



## [The Elopement of Alexander Macleod, Future Evangelical Minister (c 1810)]

Alexander Macleod was a crofter's son born in Assynt in Sutherland in 1786. About 1800, at the age of 14 years, he was awakened to the spiritual concern for his soul, and gradually the thought of the Ministry of the Church formed in his head. At length he set off for Kings College, Aberdeen and during his summer holidays he worked at home on fishing and crofting.

At the close of his theological studies a well-to-do farmer from Skye came to the Principal of the College in search of a gifted young man of good character as a tutor for his young sons, as was customary at that time. Alexander accepted the post reluctantly on a temporary basis, as it was preaching he wanted to do and not teaching. It was however a turning point in his life.

On the boat that carried him to Skye he met a young lady who turned out to be a sister of the boys he was to teach, and it was she who was destined to play a dramatic part in Mr Macleod's life. It seems to have been a case of love at first sight. Her affection for him grew apace and at last he cast his reserve aside and told the young lady that he loved her with his whole being. Both of these young souls were deeply religious and Evangelical.

After a good while Alexander felt he should inform the young lady's father about their mutual affection. Alas, the old gentleman reacted in a scornful manner. 'Who, and what was he, to lift his eyes to his daughter?', and he ordered him out of the house instantly. Poor Alexander accepted that she was far above him in station, but love levelled the difference flat.

However, there was nothing for it but to pack his cases and prepare to leave at once. He told his ladylove and she replied, 'If you go, I will go as well'. In this sudden and unforeseen circumstance the extraordinary happened. The idea of elopement occurred to him and set his whole being on fire.

Alexander was respected and admired by everyone for his character and for the Evangelical sermons he preached at their meetings. He had no difficulty securing a boat and a trusty crew, to which he told his purpose and engaged them to secrecy. About midnight he brought a ladder, and through her bedroom window the young lady made a noiseless escape, and they sailed off to Gairloch. From there they went on at breakneck speed to Inverness and thence to Edinburgh, where they were duly married, and they set up house off the High Street in Edinburgh.

When her family discovered the sudden disappearance of the young lady, they were astounded and the head of the family was particularly angry. The whole of Skye rang from end to end with gossip about the dignified young Evangelical preacher, who apparently was also a true romantic. The exploit brought young Macleod at once into the limelight, and as might be expected, the so-called theologically conservative school clamoured for his blood. They tried to build a 'fama clamose' case against him.

The old gentleman went pelting after the runaways but he was too late. He did however use his influence to revenge himself by doing his best to prevent his son-in-law from getting a call to a Parish. The young couple moved back to Assynt and lived for the next three years in a humble thatched bothy. It was a severe trial, but under it, the young man's character grew to steel of finest temper. In the course of time the family were reconciled and they all drew close together.

At length Rev. Alexander Macleod was licensed to preach in 1818 in his 33<sup>rd</sup> year and he was ordained to the Gaelic Church in Dundee in 1819 as their first Gaelic Minister. From Dundee he was transferred to the Gaelic Church at Cromarty in 1821.

At that time the Island of Lewis had long lain in darkness except for the stirrings of The Spirit, through the agency of the recently established Gaelic School.

The patronage of the vacant Parish of Uig in Lewis was in the power of the proprietor, The Honourable Mrs Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth, and as she was scouring the Highlands for Evangelical Ministers for Lewis she discovered Rev. Alexander Macleod and urged him to come to Uig. His arrival in Uig in 1824 as the first Evangelical Minister in Lewis marked a new era for the Island. He is still talked about.

He found in Uig a congregation of over 800 communicants, most of them pagans paying homage morning and evening to the sun and moon. The rest of the Island was in a similar state of idle superstition and formality. He

asked one of his Elders to lead in a prayer at a week night service, and he was startled when the Elder asked God to raise a storm and send them a big wreck and store of goods from the sea.

Mr Macleod was pained at the deplorable spiritual ignorance of his people and he suspended the celebration of the Lords Supper for a year or two until people came to have a better understanding of the sacrament. By 1828 the Parish of Uig was in the throes of a mighty religious revival and the movement spread to the limits of the Island, an Island that had never known or heard of a religious revival.

On the Sabbath people thought nothing of walking 20 miles or more to hear Rev. Macleod and retrace the same long walk back home in the evening. Such was the eagerness of the people of Lewis and Harris for a taste of the Uig blessing. The character of the Highlanders owes much to the printing of the Gaelic Bible, the coming of the Gaelic Schools and a crop of sound Evangelical preachers like Rev. Alexander Macleod.

[ends]

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