

## **The Rev. Lachlan Mackenzie, Lochcarron.**

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THE Rev. Lachlan Mackenzie, Lochcarron, familiarly known as “Mr Lachlan,” occupies a very high place in the estimation of God-fearing people in the North of Scotland. Added to his outstanding piety there was a spark of genius that gave a distinction to his utterances which lifted them far above the common place. There were also in his ministerial career certain picturesque incidents which caught the attention and appealed to the imagination of the people among whom he laboured so long and with such zeal for God's glory and devotion to their everlasting interests.

The Rev. Lachlan Mackenzie was born in 1754 in Kilmuir-Wester, Ross-shire. His father, Donald Mackenzie, occupied a farm on the property of Kilcoy, and was connected with some of the first families in the district. His mother, Elizabeth Clark, was a native of the parish of Pettie. She was considered a remarkably clever and well-educated woman, and endeared herself exceedingly to the people among whom she resided by her benevolence.

Young Lachlan received his first education in the parish school of Pettie, and at the early age of eight he was brought under the power of the truth. He was known to have been called upon at the age of thirteen to engage in prayer at a prayer meeting held in the district, and it is said the aged men regretted, owing to his modesty, he would not be prevailed upon oftener to come forward in public. His biographer says: - “He was observed to have the appearance of a solemn sense of the All-seeing Eye upon his spirit all along, in school and at college, as well as in after life. He was kept very humble in early life by the mental and spiritual conflicts he endured, being deeply exercised with a sense of the corruption and wickedness of the heart, the suggestions of unbelief, and the wiles of Satan.”

Mr Lachlan underwent the usual Arts and Divinity courses required of ministers of the Church of Scotland at Aberdeen. Prior to being licensed, he taught school at Lochcarron, and here the piety of his life began to attract attention. The godly people not only at Lochcarron, but in the neighbouring districts, were instinctively drawn to the prayer meetings conducted by the young schoolmaster. The warm earnestness of Mr Lachlan and his earnest zeal came suddenly into contact with the cold, dead formality of Moderateism. Some of

the ministers of the Presbytery of the bounds opposed the prayer meetings held by the schoolmaster.

It was during this period that a new manse at Lochcarron was built, and on passing it one evening, Mr Lachlan went into one of the rooms and engaged in prayer. While thus engaged, the words of Ps. lx. 6, "I will measure the valley of Succoth," took possession of his mind. He diligently inquired what the meaning of the words could be. He was led to understand that as Succoth was a hilly country the Lord might have some work for him among the hills and valleys of the Highlands, if not in Lochcarron itself. But at this time it was very unlikely the latter place should be the scene of his labours, as there were three of the members of the Presbytery that were quite opposed to his being licensed at all. But as these were soon removed by death, Mr Lachlan was licensed without any opposition. Mr Thomas Mackenzie of Applecross, being friendly to the young licentiate, as well as the people on his property, procured for him the Crown presentation to the parish of Lochcarron.

The news of the presentation was received with great joy by the people, and then began in Lochcarron one of the most blessed and notable ministries in the North of Scotland. With burning zeal for God and His cause, and yearning desires for the salvation of his people, the young minister was soon made painfully conscious that it required a great more than natural endowments, sanctified though they might be for the Master's use. The loose living of some of the people, excessive drinking, and Sabbath profanation, required much more than stern denunciation to eradicate them. God's own power was necessary, and Mr Lachlan fully realised this. Bad as Lochcarron was at this time, it was greatly reformed by what it was when Mr Sage came to it.

By way of an effort to improve the habits of the people, Mr Lachlan drew up the following rules: - "Church of Lochcarron, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1792. - Whereas it is the duty of all who love the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to depart from iniquity, and, as we are desired to abstain from all appearance of evil, we, the after subscribers, conscious that it is our duty to have the cause of God and the interests of religion and morality at heart; finding that great irregularities are practised at burials and other meetings, and even on sacramental occasions; and as we know that other people make an excuse and take an example from the conduct of those who are reputed religious, and observing with regret that the Sabbath is shamefully profaned by idle talk in the church-yard, have come

to the following resolutions, which we are determined, in the strength of God, inviolably to adhere to, viz:-

“1. That none of us will taste a single drop of spirits at a burial after the body is interred; but, if the corpse is carried a good distance, and if the day be so coarse as to make it necessary to take a little on the road, that we shall do so at a decent distance from the church-yard, and only take a very little, if necessary, to refresh nature; but, if the day be good, that we shall not take any liquor but what we take at the house from whence the corpse shall be taken; and that, when the body is consigned to the -earth, we shall immediately come to our respective homes. And however willing a poor widow may be, from a mistaken principle, to spend a good deal of whisky at the burial of her husband, we are determined that we shall not lay such a burden upon our consciences as to spend wantonly at the burial what might afterwards be of service to the widow and orphans. Whereas any of us singly, from slavish fear, might be afraid to break from this absurd and wicked practice, we hereby resolve, unanimously, to join together in breaking through it, so as that the world cannot be able to lay the blame upon an individual, but upon the whole of us taken collectively.

“2. We hereby resolve, and promise solemnly and faithfully, in the sight of God, that, if we see or hear of any communicant being the worse of liquor at any meeting, especially a burial or sacrament, we will inform against him, so that he may be proceeded against according to the rules of the Church.

“3. That everyone shall go home immediately after sermon, and not stay in the church-yard conversing on idle or worldly topics.

“4. That if any habit or practice, contrary to the Word of God, shall be observed in the parish, we shall do our utmost to suppress it.

“5. That if any of us, through slavish fear, or a desire to gratify an appetite, shall break through any of these resolutions, he shall be reckoned infamous.

“6. and lastly, that to the utmost of our power, we will endeavour to observe the utmost regularity at our sacramental occasions.”

That there was much room for improvement religiously in Lochcarron may be readily gleaned from some of the statements made in the foregoing paper of resolutions.... The first signature to these resolutions was that of Mr Donald

Kennedy, Kishorn, father of the saintly Rev. John Kennedy, Redcastle, and the grandfather of that prince of northern preachers, Dr John Kennedy, Dingwall.

But it was not merely outward reformation, good though that was in itself, that Mr Lachlan aimed at. He longed for the conversion of those over whom he had been placed as pastor. And the Lord answered his earnest prayers. He often made mention of and pled for the fulfilment of the words: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains, the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon" (Ps. lxxii. 16).

He had his own trials with his brethren in the Presbytery who belonged to the Moderate party. On one occasion he was appointed by the Presbytery to preside at the settlement of an unacceptable presentee. Mr Lachlan refused to obey, but the Clerk sent him a threatening letter, informing him that legal steps would be taken for his deposition if he refused to obey his Presbytery. Mr Lachlan yielded, and in writing to Dr Ronald Bayne, Kiltarlity, about this matter, he says; - "I was that day like blind Samson in the temple of the Philistines. It is true the presentee to that Gaelic parish did translate a chapter in Isaiah to Gaelic." In his latter days he was much troubled over this affair.

As one deeply interested not only in the spiritual but worldly welfare of his flock. Mr Lachlan protested strongly against the depopulation of large parts of the Northern Highlands to make way for sheep. He preached a series of sermons from Is. v. 8 - "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed in the midst of the earth! In mine ears, said the Lord of Hosts: of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant." His attacks on the new system were keenly resented by the sheep masters as was to be expected, but this did not keep Mr Lachlan from giving utterance to the after noted remarkable deliverance, as recorded by his biographer:- "When one in private conversation mentioned to him that many thousands of sheep had been lost in a snowstorm, and took occasion to say that Mr Lachlan's predictions were thus in the way of being fulfilled, Mr Lachlan replied that it was not in this way that he anticipated a change; he was not looking to present appearances - it was neither the snow of winter, nor such heat as would dry the tongue of the raven, that would bring deliverance from the system of oppression and grinding the face of the poor." It is very remarkable that these words should now be receiving their fulfilment in the re-peopling of the glens and straths of

the Highlands from which the people in the early nineteenth century were driven.

As a Christian Mr Lachlan enjoyed a more than ordinary nearness to God. Dr Kennedy, in his reference to this feature of the saintly minister's character, says: - "His prayerfulness was the leading feature of his Christianity. Much of his time was spent on his knees, and many a sleepless night has he passed, sometimes wrestling, as for his life, against the assaults of the tempter, and at other times 'rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. The nearness to the mercy seat, to which he was sometimes admitted, was quite extraordinary. Proofs of this might be given, because of which we cannot wonder that he had the fame and influence of a prophet among the people of the North. Avoiding the extreme of a superstitious credulity, on the one hand, and of the formalist's scepticism on the other, it is altogether safe to say that Mr Lachlan enjoyed peculiarly familiar intercourse with God, and received such distinct intimations of His mind, in reference to the cases which he carried to the mercy seat, as but very few of God's children have obtained" (Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire, 1897 Edit., p. 61).

Mr Lachlan never married, and in his poetical account of the parish written for Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland he refers to his happy state in the well-known lines :-

"The parson has no horse nor farm,  
Nor goat, nor watch, nor wife,  
Without an augmentation too,  
He leads a happy life."

A year before his death Mr Lachlan was stricken with a paralytic stroke. "Mind and body alike," says Dr Kennedy, "succumbed to the blow, and, before the year has closed, the friends who loved him best were willing that he should leave them to enter on the rest for which his soul was pining. It required such a visitation as this to reconcile them to his death. He had survived his usefulness to the Church on earth, and there was no inducement to wish him longer 'absent from the Lord.'"

He fell asleep on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1819, in the 65<sup>th</sup> year of his age. On being asked near the end how he was, he replied - "I am taking a faith's look into heaven." The following inscription, composed by the Rev. Dr Ross, Lochbroom, was placed on his tombstone: - "Here are deposited the mortal remains of the Rev.

Lachlan Mackenzie, late minister of Lochcarron, who died April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1819, in the 37<sup>th</sup> year of his ministry. A man whose simplicity of manners presented a picture of apostolic times; whose heavenliness of mind still spurned the vain objects of time and sense; whose vivid imagination shed a bright lustre on every subject which he handled; and whose holy unction in all his ministrations endeared him to the people of God, and embalmed his memory in their hearts. His praise is in the churches. His parish mourns."

A number of his sermons from MSS. in the possession of his sister (Mrs Ann Mackenzie) were published with other pieces of his writings, including a poem on redemption, in a small book edited by the Rev. William Mackenzie, North Leith. A small booklet, under the title, "*Gleanings, Gaelic and English, from the Sayings and Writings of the Rev. Lachlan Mackenzie, Lochcarron,*" was published in 1877. Most of these Gaelic gleanings were a reprint from "*Dioghlum o Theagasg nan Aithrichean.*" The latest edition of his sermons was that published at Glasgow in 1896, under the title, "*Sermons and Verses.*" There have also appeared in pamphlet form the following Gaelic sermons: - "*Ros O Sharon*" and "*An t-Uisge Beo*" (a Gaelic version of the sermon on Is. xlv. 3-5). Perhaps reference should be made here to the affecting story of the conversion of Ceit Mhor (Muckle Kate), for though not written by Mr Lachlan, he was God's honoured instrument in this marvellous triumph of divine grace.

As a preacher, Mr Lachlan occupies a place in the front rank of northern ministers. His most famous sermon, according to Dr Kennedy, was that on, The Babe at Bethlehem, a summary of which may be given in a future issue. We conclude our sketch with Dr Kennedy's description of Mr Lachlan as a preacher: -" His preaching was always remarkable. His great originality of thought and manner, his apt and striking illustration, his clear and emphatic utterance, the unction and authority with which he spake, his close dealing with the conscience, his dexterous and tender handling of the cases or the tempted, his powerful appeals, his solemn earnestness, and his frequent outbursts of impassioned feeling, could not fail to win for him a measure of acceptance, as they gave him a measure of power beyond that of any other of his brethren. His was preaching to which all could listen with interest. His striking illustrations, often homely, though always apt, would arrest the attention of the most ignorant and careless. There was an intellectual treat in his sermons for such as could appreciate the efforts of genius. The scoffer was arrested and awed by the authority with which he spoke, and every hearer

seeking the bread of life hung upon his lips" (*Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, 1897 Edit., p. 62).