier animals—Marly, and Duple, and Flecky—came stolidly homeward, their heads swinging low, absorbed in meditative digestion, and soberly retasting the sweetly succulent grass of the hollows, and the crisper and tastier acidity of the sorrel-mixed grass of the knolls. Behind them came Spotty and Speckly, young and frisky matrons of but a year's standing, who yet knew no better than to run

with futile head at Roger, and so encourage that short-haired and short-tempered collie to snap at their heels.

A strain of genuine and kindly humour runs through the book, though we must confess that, like much Scotch humour, when it becomes really conscious of itself, it is apt to grow somewhat strained and stilted, which is frequently the case with Saunders Mowdiewort and his mother, and even at times, with the half-witted Jock Gordon. This charge cannot be brought against Andra, the bare-legged boy of twelve, who is always delightful whenever he comes upon the scene. Here, however, is a scene in which the humour is as natural and unforced as could be wished:

When he got to Cairn Ronald..

When he got to Craig Ronald, the girls were in the byre at the milking, and at every cow's tail there stood a young man, rompish Ebie Farrish at that at which Jess was milking, and quiet Jock Forrest at Meg's. Ebie was joking and keeping up a fire of running comment with Jess, whose dark-browed gipsy face and blue-black wisps of hair were set sideways towards him, with her cheek pressed upon Lucky's side, as she sent the warm white milk from her nimble fingers, with a pleasant musical hissing sound against the sides of the milking-pail....

The conversation in the byre proceeded somewhat in this way:

Jess was milking her last cow, with her head looking sideways at Ebie, who stood plaiting Marly's tail in a newfangled fashion he had brought from the low end of the parish, and which was just making its way among young men of taste...

'I never really likit a lass afore, Jess, ye may believe me, for I wasna a lad to rin after them. But whenever I cam' to Craig Ronald I saw that I was dune for.'

'Stan' back, ye muckle slabber! said Jess, suddenly and emphatically, in a voice that could have been heard a hundred yards away. Speckly was pushing sideways against her as if to crowd her off her stool.

'Say ye sae, Ebie?' she added, as if she had not previously spoken, in the low even voice in which she had spoken from the first, and which could be heard by Ebie alone...

'I hae seen, maybes, bonnier faces, as ye micht say—'

'Haud aff, wi' ye there; mind whaur yer comin' ye muckle senseless nowt!' said Jess to her Ayrshire Hornie, who had been treading on her toes.

'As I was sayin', Jess, I hae seen—'

'Can y no unnderstan', ye senseless lump?' cried Jess, warningly; 'I'll knock the heid aff ye, gin ye dinna drap it!' still to Hornie, of course.

Mr Crockett's descriptions of scenery are very real, and the effects of early morning, high noon, and evening are touched with the hand of a lover, but here and there they are somewhat spoilt by suggesting too much the artist's colour-box, such as a phrase as the following rather calling

to mind the directions of the drawing-master to an outdoor sketching class:

The indigo grey of the sky was receding, and tinging towards the east with an imperceptibly graded lavender which merged behind the long shaggy outline of the piny ridge into a wash of pale lemon yellow.

A small thing , after all, to take exception to; but it strikes a jarring note in language that is for the most part harmonious and well-balanced, and chosen with a true ear and delicate sense of feeling. We wish we had space to quote the whole of the song of the thrust that sings to Winsome as she sits dreaming of her love in the early dawn, beginning thus:

'There—there—there—' he sang, *'Can't you see, can't you see, can't you see it? Love is the secret, the secret! Could you but know it, did you but show it! Hear me! hear me! hear me! Down in the forest I loved her!*

Where the clear and reiterated note of the bird is exactly caught and reproduced. We have rarely come across such pretty love-making. Indeed, we have heard of the book being recommended to a young man as a perfect lesson in that art - the lady who did so, adding as she took a meditative and retrospective glance back along the year, 'Ah, if any one had ever wooed me so prettily, I should not be a spinster today.'

The Lilac Sunbonnet is once again the story of Romeo and Juliet enacted without its tragedy, and the 'parent's strife' is 'buried' not through the death of the hapless lovers, but somewhat through the triumph of the fearless faith of their true love, the scene of which is laid, not in fair Verona, but among the breezy Galloway Mountains, glowing in purple heather and musical with the sound of streams and burns.

We will end, though it seems hardly fair, except that it illustrates Mr Crockett's power of pathos, with the reconciliation of the parents:

But when the church was empty and all gone home, in the little vestry two men sat together, and the door was shut. Between them they held a miniature, the picture of a girl with a flush of rose on her cheek and a laughing light in her eyes. There was silence, but for a quick catch in the stronger man's breathing, which sounded like a sob. Gilbert Peden, who had only lost and never won, and Allan Welsh, who had both won and lost, were forever at one. There was silence between them, as they looked with eyes of deathless love at the picture which spoke to them of other years.

It is well to have set before us in these days this other brighter, purer side of life and love, as true and quite as common as the side to which just now we are being treated *ad nauseum*.

And the final review before Christmas was in the **Publishers Circular for December 22nd.**

'We like the Play-Actress' better than Mr Crockett's earlier story in the 'Autonym Series.' It tells of the awakening of Gilbert Rutherford, the 'great preacher' of a certain Scotch district, to a more liberal view of human nature in general, and the play-actress nature in particular. The preacher has been holding forth on the subject of the prodigal son, and, after the sermon, is approached by a young woman with a child. The woman tells him that the little girl is his son's child, that his son had died abroad, and that the

child's mother (her sister) is not a fit and proper person to be trusted with her upbringing. Little Ailie is left with her grandfather, and Bessie Upton returns to London. The child entirely wins the old man's heart, as well as those of the friends with whom he is staying. Ailie is perpetually prattling of Aunt Bessie, her doings and sayings, and wants to know when she is to visit them. Dr Rutherford, takes a sudden resolve and visits the metropolis to find out more about the play-actress. He meets with a talkative constable, and an unpleasant gamin, and at length finds himself in a lodging house in Essex Street, Strand, close to the theatre where Bessie is playing, and fellow lodger of John Spencer, Bessie's suitor. It is an eventful visit for the 'great preacher' and there are one or two strong scenes where his dipsomania daughter in law creates a disturbance in the theatre, and where she has a gathering of fast young men in her home. The end is the only possible one - the dipsomaniac dies, and her noble sister returns with the preacher to Scotland. Without being in any way remarkable, the story is clever.'

After Christmas, and just days away from leaving the ministry, he wrote again to Unwin. Their own collaborative days would soon come to an end and Crockett would rely on Watt to get him work - and plenty of it - now he was to be a full time professional writer.

Bank House

26 Dec 1894

Dear Unwin,

Greeting! I send you the unbound 'Stickit' I like the white vellum and gold best of all so just bind it like the last. If I am to shell out four pounds for the two books on vellum and be out of pocket twenty or thirty for the credit of the edition, surely my affectionate and long suffering publisher will bind both copies for me. N'est pas!

Please send me a full of my little contribution 'The Sealed Book' to Good Reading by return, like a good chap

Ever yours

SRC

Bank House

28th Dec

My Dear Unwin,

Many thanks for sending on Henderson's book. I wondered who he was. He wrote a most excellent life of Claverhouse in the National Dictionary of Biography which I admired for its precision and kind statement

I shall read his book with great pleasure. Thanks also for sending on the large paper bound 'Stickit' but if you charge me £4 for the two I think you should bind them both. Why charge me with one binding and not the other.

Ever truly yours

SRC

I am coming to town in the Spring. See you then.

And the last letter of the year sees him firming up to meet John Macmillan - as soon as he left the ministry he went and spent some time at Glenhead in preparation for his 'new' life. He was to be in Ayr researching for 'The Grey Man' which was already under contract, though not due for publication till 1896.

Bank House

Dec 29th

Dear John,

I am due to be in Ayr beginning my full tour to Cassillis, Auchencairn, Bargany and Colgreave on Monday January 7th ie Monday next. I expect you to meet me at the Station Hotel and be my guest and if the wife will come too then that will be so much the more joyous. Try to persuade her, given this bitter weather. I should hope that by Thursday we could manage to be at Barrhill driving at once to Glenhead which is the goal of my desiers, where I long for rest and look for it.

I have to lecture in Glasgow on Thursday 17th but by leaving Glenhead very early, driving to Barrhill and catching a train I hope to manage a whole week at Glenhead with my most dear friends.

Come anytime to the hotel you like on Monday. I shall have a room ready for you.

With love to you both from the two of us

Ever your friend

SRC