

CROCKETT TIMELINE SEPTEMBER 1894.

Crockett spent most of September in Galloway, at Glenhead where he was working on the serial for 'Good Words' which would become 'Men of the Moss Hags.'

Prior to his visit he wrote to John and Marion Macmillan as follows:

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.'

It seems that he was in Galloway from September 3rd until October 2nd and there is not much correspondence from the month (so hopefully he was a) working hard and b) enjoying the relative solitude and good company afforded at Glenhead.)

Before he travelled he would possibly have seen the *National Observer* review of 'Mad Sir Uchtred'. This was short and perhaps as expected, negative. It has the hallmark of Henley (or one of his 'Young Men') since it refers back to the 'disappointment' aroused by 'The Raiders', and generally reception of 'The Raiders' was good, with Henley being the lone voice of dissent. It serves, however, to remind us of the material and cultural aspects of publishing at the time, something we should always be aware of before we make literary critical judgments.

1st September 1894. *National Observer*.

Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills', by S.R.Crockett, is a very slight story, easily read within the hour, and looking at it in the spirit in which it is published we consider it a poor eighteenpennyworth. The tale is of a curse called down upon the head of Sir Uchtred in expiation of sacrilege. For three years the ill-gated knight roams unclad among his own hills within cry of the home where dwell his children and his fair young wife in peril at the treacherous hands of Sir Uchtred's half-brother, or twin-brother, or blood-brother. So, indeed Randolph Dowall is severally described and the synonmy of the words can scarcely be admitted even for the case of picturesque writing. The curse is finally removed, and we leave Sir Uchtred clad and in his right mind. There are signs of haste in this somewhat thin tale, and its style is singularly vacillating. The narrative begins in a manner carefully attuned to the period by the selection of word and phrase sacred to legendary or historical fiction, but lapses later into a more colloquial style. It is no doubt owing to the conviction that the author of 'The Stickit Minister' can do better work that this that one closes the volume with a return of that feeling of disappointment which was aroused by 'The Raiders.'

On 3rd September Crockett was at Glenhead, from where he wrote to Unwin:

Glenhead of Trool

Sep 3rd

My Dear Unwin,

Delete the reference to pages from the Glossary. It was indeed compiled from the American Edition with the corrections for yours. I had no other and he needed to have the whole before him. In case of Harper's buying the book for 1896 I shall certainly retain the English book rights for disposal in this country. I was not aware of the close relations that subsisted between Harpers and Osgood [] But on reference to Mr Watt's letters, I see that it is through Harper's agent that the communication has come.

Do send me two or three copies of the Lilac as soon as they are bound up. I make two or three [] on the Glossary, but Dudgeon knows his work well.

With kind regards

Faithfully yours

SRC

He followed this letter up with a postcard:

Sep 4th

Postcard

I would rather E.A Waterlow's Stickit Minister Ploughing was used for frontispiece, if possible, but in any case 'Galloway Fastnesses' would do for the plate formerly called the Raiders Country.

SRC

This is obviously in connection to the Illustrated Stickit Minister (so the previous letter may also refer to that - in which case, it's interesting he's still being dogged by that while he has so many other thing to think about!)

On the 6th September *The British Weekly* offered a 'rebuff' to the *National Observer* review, and interestingly brought out Ian Maclaren to write the review. This in itself, given the broader context, may have further

inflamed things and fits into the bigger picture regarding the antipathy that would lead Henley et al to coin the phrase ‘Kailyard’. It also perhaps shows Roberston Nicoll’s ‘hope’ for the kind of writer Crockett would be - which was not the kind of writer Crockett turned out!

6th Sept 1894 The British Weekly.

Mad Sir Uchtred.

Both Cavaliers and Covenanters have both been served by Sir Walter Scott, but the former have had the advantage. One can understand that the gay chivalry of the Cavaliers has lent itself to fiction, and that literature has been repelled by Covenanting authority. It has been difficult for any one filled with the spirit of the Renaissance to enter into the mind of men who took their religion hardly, and as yet no novelist has combined the faith of Puritanism with the culture of letters. If such a writer can be found in a field is ready to his hand, and some dare to hope the Covenanting Scott has arrived in Mr Crockett.

He did excellent work, for which we are all grateful, in the ‘Stickit Minister,’ but he made what he hope is a prophetic departure in one or two chapters of the ‘Raiders’ where he touches on the Epic of the Covenanters. This vein is followed up in ‘Mad Sir Uchtred,’ which is a story of the Killing Times. It is distinguished by Mr Crockett’s accurate observation of nature, his power of graphic description, his happy use of the archaic style, and his profound sense of religion. Critics may object, with some appearance of reason, that the plot is extravagant, but very likely the author holds that no language can sufficiently translate the agonies of the soul in a day of intense religious passion. We take for granted that, in the greater work, for which many are looking and for which ‘Mad Sir Uchtred’ is, no doubt and opusculum, Mr Crockett will so depict his Covenanting heroes that it will not be open to anyone to confound their intensity with unreality. There is every reason to believe that Mr Crockett will be in fiction what McCrie has been in history, the apologist of Scottish faith.

Ian Maclaren.

On September 7th The PlayActress began serialisation (as The Great Preacher) – offering another example of how stories could be ‘manipulated’ to fit whatever publication was required. You may remember that at this time J.M.Barrie had a copy of the story with him on his honeymoon, with the intention of getting it made into a stageplay.

Crockett writes on September 13th to Mr Lawrie (presumably printer/setter

of Stickit?)

Sep 13th

Glenhead of Trool

Dear Mr Lawrie,

I shall send on the proof of the Illustrated Stickit in a day or two. I sent four other sigs today.

The Glossary I have nothing to do with. I don't even know if Mr Dudgeon, Cargen, Dumfries, NB has begun it yet. You might send him a set of proofs of the Illustrated Edn to do it from. If he does not send it in in time, don't keep back book for it, but go ahead.

I am wearing to see the Lilac in final form; please do send me these copies here as soon as you can get bound up. I am trusting to you putting the due notes in the Atheneum. Nicoll is clamouring for paras from me. He thinks I am very mean but I am obeying orders and giving him none. I therefore depend on you.

I am sending the complete MS of 'The Playactress' in a day or two. Both Barrie and Lang have read it and both like it. Barrie is specially delighted. I shall show you his letter some day - but not for use. And don't tell any of your interviewers that the MS has been read or I shall get into a hole.

Faithfully yours

SRC

And on September 14th a long review came out in *The Literary World*. I can't find any real detail on this, but it's possible the review was written by Andrew Lang, who was a champion of Crockett at this time. You might remember the PS Crockett wrote to Unwin in April:

PS Lang thinks Mad Sir Uchtred the best thing I have ever done.

It's also worth remembering that at this point, 'Men of the Moss Hags' had not been (indeed was being) written so that it was in this milieu that Crockett was both managing expectations and trying to write what he hoped would be his best novel yet - stepping up and on from 'The Raiders.'

Mad Sir Uchtred.

Mr Crockett's contribution to the 'Autonym Library' will most probably both surprise and disappoint his admirers, but only after a pleasing fashion. The surprise will be in the theme chosen, a Nebuchadnezzar-like instance of Divine judgment; and the disappointment of the brevity of the narrative. The effort, however, must be looked at as a 'sketch' or 'a study' and regarding it thus, everybody must feel that it is masterly despite a weakness in the drawing here and there.

Sir Uchtred of Garthland, who had once been loyal to the Covenants, and had born the silver cups when the tables were set white and fair in the House of the Lord,' tempted by an earl's coronet, foreswore himself, and set himself, with all his men, to do the king's will. He and his troopers, 'ready to kill man and kiss maid in the king's name,' set out on a glorious Sunday in June to turn out of kirk and manse Alexander Renfield, the minister of Kirkchrist, beloved of the people

Stricken of God

There was a great silence in the kirk as the men rode forward. A bronze-faced congregation sat listening to one who preached to them from an old black pulpit over which hung a sounding-board. Every man heard the trampling of the horses, yet none so much as turned his head about. The minister who preached was a little fair man, slender and delicate. It seemed as though a breath of wind might blow him away. Yet he swayed the folks' hearts as the breath of God that blows upon the trees of the forest.

'Christ hath a folk in Scotland that shall not fail Him, though the horse and his rider trample them under foot, yet shall they that love the Lord not be utterly cast down.' So ran the sermon, and the people listened.

With that Sir Uchtred of Garthland set the hilt of his sword to the door and drove it open, both leaves of it clashing back against the wall. Then bowing his head, but not for meekness, upon his horse's neck, he rode in, armed as he was — into the quiet and solemn house of prayer. The spray of cut lilac bloom from the manse wall was in his hand, and the babe in the arms of the minister's wife crowded to pluck at it as the war-horse clattered up the aisle. Then in the narrow seats the men stood up, grim and silent, while the women sat and trembled, some crying out to God to help them in their trouble.

But the little fair man in the pulpit, that had feared the face of God all his days, feared not the face of man. Perhaps no man who truly does the one can do the other. He put out his hand with a gesture of command to the people and to the intruder, as a general who halts a squadron.

'Uchtred Dowall of Garthland, perjured and man sworn, in the name of the Lord I arrest thee from coming further.'

And Sir Uchtred, though a proud man, stayed. But for all that, he cried the

King's commission for the taking of Alexander Renfield, because of nonconformity and resisting the King's authority for the shutting up of the kirk, and the warranty for the poinding of his goods and chattels which were escheat to the Crown.

So the little fair man came down. But even as he was on the stairway he turned him about and laid his hand on the pulpit door, saying, 'Alexander Renfield hath steeked thee in the name of Most High God. See and bide thou shut till the Lord send a man to open thee in his own good time.'

Then he lifted his hand and got him down. Which thing came to pass to the admiration of the people of Kirkchrist; for the curate of Langloan essaying a year after that to open the door, was hindered by a spirit that withstood him, and perhaps also by the memory of the curse of Alexander Renfield, for all the people of Kirkchrist held him to be a prophet. And, when out of liquor, all the curates were very superstitious.

So they shut to the door of the kirk, and the minister stood quiet and silent between two troopers while they turned the slender gear that was in the manse out upon the green. And the minister's wife stood by the little grey sundial and saw all the plenishing that she had brought from her home made into a heap — the goodly cloths she had spun with hope in her heart, and the little lovable things that were of no value to any, but dear to her as her life. She stood with her bairns in her hand, like a hen that gathers her chickens, as near to her husband as they would let her. But when they set the children's cradle on high a-top of all, and Uchtred of Garthland cried to a soldier to set his match to the rubbish-heap, suddenly she wailed aloud. It was only for the cradle that her foot would rock no more. She had seen so many flaxen heads in it, and some of them were now within the veil. So when the cradle was set on the heap to be burned, she cried aloud as she had not done when God took her bairns themselves out of her arms.

Then Alexander Renfield lifted up his voice from where he stood between two soldiers with his hands tied before him. He pointed with his bound wrists to the knight, who reined his horse and looked on silently, doing the King's work and Lauderdale's. 'The Lord judge between thee, Uchtred Dowall of Garthland, and me that am but his minister in Kirkchrist. The Lord do so to thee and more also. Thou hast made desolate the sweetest roof-tree that reeked in Galloway this day. See that thou come near thine own in peace this night. A greater than thou art ate grass like an ox. Thou hast built Garthland where it shines fair on the brae. But in his time King Nebuchadnezzar built Babylon, that was of marble and greater than many Garthlands. Yet the Lord laid him full low. Even so shall he do with thee, thou bloody and deceitful man, for the cry of the mother of my children this day.'

Sir Uchtred of Garthland pointed with his sword at the minister where he stood, but his tongue gave forth no word of command. For even then the Lord's hand smote him. In a moment he fell from pride, and that in sight of all the people who had seen him ride to the kirk door.

For a while Sir Uchtred writhed, grovelling on the ground, gnashing his teeth and foaming; then his people managed to set him on his horse, but, having the

power of one possessed of a devil, he broke away and fled like a deer to the hills. The description of the madman alone on the desolate hills, except for the companionship of a wile cat, is most realistic and weird. Open to criticism as it is, it is nevertheless a great triumph of the imagination and of dramatic representation. Sir Uchtred's half-brother, determined to secure his brother's wife, Philippa, and the inheritance, gathers together a company and, aided by dogs, determines to hunt Sir Uchtred to the death. The wild man knows it, and he speaks to his companion whom he called Belus, his god.

Fellowship with the Beasts

'They chase us, Belus,' he yammered. 'I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, whom the Jew God hath cursed — sweet Belus, my god.' He looked down and spoke to the wild beast in his lap. It watched him with yellow baleful eyes.

'For thou art my god,' he went on. 'The Jew God would have me worship Him, but I have profaned His temples and He has cast me out — to eat grass like an ox. So He said; but thou and I know what is better than grass, and that is blood — blood, the fresh sweet blood.'

And the hideous thing in his lap reached upward, fawning on him and rubbing its head against his face and mouth.

'Sweet Belus, my god,' he said, 'they will chase us with dogs tomorrow, you and me — great dogs. It will be rare sport. Dost thou mind what we did with the last dogs that came? How I held them and choked them whilst thou hadst thy will of their pain, for they are thy enemies also, Belus, my god! Tomorrow thou shalt hold them that howl at thee — the men that hound them on, for they are my enemies, and I, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, shall have my will of them.'

The indigo blue night, winking with stars, bent over Clashdaan. Uchtred, the Beast-Man, went back to his lair in the Hass of the Wolf's Slock, dancing along the fretted pinnacles of the granite as a withered leaf dances in the veering flaw of November. His familiar followed after, trailing a limb. To see them against the sky was to believe in devils; and that is sound and wholesome doctrine.

The cave on Clashdaan was but a fox-earth between two stones; but it was overgrown with matted heather, and being set on a promontory it was a watch-tower looking three ways over the blue cauldron of the Dungeon of Buchan.

Far away in the depths of it, where the winds that were silent above at Clashdaan were sighing, a fire was leaping and sinking. At the door of his earth Uchtred turned and pointed it out to the beast crouching at his feet.

'See, Belus, my god,' he said; 'that is the watch-fire of them that hunt us. If thou wilt, Belus, we shall visit it tomorrow, for tomorrow is the dark of the moon. And we shall hunt the hunters; and then, too, the hounds shall not cry, scenting us afar as they would do if we went tonight, for tomorrow they shall all be dead.'

So the Wild Man crept into his den, and the beast after him. The man turned him about in the smother of bracken and heather as a dog does when it couches. The lame wild cat leapt in between his arms and his breast and curled there. And

sleep — which is God's equal mystery, like the air and the sunshine, for wild and tame, just and unjust — fell upon them twain.

The great wild cat that slept in Mad Uchtred's bosom opened an eye when the front of the morning showed over the Range of Kells. It was a glorious promise of sunrise, but the wild beast in the madman's arms heeded it not. What the eye of the wild cat lighted upon was a spark of red in the stones — a spark that flitted and ever flitted, yet drew always nearer. It was a weasel among the stones, gazing fascinated at the naked and hairy throat of the wild man, who lay with his head thrown back among the leaves. The beasts saw one another; but the will of the weasel was to the man, and to the blood that leapt under the skin of his neck. It wormed its way among the stones, rearing a yellow, snaky head, with glittering eyes of ruby red, watching where in the sleeping man the live pulse beat.

The wild cat made no sign nor prepared to spring till the weasel had almost set its nose against the neck of Uchtred of Garthland. Then the cat sprang, gripping the slim, snaky back in the middle. The weasel bent like a whip to bite; but the wild cat snapped it like a rotten stick, and, letting it fall writhing, looked about quickly lest the sleeping man should have wakened.

The cat cast no further glance at the weasel, beating its life out like a trodden worm on the heather, but couched open-lidded at the head of Mad Uchtred of Garthland, watching with yellow-irised eyes the dreams chase themselves across the clouded brain of that man whom God has driven out to eat with the beast of the field.

Uchtred of Garthland sat up when the first beam of the sun touched him, straight as a lance laid in rest, over the saddle of Clashdaan. He put his hands, which were wet with dew, to his lips, and licked the moisture. Then he held out his arms.

'Sweet Belus, my god!' he said.

And as the wild beast, trailing a limb, sprang into his arms, the weasel twisted in pain and bit in agony at its own body. Uchtred set his foot upon it, because he hated its kind. With a great gladness to bite once before death came, the small evil beast met its curved teeth in the man's ankle. He jerked his foot and sped it over the cliff to feed the ravens on the Clints of Clashdaan.

For evil sometimes slays evil, and Satan's kingdom is divided against itself.

The hunt most graphically described ends in triumph for the hunted, but in justice to the author we must not divulge the plot, if plot it can be called. Sir Uchtred is restored to reason and to home, but we are bound to say that here, in our judgment, the author's pen seems to fail him. No doubt it was no easy task to sustain the dramatic force to the end, but we cannot help thinking Mr Crockett must have finished the story in a great hurry or suffered his own interest to lapse. The end might have been a triumph of dramatic and pathetic representation. The elements, indeed, are there, and the idea of the 'little child leading' the wild-beast father is good; but somehow we feel that Philippa is not made to play the part she ought to in the restoration of Sir Uchtred. But lest we may be thought of

hypercritical, let us hasten to say that this little work only convinces us the more of Mr Crockett's great powers, and intensifies our expectancy of a real masterpiece of fiction from his pen.

If we want to know what Crockett was up to at Glenhead that September, his letter to Unwin on 17th offers some suggestion:

Glenhead of Trool

Sep 17th

My Dear Unwin

*I have in my hill country quiet completed a job that I have longed felt to be incumbent - no less than the revisal of *The Raiders*. I send a revised copy by this mail. There are not many serious changes, but the whole book is immensely improved in detail.*

Perhaps the corrections could be incorporated in the 7th Edn along with the glossary; and then it could be announced as 'revised by the Author and with Glossary by Mr Patrick Dudgeon of Cargen, Galloway.' At any rate the corrections can be made in the next edition printed.

I would like the corrections made in the Illustrated Stickit to be also made in the ordinary editions.

Be good enough therefore to get from R & R Clark the proof sheets corrected by me, which you have sent to them; and I shall get the corrections transferred to a copy of the current edition for incorporation with the next edition printed.

I should like the Illustrated five Edition to count as one of the editions (the eights?) and then the next to count the ninth. That is both true and proper.

With kind regards

Faithfully yours

SRC

Note that even as *The Raiders* is going into a 7th edition, Crockett has revised it. Then a couple of days later he writes again:

Glenhead of Trool

Sep 22nd

Dear Unwin,

Hurrah! Precious glad to hear of the going off of the 1st Lilac. As you say it makes an A1 para.

I have nothing to add to the 2nd Edn. The words (2nd edn) say all that has got to be said. Nicht wahr?

Don't think it the square thing to use Barrie's or Lang's opinions when privately given as friends. Besides they would both see it, and then they would never give me a hand again.

Lang anyway (and perhaps JMB also) will assuredly say it also in public and off his own bat which is much better. I am sure you will agree.

I should like much to have complete early copy before leaving on 29th but it takes two days to get into Raiders Country so unless you can mail it on the 27th send to Penicuik.

In great haste

Faithfully yours

SRC

From this letter we can tell that 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' is getting ready for publication - and that Crockett is concerned regarding using private comments for 'puffing' the book - once bitten twice shy with RLS perhaps? Or perhaps this suggests that this is Unwin's modus operandi and that all the trouble from before really can be laid at his door. I take this as Crockett really trying to give Unwin a calm, but firm warning.

The 24th of the month - which this year is his 160th birthday, was his 35th. I hope he spent it in good company, perhaps out on the hills with John Macmillan.

At the end of the month he sent a postcard to Unwin:

Postcard

Postmark NS 27/9/1894

Glenhead

Mem

Sigs G - O p 97-209 of Playactress arrived. What's come of A-F (p1-96) Does the Gresham press print backwards the way the deil says the Lord's prayer?

Inquire!

A vous

SRC

We note that he got the (half) proofs of the Play Actress - it was being serialised but also about to be printed. And his 'joke' about the Lord's Prayer!

And the final letter of the month was addressed Bank House to make sure that Lawrie responded to the right address:

NB Address Bank House now

Homeward bound.'

28 Sept

Dear Mr Lawrie

I have the L.S. It is exceedingly handsome. I see one or two slips, surely made in correcting other things - pure literals. I shall note them, if not in time for 2nd at least for 3rd Edn.

I send on of the two copies to Lang who will likely review it somewhere but he likes adventure books better than Idylls. But on my soul, I think 'The Lilac' the better book. I have a curious feeling about letting it go. There is such a desperate lot of myself in it. Every cottar, ploughman, herd, every cricket's chirr, every hen scratching was just so, and just my friend when I was a boy.

But no one will know that. I am always a little depressed when I launch a big book.

But what you tell me about the orders rolling in is certainly very cheering. Please send me my 3 dozen and 6 to Penicuik when you can. You might wrap them for me like a good soul and leave me to add string and inscription.

Truly yours

SRC

PTO I shall send proof of the Playactress as soon as I get first time. I should like revise [] I shall return at once. It is worth it, I find.

SRC

There are some interesting small points in this letter. Firstly regarding the ‘realism’ of The Lilac from his own childhood (surely something to stand against the later accusations of ‘sentimental/nostalgia’. His awareness that no one knows the ‘truth’ of his fictions, or indeed of his state of mind when a ‘big book’ is launched. I find this letter both poignant and very revealing.

I finish this month’s timeline with a letter that Crockett probably received when he returned to Penicuik, from Robert Louis Stevenson, regarding ‘Men of the Moss Hags’. You may remember earlier correspondence between them where RLS humorously ‘warned off’ Crockett as to this topic of conversation, and Crockett replied, explaining that his story was already commissioned.

The letter was dictated and dated 13th August:

Vailima

Rev.S.R.Crockett

Dear Mr Crockett, Do not bother yourself any more about the matter. It is of no moment one way or the other. On the subject of the Cameronians I had no idea you were so far advanced and can only wish you well out of that difficult business which you may be sure I do sincerely. I fear you misunderstand my attitude about these ticklish gentry. I have but little use for them except in so far as they were sincere and are picturesque. Excuse this very brief note, as we are in the midst of a war here and I am leaving tomorrow for the Front. Yours truly

RLS.

This short letter is open to many interpretations, and has been interpreted many times unfavourably towards Crockett, but closer examination of a broader range of their correspondence, and that of Stevenson’s with Barrie and other close correspondents at the time offers a different picture. It is, as always, wise both neither to read too much into a letter, but also to do as much research as possible regarding the ‘surrounding’ material and cultural aspects, before making up one’s mind what this ‘means.’ So I will leave you to ponder on that for yourself till next month’s

timeline!