



Crockett in context: January 1894.

As we embark on our Raiders125 Anniversary year it's worth noting that the year opened with *The Lilac Sunbonnet* in the spotlight. Serialisation in 'The Christian Leader' started on January 4th and was to continue in weekly episodes through till October, when it was published (by T Fisher Unwin) on October 2nd. By that time Crockett had two major successes behind him with *The Stickit Minister* and *The Raiders*, and had caused a stir with shorter works such as *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills*. But that was all yet to come at the start of January 1894.

During the month he was dealing with family illnesses, revisions and the criticisms from his publisher's readers as regards *The Raiders*, as well as ongoing preparations for the illustrated edition of *The Stickit Minister*, and the production and placing of other short work via A.P.Watt. To say it was a busy time is an understatement. And if that wasn't enough, on January 25th he was called upon to give the Immortal Memory at The Edinburgh Burns Club.

The speech was reported in 'The Scotsman' the following day and was a significant event in the Edinburgh literary calendar, showing that Crockett was already well respected by his peers.

The month began with a letter to John and Marion Macmillan at Glenhead:

Penicuik 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. 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. 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.

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.

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 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. 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

On January 3rd he was in correspondence with Unwin:

Dear Mr Unwin,

I am much obliged to you for the beautiful type you are putting on the Raiders. It is indeed worth waiting for. I think we should make a fine book of it.

With kind regards

Ever Truly

SRC

I send some suggested title-pages

On January 4th, Episode 1 of *The Lilac Sunbonnet* was published in 'The Christian Leader.' On January 6th, he writes to his friend bookseller Thin on more domestic matters.

Jan 6th 1894

My dear Fellow, (Thin)

How goes it with the babe and the good and kind masters of mine? All well now I trust. We have just had our turn – Maisie down with bad throat and swollen tonsils; but no fear says the Doctor of diphtheria as we feared at first. We have had it so often that it is our [] terror I feel that we can stand anything except that.

Ruth is down every day and well. George Milner thrives excellently. Fancy, what a sell. I'd have eaten my fingers. The McClure syndicate have offered for 'The Raiders' a handsome sum and we are booked for March 1st in book form. If we had only had that offer three months ago!! Ah me!!

By the by, there are large numbers of my wants enshrined in that notebook of yours. 'All right' says Thin - out comes pencil, down she goes – and stops there! I wish you could get me English Mechanic say from 1890 cheap – also Pearson at least to look at (not on greed!!) Did I send you Watt's little book. If I did, give this to George. He wanted one. I hope to see you on the dies saturnalia if Mrs Thin can be bothered with me.

Ever Cordially yours

SRC

For much of the month, *The Raiders* took over and letters back and forth from Unwin talk about the title and Crockett's response to readers Reviews.(We'll look at these next month). On January 17th he wrote to Unwin:

My Dear Unwin,

That title winna do – I send you my ideal. I wish you would rubicate for me like a good fellow. I send you a specimen of a Scottish printer's title Page of date contemporary with the writing of the story (1735) I wish you would let your printers see it. It will tell them what I want more than anything. It is beautiful exceedingly as I think. I wish there was more printing like it now. Please keep it unfolded for I have removed it from the first volume of the Scots' Magazine, of which I possess a full set in a hundred volumes. It is a mine of material for me, as you can understand. So please take care of the precious leaf. It is as fresh as if it had been printed yesterday. It will pay us to do a good title page before the contents with the dedication and the original Patent of Nobility granted to the first John Faa by King James.

Ever yours

S.R.C

And on January 23rd:

Dear Unwin,

How goes the 4th edn Stickit? Ought you not to be putting another in hand so that there may be no hiatus (more egg-sucking!) You know best, of course. I send you an interview in our Liberal Morning paper which may interest you. There are many things in it I never said. He had doubled the number sold for one thing – added a few pounds to the price of some of my books, but it is wonderful withal.

He never set eyes on me before he came out, talked an hour by the watch, never took a note, and wrote two columns and a half of brevier. You and I may be clever fellows but we could not do that. For one thing we are too conscientious.

Elliot, Douglas and Thin tell me the Stickit is going splendidly. I enclose a form from Thin (clipped) that is why I ask about the Stickit. We must keep the Raiders thinner. I hate dumpy books.

All regards

Ever yours SRC

Thin, the bookseller, invited Crockett to deliver 'The Immortal Memory' at the Edinburgh Burns Club on Jan 25th. In a letter to Thin also dated Jan 23rd, Crockett was looking for a bed for the night – and a ticket for his friend John Wilson.

My dear Thin,

Thanks you greatly. It is always a great pleasure to think of seeing you and (as much) the good house-mother. I shall be glad if George can let me have another ticket (give it to you to send me – or I shall see you when I come. I shall come out to dress etc about 4 or there away and if you are home I cd get the ticket from you.

I should like to bring John Wilson. He is a good friend of mine and the Burns dinner will just suit him. Alas for the oration! Haven't I done my best. Gilbert the Scotsman chief reporter wrote for it last week. He said he would give me a proof. So it is written and he has it now. It is, I think, a new line. At any rate, I have done my best.

Yes the C Leader Man came out and talked to me for an hour on my busiest morning, and has written two cols 1 1/2 there anent. There are some mistakes but not very bad ones or very big ones, so I shall see them go.

Glad to hear the Stickit is going. The 5th Edn is in the press.

Ever Cordially

SRC

Note that Crockett mentions a Scotsman reporter by the name of Gilbert, who may be significant later on as the man who lit the flame that set Henley alight and brought about (indirectly perhaps) the stooshie that 'created' the term Kailyard (attributed to J.H.Millar in 1895) Certainly, when *The Raiders* missed its 1st March publishing deadline there ensued a fair amount of trouble which, shall we say, put Crockett on 'the radar' of forces not entirely well disposed towards him.

While Crockett was perhaps distracted with his Burns supper engagement, Unwin was trying to get *The Raiders* through proof. Crockett posted him letters on the 25th (probably on his way in to Edinburgh)

FCM Jan 24th

I have a note written to you but not posted so the two can go together. I have title page proof. The top part could hardly be bettered - the last line 'Egypt' might be indented - my name raised close beneath the second title and put in L.C antique red. Then a good space before your name and style. I wish you would put it in ancient fashion By Fisher Unwin in Paternoster Square. I think I would have to Italic Cap on page. What do you think? I send you all the Radiers proofs I have. So I am clear at present.

Yours ever SRC

FCM Jan 25th

Dear Unwin,

I think tablet advert; a capital idea for making known The Raiders. It was strange that I should write to ask about a 5th edition when your letter was on the way as the proof to pass of its title etc.

I do hope you will stick to the characteristic green ribbed cloth of the Stickit for the cover. Even if you front title differently. You can make a very nice book of it if you don't make it too thick. I suppose buckram is too dear. Green buckram is very swaggy, I assure you (probably also in price) We have been well and characteristically. Don't let us fall into the net of Haggard & Cassells, neither of which firms have any more taste in getting up a book than my old cow in the meadow there. Upon my faith they haven't. Look at Kidnapped and even Catriona. Look at Haggard's book - machine made, scissor trimmed, cabbage garden abortions. There! How's that for relieving the mind. Let us keep on and not follow after. If I can't beat these fellows (I don't mean RLS) Haggard, Barrie, and so on, call me knave and no man. So if you can't stand buckram, give me first rated green cloth, like what Nutt put on Henley and Stevenson's plays and keep the book thin - on a light, slightly toned, unsized antique paper.

Them's my sentiments. Mark them TFU says Amen which is a laudable exclamation at most any time.

Ever yours

SRC

Then, back home, in response to what was possibly a terse letter from Unwin, he tried to clear up the confusion over the article he mentioned to Thin on Jan 23rd. The 'errors' were obviously more significant to Unwin than Crockett!

Jan 26th

My dear Unwin

Of course 10,000 is absurd and I never said anything like it. He asked what was the size of our 1st edn I told him 1500 and told him that a 5th edn would be out shortly. So I presume he multiplied with a considerable overplus for general generosity.

I was proposing 'the Immortal memory' at the Edinburgh Burns Club last night - so so am back with my work and not feeling up to the mark (No insinuation. I was an abstainer even from Burn's own drink. (I shall send the proof of 'Raiders' in a day or two. I am very pressing work on hand (chiefly local) for a day or two.

Yes By and In might make the book look too archaic. But I hope you will stick to the green ribbed cloth. Make the book thinner and the binding a little shorter.

I think the 10,000 will come in time - certainly if the Raiders goes.

Ever yours SRC

PS I posted the Tablet Advert this morning from Edinburgh.

There are many interpretations of this ‘Tablet Advert’. Historically, the worst motives have been given to Crockett, suggesting that he was behind the unwarranted publication of what was effectively a private correspondence with Stevenson for his own gain and/or gratification. But there is much more to this than meets the eye, as we shall see over the months ahead. It is quite possible (even likely) that Crockett’s eye was off the ball at this point and that the error was part of a confusion between him and Unwin. It’s also possible that Unwin knew exactly what he was doing - which in itself was no bad thing - it was quite usual for ‘puffing’ to go on and the quotations had all been published the autumn before in ‘The Scotsman’ (by the journalist Gilbert?). However, Henley in particular took it amiss and this advert caused a lot of trouble for Crockett in the months to come. We can learn quite a lot about the publishing practices and milieu from the spat, so it is worth looking at in more detail as we move through 1894.

For Crockett at the end of January, getting his finances straight was perhaps a more important and more pressing concern. He wrote to Unwin on January 29th

My dear Unwin,

Thanks many for your cheque. It is welcome this weather when the coals are dear. Did you remember that when you sent me the cheque for the second edition in September and a little additional cheque in recognition of the fact that the edition had gone well – you were good enough to say that you would do the same with succeeding editions if they too did well. You will remember that it was at the time when Mr Wylie and you had some correspondence, but there is no reason why we should not arrange these matters between ourselves. Your letter was dated September 11th 1893 and in it you say ‘I have now much pleasure in enclosing you a statement for the second edition, and enclose cheque for royalties. I have also much pleasure in enclosing an additional cheque (for ten pounds) in acknowledgement of the success of the said edition. As soon as the third edition is sold out, I shall have pleasure in forwarding you a cheque and royalties accrued, and if sufficiently profitable, shall be happy to add another one in acknowledgement of the fact.’

When you make out you a detailed statement to Mr Wylie and myself of the third and fourth editions, no doubt you will take that into consideration. I only venture to remind you of it in case you had overlooked it during the intervening months and amid your mass of correspondence.

I observe that you simply send me the present £15 on account of royalties – so that no doubt it is all right. I was just ‘kind o ways’ as we say, counting on it, when the bank folk began as Stevenson says ‘to remind’ one of the fact that they might much more decently say nothing about. So inconsiderate of them!

Anyway, thank you for the cheque, and for your continued goodwill. I am busy correcting the last sheets of the Lilac Sunbonnet. It pleases me a good deal – more than I thought. But you should see the Yankee proof set up from my original M.S. – the Scots dialect is marvellous and would make you shudder. I shall be very glad indeed to have the book printed by Clark – they are a first rate house – second only in my mind to Constable, who however have an artist in Blaikie for their head. I send you the book of plays of Stevenson’s. I should like my book done like that. It is somehow better cloth than the Stickit and of course the thinner paper makes it look better, but that book in format is almost exactly what I should like for The Raiders. You can return it at your leisure.

By the way, I am coming up to town in the first week of March, or perhaps the second. It will depend on the day of issue of The Raiders. I shall see you then and have a long talk about all manner of things.

It does one good to show up when one’s book is in the hands of the critics – so at least, says Nicoll.

I should come later, but I have taken a larger house, and am leaving the Manse in May – preparatory to leaving the Kirk also – which at present, tell not in faith or elsewhere.

With kind regards, ever truly yours SRC

Note that Crockett clearly already has plans for leaving the Kirk. That did not happen till January 1895 but he was already working towards that goal. Note also his intention to be in London for the publication of *The Raiders*. You might also feel (as I do) that it's such a confusing time that it's no wonder 'errors' creep in. While A.P.Watt should have been taking all the business responsibilities off Crockett's head, it's clear that he was still heavily invested in bringing the book to print – and we should not forget that he still had his full time ministry and a young family to keep him busy.

The following day Crockett wrote again about *The Raiders*.

Jan 30th

My dear Unwin,

*The title is admirable now, I think and will be a credit to us both. Of course do as you like about the double binding. I think it would be a great pity not to bind at least part of the edition in green cloth somewhat uniform with the *Stickit*, and with a design similar on the cover. It keeps up a continuity and most of the possessors of the *Stickit* would buy. Of course you could as you say do others in that colour of cloth you said – only ribbed. It is the rib I like so much. It does not spot or soil so easily, and is distinctive.*

The paper too is all I could wish and will do admirably. I should think that the book will not be dumpy – at least I hope so.

We are having terrible weather here – blocked with snow and still snowing hard. [] fear the [] will be stopped on all our northern lives if this goes on a week longer

I must go to my proof-correcting

Faithfully yours

SRC

I hope that reading this gives a sense of the reality of Crockett's life at this time – I certainly wouldn't want to be juggling all this. Yet however busy this might seem, it was the calm before the storm... as we shall see.