

THE CROCKETT/MACMILLAN LETTERS

1893-1894

To commemorate the 160th anniversary of the birth of S.R.Crockett,
the 125th anniversary of the publication of 'The Raiders' (1894)
and the 125th anniversary of the first meeting of Crockett and
Macmillan (1893) and Crockett's month long sojourn at Glenhead
in September 1894.



John and Marion Macmillan at home

The fifteen letters written by S.R.Crockett to the Macmillans during 1893 and 1894 form the core of this special downloadable commemorative work, with added footnotes and commentary as appropriate. Research is ongoing through the extensive Galloway Raiders archive and nothing should be taken as inviolable 'fact'. The aim is to give members something of a flavour of the times and act in some small part to stir a sense of significance of the place and the relationship, and the necessity to commemorate this.

[] denotes illegible handwriting in the original.

The full archive of letters between Crockett and the Macmillans is held at the Hornel Library in Broughton House, Kirkcudbright. It forms part of the National Archive. The full correspondence relating to Crockett and the Macmillans, which runs through (beyond his death) to 1917 is still in the process of production.

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INTRODUCTION

Galloway has many Crockett connections – not least in the area which used to be referred to as ‘Crockett country’ – the Galloway hills. Crockett’s biggest legacy and resonance is found in the landscape, especially the hills. Glenhead is a gateway to this. On August 15th 1893, Crockett and John Macmillan met for the first time. Macmillan took Crockett out into the Galloway hills looking for locations for *The Raiders*, (1894) and *Men of the Moss Hags* (1895). Their friendship endured until Crockett’s death and Glenhead was a sanctuary for him from the travails and rigours of life as a ‘celebrity’ author.

Glenhead was inhabited by farming people up till the 1970s. While a modest place, we should not under estimate its significance simply because it has no high status. The people who are connected with it may be ordinary but their stories are nevertheless important as windows into a past that is less ‘privileged.’ Sadly, Glenhead fell into dereliction in recent years and was subsequently sold by the Forestry Commission. Today it has been all but demolished to be replaced with modern ‘bunkhouses’. Ironically Glenhead might have offered a significant opportunity for tourism. Such cultural vandalism denies the possibility for current and future generations to fully appreciate the cultural heritage and literary significance of the place and seems to be a classic example of cutting off one’s nose to spite one’s face.

Glentool may be better known today for its connection with Robert the Bruce and a medieval battle, but Glenhead offered a chance to look a bit closer to home. The view is different but every bit as important. The history of ordinary people –which was what Crockett championed in his books – is our history too. And it is this history, too often considered unimportant in the ‘grand scheme’ of progress, that can be lost when the physical connections disappear.

Crockett gave much to Galloway, and it is sad that so little has been given by Galloway to him in return, at least in the last fifty years. He should hold a central place in the literary history of Galloway. He would have been at the centre of a campaign for Land Reform were he here today. He would also be shocked at the casual and callous disregard for the local environment and history which is a sign of what we call ‘progress’ and ‘development.’ He wrote about such things in many of his Galloway stories – fictionalising in order to be able to speak more plainly of the social conditions of ordinary rural dwellers. He always spoke up for the underdog and he was scathing in his attitudes towards those in power.

That Crockett still needs to be ‘discovered’ in his own country is a mark of sadness, if not of shame. Look to the Brontës, to Dickens or even to Sir Walter Scott to see how it is possible to ‘capitalise’ on culture in the built and/or natural environment. Crockett has every bit as much to offer as any of these other figures – his connections to

Galloway wipe the floor with the more well known Buchan or Scott – he is native born – and more significantly he wrote extensively, and accurately, about the landscape and people of his home.

Yet the riches Crockett offers the people of Galloway are far beyond the tourist dollar. His stories ooze history, adventure and romance. Whether you are interested in hills or history, Crockett offers a unique Gallovidian view point and one that should make Galloway natives and lovers alike proud.

Glenhead Farm was a place of ‘meeting’ and a refuge for generations. It was a place where stories were born, incubated and shared. John Macmillan and Glenhead Farm played an important part in the ‘story’ of Crockett’s fiction. This should surely be celebrated. The Crockett/Macmillan letters held at the Hornel Library in Broughton House, Kirkcudbright are central to this. They are filled with local flavour and personal detail of social and cultural significance. Above all they pay tribute to a friendship and his love of Galloway. But hidden away in archives, they are unable to act as good testimony to a legacy that should be much more widely known.

Crockett was well aware that ‘*time brings changes.*’ While we can all appreciate this fact, it is surely a responsibility to future generations as well as a gesture to those who have gone before, to do what we can to preserve both spirit and fabric of places which have both been so greatly loved and so culturally and historically significant in our landscape. Perhaps we need to appreciate the ‘ordinary’ as well if we are to hope to tell the story of our country and to come to know our place in the world.

I have been working on producing a volume to show Glenhead and the ‘Crockett’ connection for a couple of years now, and I am still working on how to best present the ‘whole’ story of Glenhead. The outcome of the demolition (against planning rules I believe) is still to be determined, and I have been so sickened by the fact that in these most significant years (125th anniversary of 1893 and 1894 ‘connections’) there is nothing but devastation at Glenhead, that I admit to having faltered in my motivation, or more accurately perhaps, have put efforts into other ways of bringing Crockett and Galloway to broader attention.

I shifted to a more personal approach. On August 15th 2018 I attempted to retrace Crockett and Macmillan’s steps from Glenhead up to Loch Enoch, but failed, getting no further than part way up the Gairland Burn. At the time I felt my failure simply reflected the darkness of what was going on around me culturally. However, I regrouped and came up with another plan. It was not within my capabilities to ‘save’ Glenhead, but I will not see it entirely forgotten. This year I set up the #GoCrocketteering project, and on June 28th (thanks to much help from my own John Macmillan - Mark Hannay, - and Alan Wright), I made it to Loch Enoch (via the Pulsaig Burn) and laid two commemorate slates there.

There is still much work to do regarding a full Glenhead publication, and it will not be finished this year - but I could not let this significant date pass without some tribute and so I offer this partial volume to members, as a commemoration of Crockett’s 160th anniversary, his month’s sojourn at Glenhead in September 1894 and his thirty fifth birthday, spent at Glenhead, which occurred at a truly significant turning point in his life.

I firmly believe that locally, Crockett has a vital part to play. Credited with the first tourist ‘boom’ in Galloway in the late 19th and early 20th century, he remains potentially one of the best assets to tourism, both natural and cultural, that Galloway has. He is a figure of huge cultural significance and yet still so vastly under-rated and

unexplored. The potential still waits to be released. The demolition of Glenhead serves as a dark reminder of what we lose when we lose sight of the past.

More will come - one day I will publish the complete letters - but hopefully in the meantime this selection will spark interest in Glenhead and no few questions about how it can have been allowed to be written out of Galloway's social history and cultural landscape. I only wish that, like Crockett 125 years ago, I could be spending this September in Galloway, at Glenhead.

Cally Phillips

Galloway Raiders

September 2019.

1893

Context

The Crockett's visited Laurieston in August 1893. Crockett was undertaking research for what would become his best known (and first) novel 'The Raiders'. He had been given information that John Macmillan of Glenhead knew the hills better than any man and while he was already somewhat familiar, Crockett was keen to go in his company to explore them further. Ruth was pregnant with their third child (George) and did not accompany Crockett and his assistant/secretary Mr Brown on the trip into the hills. It seems the two men did not arrive at Glenhead till the afternoon, on what we can assume was August 15th but Crockett was determined to get to Loch Enoch, despite the late start. The rest, as they say, is history. We can access it through fiction – and in this case, correspondence.

LETTER 1

Laurieston,

Castle Douglas

Aug 17th 1893

Dear Glenhead,

I do not forget the great kindness that you and the Mistress showed a couple of tramps of rather disreputable appearance, and I wish to thank you again for all the splendid hospitality we received. When I got home the wife was in a great state till she heard where we had been and that we had not inconvenienced you to any terrible extent – I gave assurance on this point, and I hope that I spoke the truth.

Indeed we were so happy that at least one of the tramps hopes to revisit the hospitable home of Glenhead and see the mistress and master thereof before very long. The wife would come too but she is not going very far this weather; but another year if all goes well perhaps we may bring her up to see the marvels of Loch Valley at least.

¹

I have been firing her mind with Loch Enoch and its marvels and she hopes to see these too some day. I hope that it won't be long till I see them again either, for it would take a whole day to do anything like justice to that glorious loch, circled by its granite hills.²

I am going to get on with my record of the impressions of my two days and send them to my excellent critic among the hills for correction and suggestion. That was a never to be forgotten walk that we had over the moors, but someday we must start early in the morning and spend the whole day there. I would like to swim across to the island and see Loch in Loch – if that is the way to spell it.

I am sending to you the 'Stickit Minister' – puir laddie you will treat him kindly and gie him a place by the fire side, a gude horn spune an' a sonsy cogfu' o' brose.³

The author has had some buttermilk since he cam doon here, but it's gye an' wersh stuff to the grand meat an' drink o' the Mistress o' Glenhead.

Tell her that my wife sends her kindest regards and very best wishes for her care of her large incumbrance. I have another of my books with some pictures in it by McGeorge and also Geikie's Picturesque Geology of Scotland, which I shall send, the one to keep and the other to read as long as she likes – when I get back to Penicuik.

¹ The plan was laid for a trip to Loch Enoch in September 1894.

² Loch Enoch is a key setting in 'The Raiders.'

³ The Macmillans kept a well stocked library at Glenhead, and over the years Crockett added to it. There is a tale that, early, he pointed to Macmillans bookshelves and said 'I'll fill these' and indeed over the years he sent John Macmillan first edition copies of all his works.

We made good time yesterday. (The roads were good and we got on very quickly – 35 minutes to Eschequhan, 1 hour to House of the Hill,⁴ and the whole family to Newtown Stewart in two hours exactly – which we thought very good considering the heat of the day. We were settling in at tea in Sunnyside, Laurieston at 5.45 – only three hours and three quarters out from Glenhead.

We are busy at journalistic work today – dictating and typing.⁵ So it is wit the ‘hamm is frizzlin’ I’ the pan’ that I write this. Mr Brown sends his kindest regards. And I shake you and the good kind wife by the hand. I wish I had some Glenhead buttermilk!

Always cordially yours,

S.R.Crockett

The ‘Minister’ who hopes that some day he will be ‘stickit’ at Glenhead for a day or two. He would not mind a providential thunderstorm at all.

CONTEXT

This, the first of many letters, shows that Crockett was still (somewhat reluctantly) a minister at this time. His visit to Glenhead was in no small part responsible for the success that allowed him to leave the ministry and take up a full time career writing fiction

⁴ House of the Hill still exists as a hostelry at Glentrool.

⁵ Crockett had been supplementing his income through journalistic work since his student days.

LETTER 2

Lauriston, Castle Douglas

Aug 30th 1893

Dear Kindly Critics,

Your help is invaluable. I have gone carefully over the paper, noting the corrections and thank you for every one of them. Everything is as it ought to be now, and the paper is now something like. It still needs some cutting down but I am sure of this, that nothing has been written about the district so exactly true, for a long time – that is praise not for me, but for my guide, without whom, I should have known nothing.¹ I shall certainly come down over a Sabbath when I have been long enough at home to deserve a week without washing my face, if you can be doin' wid me!² Give my kindest regards to the Mistress in which my Mistress (and Master) joins. We go back on Friday. I think I understand the Pubscaig matter now; but when I come, we shall go over the ground and see for ourselves.³ I think I shall leave out the paragraph out of this paper, and reserve it for the next. 'Dungeon Land in Winter.'⁴ How's that for a little, offhand?

The bairns are making a dreadful racket and I cannot write,⁵

I shall send you a screed when we get back to Penicuik.⁶

Yours ever gratefully,

SRC

Context

While still in Laurieston (presumably at Sunnyside) Crockett writes to thank John and Marion for their help. Already we see an easy familiarity, we might even say a kind of intimacy, established. His attitudes towards his ministry are more than hinted at. It pays the bills. It 'washes' his face. The letter suggests Crockett's attitude towards his ministerial employment. It pays the bills. It 'washes his face.' On leaving the ministry at

¹ Crockett had sent 'proofs' to Macmillan to make sure he got the flavour and detail of the place correct.

² Suggesting that he is keen to get away from the restrictions of 'polite' ministerial life

³ I have not (yet) found any reference to this, so it stands as an example of the mysterious depths that such letters contain.

⁴ This probably refers to an article and later material for The Raiders (perhaps the chapter 'Sixteen Drifty Days.'

⁵ Reminds us that Crockett was at the time the father of two (soon to be three) small children – with all that that entails.

⁶ The correspondence between Crockett (and Ruth) and the Macmillans continued through till his death in 1914.

the beginning of 1895 he went almost immediately to spend sometime in Glenhead, before embarking 'proper' on his career as 'celebrity' writer. But here, as always, he yearns for the Galloway hills

LETTER 3

22nd Sept and 30th Oct 1893

Free Church Manse,

Penicuik, NB

My dear Friends,

Many a day I have said that I would today write a note to my kind friends in the hill country, but each day has hardly sufficed for the things of itself, and has fled away so that I could not tell how it has gone.

But I have not been forgetting you both nor all your kindness to me when I was with you. I have been busy since I came home, I have begun my big book¹ and am now a little more than half way through it. I am living as it were all my morning hours in your part of the country. But the manners and customs of its inhabitants were far other to what they are now, and whereas in the old days the Marshalls, Millers, Macatericks and Faas slit one's hals, the Macmillans only fill your pechan. I prefer the Macmillans and the guid at meal and buttermilk to ony o' your gypsies and broken men.

I think I am getting on pretty well, but Dr Whyte has asked me to begin his winter class at Free St. George's with a couple of lectures – I am to be there two or three Sabbaths – morning, 2nd evening – so I have had those lectures to do and they have kept me away from my story this week, so that I am not quite so far on as I would otherwise have been.²

I see that it is more than a month since I put finger to typewriter to send a line to my friends whom I seem to know so well though our acquaintance was, as far as time goes, of the shortest. But these things do not go by time measure. We were I think fitted to understand one another before I came, for by training and nature we were fitted to have much in common beside a liking for oatmeal porridge.

It is now nearly the end of October, this is Monday, the 30th and the 'Galloway Raid'³ or whatever the name of the thing is to be, is finished and away to London. I think it will be out in the spring. Then I shall not forget my promise to the man who took me to Loch Enoch. There is a great deal about the district in it, and a great deal that will interest you, and the good mistress.

¹ The Raiders, published March 1894.

² Crockett delivered a series of lectures in 1893 for Dr Alexander Whyte. Whyte was old friends with J.M.Barrie's older brother and so a mutual friend of these two authors. The letter provides an illustration of how his ministerial work was getting in the way of his creative endeavours.

³ 'The Raiders' still had not got a determined title. Early suggestions included 'Rogues' Island' and 'The Dark o' the Moon' both later used for other stories, as well as this 'Galloway Raid' This letter shows that Crockett had delivered the complete draft by October 30th, five months in advance of publication.

I would gladly come awa now and see you, but the Mistress of the Manse is now not well enough to make it advisable to be very far frae hame.⁴ (But in the spring I hope that I may be able to look down if you can 'be doing with me' as the Macormicks used to say when they came to the Duchrae asking a night's lodgings in the old times.

Now a word to the Mistress. I am sending a Geology book – Geikie's which is far and away the best on the subject. The wife can study it in the winter time. There is a deal in it, that won't be must use. Tell her to skip all the mineralogy – indeed, all from page 40 to page 194. From that point on it is quite easy and very interesting right on to 636. At that point, begins the history of the formations. As you have not access to fossils up at Glenhead, don't bother with them, except so far as the show how far the world had got on by the kind of beasties that were popular in the different periods. Skip freely and never read anything against the grain, nor bother with details and it is wonderful how good a working knowledge of Geology you may get.⁵ This book is a little present from me to the wife, if she will allow me. I'll soon 'eat aff her' the worth of far more than that if once, I got down. You know the story of 'Old Scroggie' 'There's a man doon in Rerrick that owes me three days peat leadin' said Scroggie. 'his horse is a' deed, sae I'll even gang awa doon for a day or twa an' eat it aff him!'

The bairns are well, all of them, and Mrs Crockett pretty well also. Mr Brown is busy at the college and comes to do his work with me every evening – which is as much for his own good as mine.⁶ We often speak of the happy days that we had on the hills, and he never ceases to say that the next trip he take, he is determined to stick in and not be left behind. I am working hard as ever, I am up every morning – not when I hear the ham in the pan – for I take only porridge, but at 4.20am.⁷

What would they say to that in the parish of Barrhill, mistress? That is almost good dairy-farm time. But when I come to Glenhead about half past eight or maybe nine is sune aneuch for SRC⁸

With all affectionate remembrance

Ever cordially yours

Samuel Rutherford Crockett.

Context

This letter was written from Penicuik over a period of time during the autumn of 1893. It was a very busy time for Crockett, he was trying to consolidate the success of 'The Stickit Minister,' and writing more than 60 letters a day at times, as well as regular correspondence with his new literary agent A.P.Watt and his publisher T.Fisher Unwin. But he still found time to keep up his friendship with the Macmillans.

⁴ Ruth was pregnant with their third child, George, born in December 1893. It was a difficult labour.

⁵ Crockett and Marion shared an interest in Geology.

⁶ Brown was Crockett's assistant/secretary (part time) who had accompanied him on his trip to Galloway.

⁷ Crockett once again shows his frugal nature.

⁸ And again he shows that he views Glenhead as an escape from the life of the minister – a holiday if you will.

He speaks of 'living all his morning hours in your part of the country' and this offers us a clue to Crockett's style of writing- he literally takes himself back to the landscape he writes about. He also jokes about the characters, drawing a keen distinction between the rogues and vagabonds of old and the douce Macmillans.

The letter also illustrates some of the practical conflict between his duties as minister and his ambitions as writer of fiction, which would lead, to his resignation in 1895. The decision was taken privately as early as spring 1894 and when the family moved out of the Church Manse, to Bank House Penicuik in May 1894 it was as a step towards this goal. John Macmillan is one of the first Crockett confided in regarding this potential change.

The letter reveals a shared interest between Crockett and Marion for geology, and his eagerness to encourage an individualised approach to reading.

Crockett often lapsed into Scots when writing to friends. It was a 'habit' which is also noted in the letters of RLS and JMB. Some critics suggest it is an affectation, but in Crockett's case it was simply reverting to his natural speech – there is much evidence of his 'broad Galloway' speech both in his prose and person. It is therefore more proper to suggest that the use of dialect in his letters is simply the manifestation of a shared bond. Even today, Crockett's dialect (as written) if read out loud is an authentic representation of the Galloway dialect. I suggest it is wrong to assume that writing this way was anything beyond a lapsing into a familial colloquialism. In a speech at a dinner honouring him in Dalbeattie in 1906 he explains the matter further...

'Editors and publishers who out of their wisdom desire such and such a crop, and will only pay according to their needs. But though I write of Latin lands, of stately Spanish ceremonials, of Apulian brigands, true it is that of Galloway I may always say, 'My heart, untravelled, fondly turns to thee.' (Loud Applause.) *But I think, I hope, I believe that I have yet kept the best for you. And to you tonight I promise that some day, when editors cease a little from troubling and publishers from dictating, I will write for you of Galloway, and for you, brither Scots, akin to her, a real Galloway book, in the full dialect, to be understood only by those to the manner born.* (Loud Applause.) *I did not think until the other day that such a book would find a publisher, but I met a friend who said, 'I'll publish it when you write it.'* We poor authors may get our fame and our inspiration from our homelands, but we have to get our money elsewhere than where the heather grows.

Our inspiration! Ah, that is a true word. Galloway has always had a cult which counted many true worshippers. I am only one among them. It chances that I have concentrated more, but that is all. The Galloway man in the widest sense; the best known politically and personally, the most ready with tongue and pen, prodigal of work, wise and far-seeing, with a genius which touches all things and adorns all that it touches, is undoubtedly Sir Herbert Maxwell, our chairman tonight. (Loud Applause.) *I had the delight of taking his history of the Peninsular War—that part of it concerned with the life of Wellington—over the battlefields; and I was extremely astonished tonight to find that Sir Herbert had not seen these battlefields. From what I have read I found he had described them more accurately than I could have done myself, who had visited most of them. And when I knew that Sir Herbert was coming two thousand miles here tonight, as well as my good friend, Lord Ardwall — I was going to say the Sheriff; we can hardly forget the old title in his higher rank — I felt*

that it was almost too great an honour. There were others, too, when I was younger, some of whom are still with us, men who taught me to love the grey land. The men who first of all drew my thought to writing were two, one of whom did not write anything so far as I know, but who accompanied the man who did write. These two men were Malcolm Harper and Thomas Bruce, late of Slogarie. (Applause.)

Often as a boy I have seen them starting off, staff in hand, to spy out the land. Once I encountered them on the links of the Cooran, when I myself was going to sleep the night at the herd's house of Loch Dee. I think they had been staying in the shepherd's hut the night before. They waved their hands and cried 'good morning,' as I was passing down the valley. I remember I had the book in the portmanteau at my back, and it was great excitement to me to see the man who had written the 'Rambles in Galloway.' Certainly no local book was so much to me in my wandering boyish days as 'Harper's Rambles in Galloway.' (Applause.) I rejoice that it has kept its place. It carries with it the wild yet homely fragrance of bog myrtle and peat, of soda bannocks and farles of cakes, and will, I hope, be remembered as long as there is a literature of Galloway and Galloway men. I hope that some day Mr Harper will give us another of the same kind, full of reflections of the old historic spirit of the freedom of Galloway. I have often, in print, demanded of Sir Herbert Maxwell, too, that he should write a full and faithful history of Galloway, and I am glad to tell you that tonight I got a sort of half promise that some day he would write it if he could find a publisher. I hope he will keep faith because his Fatherland requires it of him. I on my part will try and do something also for Galloway, something which I have had in my mind for a long while. Of course there are factors, and landlords, and editors, and publishers to be reckoned with. We authors cannot always do just exactly what we would like. The publisher tells you to cut down the dialect because the English public does not understand it. (It ought by this time.) The editor must have a book on a certain subject, because public interest calls for it. The land that holds the heather and the sheep does not hold the money for the man who has to live by his pen. So that to a certain extent the author is dependent upon a more distant public. But some day, when I have time, I intend if I have the ability, to write a book entirely for Gallovidians and Nithsdale people, for those who are to the manner born, and can understand every word of what is meant.

We also see reference to Crockett's habit of rising early. Throughout his career he used the early hours of the morning to write, before the family were up and bothering him. He then had the rest of the day free for research, correspondence, 'the day job' and the rest of his life. It was this continued habit that allowed him to produce at least two novels a year from most of his career. Assuming he regularly wrote some 2000-3000 words a day (which is quite possible within the time) this would not be too arduous a task.

This letter is typewritten. Crockett was an early adopter of the typewriter though he also penned many a handwritten letter throughout his life. He also dictated to his secretary (Mr Brown) adding hand written additions on occasion.

1894

This was perhaps the most significant year of Crockett's career. He had made waves (and enemies) in 1893 with the publication of 'The Stickit Minister' but, taken on by new writing publisher T.Fisher Unwin, this year saw no fewer than four works published. Both Unwin and Crockett's newly contracted agent A.P.Watt made sure that he was visible. There is a huge unpublished correspondence between Crockett and Unwin, and between him and Watt which offer great insight into his life and publishing matters of the time. Some of this will be familiar to you if you have been reading the Raiders 125 Timeline articles this year.

'The Raiders', published in March 1894, was his 'breakthrough' novel and still his best known, but 'The Lilac Sunbonnet,' which ran as a serial from January to September and was published in early October 1894. Short works 'The PlayActress' and 'Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills' were also published in 1894 and throughout the year reference to them is made by Crockett in his correspondence with the Macmillans.

When we look at Crockett's publishing career, we have to remember that he was writing most of his work two to three years ahead of the book publication date – the work was often serialised in the year preceding book publication (thus enabling Crockett to benefit from the syndication rights which were considerably greater than book royalties).

The letters that follow have much to entertain, intrigue and inform. Seemingly insignificant comments in the Glenhead correspondence can offer us key pointers in the development of Crockett's work –and of course his creative thought processes.

LETTER 4

Free Church Manse

Penicuik

NB

Jan 1st

My dear Friends,

I was rejoiced to get your letter this morning and for my wife and myself reciprocate your friendly wishes with much affection to you both. As you say I am as busy as ever, and I have no chance of getting away for a month or two yet, I fear me.¹ But if you were setting up a first class storm and covering up the hills with a mantle of storm I should be tempted to take a Sabbath off and have a service at Glenhead Kirk (Marion Macmillan, precentor) that day. But I fear it is not to be thought of till the wife gets a wee stronger. She has been pretty well on the whole, but still she is weak. She walked down stairs yesterday for the first time, and today she is going to be up most of the day.² Young George is a healthy chap and does his level best at sleeping. We don't hear his voice often, but when he wants anything or gets his temper ruffled, my word, all the manse hears about it. We call him 'The Graven Image' because he looks like one when he sleeps (and he is mostly sleeping) and for another reason, all the women folk draw near and fall down and worship him, being born idolators all of them.³

I have got a large number of drawings of the Loch Dee Country including a beautiful drawing of Loch Enoch and the Merrick from a young fellow Denholm Young who lived one year at the Black Laggan. He is going to be down for three or four weeks illustrating my next book in the summer of this year, so you gie him a can o' buttermilk for the sake o' ye ken what when he comes about the bit.⁴

But I hope to see you all before that. As you say Maisie is much delighted with her new brother. Philip I grieve to say, does not join. He says that he would much rather

¹ The Raiders, The Lilac Sunbonnet and the other two short works were all ongoing with editing and proof revisions.

² George Milner Crockett was born on December 5th.

³ It seems that George (later to be known – and immortalised in fiction as 'Toady Lion') kept this trait throughout his childhood. He was clearly a charming, yet stubborn child. He grew up to be a Naval Commander.

⁴ Denholm Young eventually provided two illustrations for the Stickit 'Gloaming over Curleywee' and 'The Barrier of the Hills'.

have had a horse! The Lilac Sunbonnet begins very soon and I almost wish you were reading it in a book – serial publication is rather wearisome, I always think; but it is what makes the sillar come in to the author, so that it is not to be despised.⁵ I got Mr McKenna's letter and thank you very much for the trouble you took. I have written for the Dundee News, and hope to see it before long.

My wife sends her love to you and with all good will,

And New Year Wishes

Affectionately, your friend

SRC

Context

This new year letter offers insight into the private Crockett. He is jovially irreverent about religion and his 'charge'. His reference to storms is a reminder of how significant they are in Crockett's fiction. From *The Raiders* to *Men of the Moss Hags* (1895) it also anticipates a scene in *'The Loves of Miss Anne'* (1904) where the herd's dog is caught in thunder storm, Crockett uses this particular natural phenomenon both widely and well.

'Shepherds say that if, before a storm, you lay a knife or an iron-tipped staff upon a rock, and touch it with one finger tip—or, better still, with your tongue, you can feel it tingle. Dan Weir tried this, and the warning which he (or his imagination) took from the result was that a tempest was brewing, the like of which he had never experienced. But the truth probably was that he too was worried and restless.'

And, as we now know, this is based on personal experience.

In Crockett's fiction there are no minor characters and it is interesting, in these letters, to find reference to what we might call minor characters in his life. Denholm Young is one such. Crockett was at that time in discussions with his publisher T. Fisher Unwin as regards an illustrated edition of *'The Stickit Minister'* and Denholm Young was one of those artists he was suggesting. On 16th December 1893 he wrote *'Denholm Young is coming to see me on Monday and then I shall send you his drawings and tell you what I should propose to do with them. Most of his drawings however, would far better illustrate the Raiders ... if ever that came to an illustrated edition.'* And many letters pass back and forward between him and TFU in the weeks before Christmas on this subject. On the 28th he writes saying:

'I am giving over the typewritten copy of the Raiders. I hope to send tonight, if I get an uninterrupted day. I shall finish the typewriting and ultimate correction of the whole about Jan 6th. Pp95-196 of my own copy which is typewritten on sheets of this size on which I am writing. The typewriting of the first 40pp seems well done. Then I

⁵ While he might wish not to be bound to serialisation, it was to provide his main income for the rest of his career and Crockett was pragmatist enough to know it.

shall go on with the corrections of the Playactress and let you have it as soon as I possibly can.'

All of this reminds us of the importance of letters as primary source material. The contextualisation of Crockett's frequent letters to agent, publisher, friends and public is an important yet vastly under-researched area. It can serve to put to bed many of the myths regarding the man and his work.

LETTER 5

Bank House

27th Jan 1894.

Dear Friends among the hills. I hope to look up your way before very long. We are just flitting from the Manse, not yet¹ from the Kirk, and going into a larger house. Certainly and surely Mrs Crockett and I are coming up.² It is the dream of her life to see Loch Enoch – as it is now the dream of many folks lives.³ I fear you will be more pestered even than now⁴ but I am glad to think that you have kept the warmest part of your heart for the man who wrote ‘The Raiders’ and whom your good hearted husband took to see Loch Enoch. All the rest I had seen before on the Kells range and Loch Dee side; but not Enoch and the Wolf’s Slack. I knew Slack was right, but Slock was the better word for writing.⁵

I am glad you liked The Raiders. I thought you would. I have just finished a short book called ‘Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills’⁶ I have used the Clints of Clashdan – which I have called Clashdaan,⁷ and the Dungeon as a background. The names are so grand. I have to come down again to get stuff for a great book (in slips)⁸ about the Galloway Covenanters.⁹ So John must be picking up all the tales he can for me about them. You would see how I used the ‘Breaking loose of Loch Valley’ and other things.¹⁰ I never forget anything.¹¹ This Covenanting story is bought by Good Words to be their leading story next year, running through the whole year.¹²

So I must come to you, if you can stick me in somewhere – a shakedown will do, and if I am in the way you must tell me just to march. I think of making Glenhead a

¹ Macmillan was one of the first to know, a good year in advance of the event, of Crockett’s intentions.

² Presumably ‘in status’. Ruth Milner was the daughter of a prosperous mill owner, and Crockett’s own ‘class’ issues as the illegitimate son of a dairy maid weighed heavily on him.

³ It is interesting that he makes this comment before The Raiders is even published.

⁴ Later correspondence confirmed this to be the case.

⁵ There has long been debate over the terminology (and indeed the siting) of the Wolf’s Slock. Here Crockett at least clears up one part of the debate.

⁶ ‘Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills’ was serialised in the spring and published in the late summer of 1894. It is first mentioned in correspondence with TFU on November 21st 1893.

⁷ Again, Crockett changes a name for purposes of the ‘sound’.

⁸ ‘in slips’ means that it is being advertised (and so has been commissioned’

⁹ The Men of the Moss Hags was the first of Crockett’s Covenanting novels.

¹⁰ In ‘The Raiders’ (chapter 41)

¹¹ Crockett’s good memory was one of his most powerful writers tools. It enabled him to write both landscape and character with accuracy and honesty at speed.

¹² This was to become the standard pattern of Crockett’s publishing career thanks to the diligence of his agent A.P.Watt

*leading place in the story – a headquarters of the hill folk. So it will be famous some day, no doubt.*¹³

*I must see the Dhu Loch, Loch Macaterick, and get over into Shalloch on Minnoch. Perhaps John can get a day off and go with us.*¹⁴ *Now you will just tell me whenever I write if it is not convenient.*

With regard and affection from my wife and myself.

Your friend

SRC

*[I have just been staying a week with Andrew Lang. I promised to bring him up for a night to Glenhead. James Barrie also wants to come with some time. May I bring them at some time? They want to see Enoch and the Dungeon.]*¹⁵

Context

As minister, Crockett lived in a 'tied' house. The family 'flitted' from there a good year in advance of his resignation and it is clear that he already has thoughts, if not firm plans, of leaving his charge in favour of a writing career. This is the first letter from the new address, which is handwritten over a scored out over the headed paper Free Church Manse.

¹³ Bonegill (spelled Bongill) was a key location in 'Men of the Moss Hags'. As to its fame this is a sad irony given the state of Glenhead currently and in recent years!

¹⁴ This trip took place and is written about and credited in MOMH.

¹⁵ As referred to earlier – literary types who expressed an interest in seeing the Galloway hills even before the book was published. Suggesting they had either read drafts or heard Crockett speak about it.

LETTER 6

Selkirk Arms Hotel

Kirkcudbright

May 25th 1894.

My dear Friends,

Gin I come on ye at any time o' the nicht or day next week, ye'll gie me a shakedown, will ye no?

I'm on the hunt for stuff for a new buickie¹ an' it's likely that I may turn up at Glenhead about Tuesday or Wednesday, likely Tuesday. I'll hae to gang awa' again on Saturday to get the train at Newton Stewart about 11 o'clock in the forenoon, for I maun be hame.²

I'm no sure whatna road I'll come yet, but it will be ower the hills maybe frae Dalmellington, maybe frae Barr and maybe frae Carsphairn – but Glenhead is my mark in any case.³

I hae askit papers an letters to be sent to you, so gin ony turn up they can just bide till I come for them.⁴

With all regard and anticipation

Ever truly your friend

SRC

Ps. I'm going awa' to preach in Dr Whytes in Enbra on Sabbath. ⁵

Context

The letter is written from Kirkcudbright, several months later, after 'The Raiders' has been published. Crockett's star was now on the ascendency. The novel was well received by reviewers (apart from Henley whose review of it in *The National Observer* offers a glimpse at the stooshie that was to become the root of ensuing 'Kailyard' slurs and adds further insight into the publishing climate and context in which Crockett found himself.

¹ Men of the Moss Hags

² The 25th May was a Friday, so the suggestion is that he intends to be in Glenhead from 29th May until Saturday 2nd June.

³ Reminds us that there were several alternative routes – all of which Crockett knew well and which he wrote about in a variety of novels. And that he was a great walker.

⁴ Note the habit of getting letters sent on to where he was staying (the postal service seemed incredibly swift and reliable in those days)

⁵ Which places Crockett at Dr Whytes on Sunday 27th May

Note that this letter is written almost entirely in the Galloway dialect. It seems an unlikely affectation, more a way of the man grounding himself. For me at least, the correspondence represents an outlet for his free expression, the opportunity, when writing to a friend (or fellow 'native' of Galloway), to write as he thinks rather than having to write in English,

Crockett's mention of the 'new buikie' most likely refers to 'Men of the Moss Hags', which was already being serialised in *Good Words*. The chapter on Cove Macaterick was 38 – (which would have come around September) and the strong suggestion is that he wrote this chapter at Glenhead on the trip in May he's talking about. While Crockett often wrote works long in advance of publication, he also took inspiration from his surroundings and where possible, wrote in the place the work was set be that Scotland or Europe.

LETTER 7

Bank House

6th June.

My dear Friends,

Just a word. Proof correcting all morning. I have written 60 letters yesterday and today! I'd rather walk to Cave McKitterick again. I got home all right – found all well – my study is in order now and I must plunge into the 'buik.' I would I were at Glenhead but September is coming. I was sorry to leave you all as sorry as if you have been brother and sister. I never got so near to any folk in such short time. I seem to have known you all my life.¹

My wife sends love to yours. Sir Herbert M whose letter you sent on was asking for your father.²

[] I send it. You can return it or I can get it when I come

With all [] affectionately from SRC

Context

This letter finds Crockett back in Penicuik, the trip to Cove Macaterick completed. We have no factual account of it, but it is amply dealt with in fiction in 'Men of the Moss Hags'. It is interesting to see that on his return from Glenhead, Crockett has segued back into 'English' writing style, but the dialect 'buik' gives us an insight into his mind-set. We might see his choice of Scots words as an expression of his natural heart and will. Also, perhaps the frustration of the process of proof correction, a formal task to be undertaken in English. Crockett's work presented some problems for London typesetters who were not familiar with Scots words or Gallovidian dialect. In letters to TFU during November 1893, in response to criticisms about the Broad Scots of his prose, Crockett complains (as politely as possible) that the London typesetters are poor at setting Scots. He notes '*naturally Scotch dialect is difficult for English printers.*' – and it would be better done by a Scottish typesetter, or to do it himself). Letter writing is, these days, for Crockett all too often an English task. So using Scots might be seen to be something he does when unburdened by the responsibility of profession. Thus, for his Galloway friends, he writes in his local dialect. It offers further evidence that he uses it as a mark of informality and shared community rather than one of affectation. So while this letter is a short one, it has added significance when further contextualised. This letter is on the headed Free Church Manse paper once again with that name scored out.

¹ I'm sure many people will relate to this emotion. It certainly attests to the close bond felt by Crockett to the Macmillans.

² Also reminds us that Crockett (and the Macmillans) had relationships across the social classes.

LETTER 8

Bank House

12th June

Dear Mr Macmillan,

Thank you for Sir Herbert Maxwell's letter¹ and your own pleasant words. I am sorry to hear Mrs Macmillan has not been well but I hope the tooth drawing will cure the evil. We have had incessant rain since I came home and no day so glorious as that we spent upon the heather together. My wife and I are looking forward greatly to September, but I have a vast quantity of work to do before then.² Sir Herbert also sent me the letter in the paper.³ It amused me very much

With Kindest regards from my wife and myself

Faithfully yours,

SRC

(hand written top - Keep that thunderstricken place on the hill to show us. Mr Robertson the FC Minister of Stoney Kirk sent me a paragraph about another such done in the same storm)⁴

(hand written at the bottom – Dear Mrs Macmillan. A word to you. The above dictated to Mr Brown with other 67 letters!! All people with axes to grind at my grindstone.⁵ But I cannot close without true affection and grateful remembrance to you. I weary to see you both at Bank House. I hope the teeth cease from [] Ever your friend, love from my wife SRC

Context

This letter is typed, dictated to Brown Crockett explains in handwritten additions, that this letter is typed, dictated to Brown, explaining the formal nature of address. The Bank House address is also typewritten; clearly new letter head paper for Bank House had not yet arrived.

Crockett and Sir Herbert Maxwell had a professional relationship, seen in these letters and recorded elsewhere. The letter in the paper most likely is in reference to 'The Raiders'. It was reviewed in many papers, but this may be a local one.

¹ Letters had been re-directed to the Macmillans and now were chasing him home.

² It is not definite that they both went but Crockett spent most of the month of September 1894 in Galloway

³ Presumably referring to The Raiders.

⁴ Thunder is a frequent feature of MOMH

⁵ An interesting turn of phrase. Already he was suffering the challenges of writing success!

There's another mention of a 'storm' place – this one might well be used later for 'The Loves of Miss Anne'. It shows Crockett's interest not just in the phenomenon, but in using such real life incidents to give a sense of reality to his fiction. In MOMH (Ch 25) he writes:

'After a long while we found ourselves under the front of the Dungeon Hill, which is the wildest and most precipitous in all that country. They say that when it thunders there, all the lightnings of heaven join together to play upon the rocks of the Dungeon. And, indeed, it looks like it; for most of the rocks there are rent and shattered, as though a giant had broken them and thrown them about in his play.'

Perhaps this is what we now refer to as the Devil's Bowling Green (though that it be formed from a thunder strike is an unlikely reality – a good myth though!)

LETTER 9

Bank House

Penicuik

Midlothian

August 6th 1894

My Dear Friends at the Bonegill, I have been wearying to hear from you. We are still at home and have been ever since I saw you. I am about half through with the big Covenanting book, an have to work hard at it in order to get the matter in to Good Words in time, but I am not going to do much when I come to you... but lie on my back in the sun and kick my heels in the air. Sometimes I shall arise for the purpose of following the Mistress to the milkhouse on the lookout for buttermilk – like a suckle calf. Sometimes I shall take the hill with the guidman, and sometimes I shall bide at home and read the papers... all according to the freedom of my own will as the Quastion Buik says. I never put in as muckle hard work in my life as I hae dune thae last months an' I am gye weel sure that I deserve a holiday...

Dear sirce, but I'm wearyen' to speak a word or twa or the rale Gallowa' that I get nae bit sae weel as at Glenhead. But I gie the Guidman (falsely so called for he was a Badman that day whatever) fair warnin' that gin he gies me siccan a travel as I got gaun to Cove MacKitterick, I'll e'en gar him gang screevin' hame 'without the breeks' like Gibbie Macallister o' the Langbarns in the tale o' Mad Sir Uchtred.

I am sendin' ye that same wi' this post, an I howp that ye'll like it. Ye'll hae to let the travellers see whaur Sir Uchtred made the puir bit whutterick play whush ower the Clints o' Clashdaan.

There'll be a man up wi' yin o' thae nasty photographin' things, sae see that ye hae a' the lees ready for him. It's no the truth they're seekin' onyway.

There was a callant her the ither day wi' sicklike, an' I tried to tell him the truth as best I could, though I am a minister. An' haith, but the body just gaed awa' an pat doon a pack o' lees. So I hae done wi' the truth noo. Yer minister loon wrate to me to want me till preach, but when I come away, fegs, but I'll neyther preach nor pray for six weeks!

Dear sirce me... Glenhead, I wunner to hear ye, you for you wi' your crappen fu' o guid meal, to misoaa' a puir man for talkin' balderdash! It's juist afore supper-time, an' wha can talk sense when they are bein' keepit waitin' for their parritch?

The wife sends her guid w ull, an' ye maun tell us gin it is per-pately convenient to hae us on the first o' September

Wi' a' guidwull frae mayssel'

Yer freend

SRC

Context

This is the first letter on the new printed letter head. Those obsessed with the N.B. affair re the Free Church Manse should note that the printed letter head for Bank House does NOT have N.B on it. Nor did Crockett put NB on his letters as standard. N.B stood at the time for North Britain. Stevenson railed against Crockett for using it, and this has been misconstrued by later historians and literary critics. The reason for the N.B may be simpler. On his marriage Crockett received a gift (from an old love rival) of a lot of headed notepaper with the offending N.B. Not being profligate, he used it. Either way, it serves to remind us that we need to be cautious of what we construe even from material sources.

Note again that Crockett reverts to Galloway dialect in his letter and is excited about his forthcoming trip, looking forward to a holiday - from the Kirk rather than from writing. He mentions 'Mad Sir Uchtred' which was recently published in book form and getting variable 'press' coverage. He also is perfectly aware that reporters do not always tell the truth, and he is somewhat sanguine with regards to the aims of the press which were in the process of turning him into a 'celebrity' author.

LETTER 10

Bank House

August 14th.

Dear Friends of ours,

We look forward greatly to the day of our coming. We go to Dr Whytes at Aviemore on the 20th next Monday, and if you can take us on Saturday Sep 1st we can be with you. We leave A on the 28th and will meander about a little till the Saturday when we shall if it be convenient for you, make our way up the Glen. If not, let us know; Ruth has to be back sooner in September than I, so if you can 'be doin' wid me' as MacCormick the tramp used to say, and if you have 'a cowl'd prairie or anything' then I shall bide a little longer. I have to go down to stay a day or two with Sir Herbert; but one day of Glenhead and the parritch an' milk thereof is worth all the [] in the world. But I suppose I'll hae to gang an' see the body!

Johns banes are sair are they? Woman, I believe ye hae been doin' your duty at last. Lang hae I telled ye. At him again wi' the besom shank. I'll help ye when I come. Ever yours

SRC

I shall write again a day or two before we come.¹

Context

Dr Whyte was the best friend of J.M.Barrie's elder brother Alexander (the one Barrie lodged with in Dumfries in his teens) and this year the Crocketts holidayed with him for a week prior to Crockett coming down to Galloway.

¹ There is no evidence of this letter. The next letter, dated October 6th might suggest that the Crockett's did in fact stay at Glenhead during September and there is a letter dated 22nd Sept to a Miss Johnston with that address on the head

LETTER 11

Bank House Oct 6th

(across top: I am glad you missed me a wee bit. I can tell you I missed Glenhead and you both.)

My dear John,

Your letter was a great pleasure to me this morning when I lifted it among the pile of others. I set it aside till I should have the labour of the day over in order to enjoy yours and Marion's.

It is a great thing to have friends whose hearts are warmly knit together by genuine affection. I need not say that never had I so delightful a month during any holiday since I was married, as with my dear and good friends up at the Glen.

Confound the artist. I shall have him pestering I know – they are a crew, make me nearly wild. They come out each man with photographs for some peddling thing to grease his own cartwheels. I have had a round dozen of them since I came back – all different. Hay's brother has written and telegraphed as if he were a bosom friend. I have managed to keep out of his way yet, but he'll find me afore lang, the beast.

I can't imagine how my first letter was late. It was posted in Penicuik by Monday at 11am and should have been with you on Tuesday without fail. There is something rotten in the state of Denmark with these letters. Too many of them go astray. But I don't object seriously. The more of mine lost the better pleased I am.

A cyclist man writes me to ask the best roads through Galloway and up to the Dungeon!! I drew the line at that. As the man said when he married a twenty stone wife and she had twice twins 'It is too too much!' he said. So it was for he had only one bed for the lot! So said I to the cyclist 'It is too, too much.'

Ever affectionately yours

SRC

Context

Clearly Crockett had a great time at Glenhead. The 'artist' he refers to was one who came to get information for the 'celebrity' press articles which were now promoting Crockett extensively. 'The Raiders' which was so popular that it was sparking a tourist boom. We might reflect from this letter that the problems of tourism to a lovely rural place were the same then as now. If everyone knows of the solitude, there will be no more solitude, and Crockett is most apologetic for the trouble of folk visiting Glenhead just for the purposes of promotion/advertising.

LETTER 12

Bank House Oct 12th

My dear Friend,

I have had a lonely evening and your letter of this morning lying at my elbow cheered me and made me think of the dear little house in the glen and its well-beloved inmates.

I am glad you liked the Lilac and that you were reading it in the new form for the second time. I shall never forget the first reading and the pleasure it was to have my own words read out by your voice.¹

I never heard a story of mine read in my life before by anyone, and you gave me a new pleasure.

You will not be surprised to learn that the Lilac S. has been well abused by envious Cockney Scribblers.² They have said all they can against it, but they cannot help it pleasing or selling. The Glasgow Herald had an article to prove that I had taken a few words from an old pamphlet I had never seen or heard of. But it is all no use. 18,000 of the Lilac were sold to date and it is going as fast as ever.

I am looking forward to your visit with very great delight and we hope that you will make up your mind to come and see us next month, before the winter quite sets in. All you have to do is to take the train at N.S. and arrive at Princes St. Station. Then if you take a cab to the Waverly you will get the 5pm train for Penicuik, and we would meet you at the station with great joy in our hearts. But if I possibly could, I should come down and guide you across town myself.

In any case, it would be a pride and a joy to see you. Andrew Lang comes tomorrow, the Barrie's next week, but none should have a gladder an' a prouder welcome than Marion and John MacMillan, our dear friends of the quiet and beautiful Glen. And for myself, I would rejoice to see you more than if the Queen were to come and say she was my Auntie!!!

I am delighted to hear you like the literature (book). You are delighting me every page that you read of it.

With my best love to you,

I am ever your friend, with all affection SRC

I wonder if John could knock off and bring with him a little bit of the Clashdaan rock showing the burn the lightning made in the middle.

¹ We can only imagine the scene of John Macmillan reading 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' out loud, but what a great picture it makes.

² This is what Crockett called the London literary elite, specifically Henley et al – who were to 'brand' him Kailyard in return in just a few months. The label, unfortunately, stuck.

Context

Oh to be a fly on the wall of the long evenings at Glenhead with John Macmillan reading 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' out loud! By this time the friendship is well established and Crockett is clearly excited about the prospect of welcoming the Macmillans to his own home in Penicuik in November. The details of how to get from Glenhead to Penicuik are interesting. Also note Crockett's other proposed visitors - Lang and Barrie. And the geologist in Crockett asks for a bit of the Clashdan rock (we can't tell if this is a serious suggestion or an 'in' joke.) Either way, we see how important Glenhead and the Macmillans were to Crockett at this stage in his career.

LETTER 13

Bank House

23rd Oct.

Dear Friends,

I have no time for a thousand things press – to write a long letter; but to how glad we shall be to see you. Please come just as soon as ever you can – the sooner the better.

I have to be in Edinburgh for two days Tues and Weds. Nov and 14th and I shall have to leave for the south about November 19th. So if you can come in November please come as soon in the month as you can and stay as long.

I am sure you will have a happy time with us here and though it is not like the Glen, it is lovely in its way.

Why not come off at once without waiting for November –the sooner the better.

I am getting on very fast with the story now, rising every morning about 4 and working hard, but the press will be off in a week now when I begin to correct. I hope to finish the first writing in that time.

I wrote the Wigtown martyrs chapter this morning and wept as I did it.

We are all well and looking forward to your coming greatly

Pardon brevity. It is the lambing time and I am fairly run off my feet.

With greetings and remembrances to you both.

Affectionately your friend

SRC

PS I think every night of your reading of the ‘Lilac’

Context

Note how busy Crockett is, but still how keen to fit in a visit from the Macmillans. The November trip he refers to is a stay with Ruskin at Brantwood later in November. We can see that he is in the final throes of writing ‘Men of the Moss Hags’ at this time. His mention of ‘lambing time’ is a piece of humour drawing the analogy of writing with agriculture -he is preparing for the birth of his next work. And he is still clearly moved by the experience of hearing his novel read out loud by his friend.

LETTER 14

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 is 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

Context

This letter, just before Christmas might suggest that the Macmillans did not visit early in November, although we cannot be sure. It gives us a good picture of Crockett's activities. We can see that there's still revisions etc to be done on 'Moss Hags'. He was due to leave the Kirk at the beginning of January and has a lecture in Glasgow and hopes to meet John Macmillan in Ayr prior to his next trip to Glenhead. It was planned (and happened) that he went there pretty much as soon as he left the ministry. There is plenty of small, domestic detail in this letter, all of which is great for contextualising what was going on in the bigger picture.

LETTER 15

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 desires, 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

Context

Post-Christmas, the plan is still to meet in Ayr. The planned 'tour' is research for 'The Grey Man' which was due for publication in 1896. The plans are more fixed - Ayr for Jan 7th then Glenhead, then back up to Glasgow for the 17th. This last letter of the year was the last letter Crockett would write to the Macmillans as minister. When they met in Ayr he had given up the ministry and was embarking on a career as professional writer! Glenhead, place and people, played no small part in that transition.

Final words

Letters to the Macmillans became more sporadic (at least the ones that still exist) over the ensuing years, reducing to a couple a year. There are also letters from Ruth to Marion in the archive at Broughton House - and I hope to publish all of these with a full commentary, in the not too distant future.

For the meantime, as you read these letters this September, allow yourself to imagine Crockett and the Macmillans - and Glenhead - as they would have been in September 1894. From these letters it is clearly Crockett loved Glenhead and was inspired by the place and the people. Yet 125 years on, both Crockett and Glenhead are effectively air-brushed out of both local and national significance. It should have been possible to commemorate the occasion in the substantial granite building, and it is only human ignorance, greed and apathy that have prevented this possibility. The Galloway Raiders was originally set up in the 1930s by people who felt it was wrong that no memorial existed - and thus the Laurieston Memorial was built. The new Galloway Raiders exists to advocate for Crockett and his landscape into the 21st century. I hope that, having read this excerpt, you'll agree that more both can and surely should be done to protect the legacy of both.

