



The Home and Foreign Missionaries of Habost

A high proportion of the people of Kershader School area achieved distinction in a variety of fields. Perhaps they took an early interest in education, seeing that the Lochs Parish School which was established in 1796 at Keose was reasonably near to them, with ready access to it by a short sea crossing, across Loch Erisort, which was the normal means of transport at Lochs at the time.

When one considers the lack of educational and economic opportunities available to the crofters in Lewis in the early 19th century when Alastair Macleod, 2 Kershader, 'Alastair Chalum Rudha an Fhitheach' was born in 1827, it must be agreed that he did very well to attain to the high station of Gospel Minister in the famous floating Church of Strontian. The 1843 Statistical Account states that there were only 12 people in the Parish of Lochs who could write then, and a few males could speak broken English. The small thatched Gaelic Schools were planted here and there, some 15 or 20 years before the Statistical Account was written which informs us that half of the inhabitants of the Parish of Lochs between the ages of 12 and 24 years could read the Gaelic language. Even the Bible itself was only translated as a whole at the beginning of the 19th century, and by 1820 only four copies had reached Lochs, and they were all for the tacksmen, one in Crossbost, Crobeg, Valtos and Lemreway.

Rev. Alastair Macleod, 2 Kershader and Strontian was a first cousin of Hector Macleod 'Eachainn Dhomhnuill Ruaidh', who was the first tenant on Croft 11 Habost and his brother Alastair Dhomhnuill Ruaidh, the first tenant at 10 Habost. It is to the remarkable family of Alastair Macleod, 10 Habost that we wish to draw attention here. Alastair had a family of four daughters and four sons. He was one of the Lochs people that Rev. Norman C. Macfarlane refers to in his book, 'The Men of the Lews', where he says:

Alastair's thatched house, like his croft, was a model. It was often crowded with people who came to hear him conduct family worship. The house got the name of 'House Beautiful', and to Godly people it was a magnet. Three ministers of the Gospel came out of it. No higher tribute than that could be paid to the holy influence than this crofter's home.

Donald, born 1856 - died 1933, was Minister at Leurbost among other places.

Alexander, born 1866 - died 1956, was Minister at Portmahomack.

Kenneth, the youngest son born 1871 - died 1921, had prepared to devote himself to commerce, but the influence of his upbringing resulted in a life in the service of Christ as a China Missionary.

The fourth son, John was a tailor and carried on his business at 10 Habost.

After training, Kenneth Macleod was appointed by the China Inland Mission (now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship) and arrived in China in October 1897. He was ordained in Shanghai and assigned to the East China seaport of Ningpo. In February 1901, he married Miss Katherine Richer who had come to China in 1899 from USA. The couple were then assigned to the inland town of Ninghai, where they worked with success planting Churches in the Presbyterian tradition, as well as the supervision of a boy's school and Bible teaching. When he took up work in the district, there was a membership of 57, and two organized churches and 17 pupils in the boy's school. The statistics for January 1921 give membership of 562 besides 221 under instruction. Also 8 organised churches and 40 pupils in the school. Mr. & Mrs. Macleod's first furlough was in 1906 and their second in 1919 when they prolonged their stay in the USA to undertake a six-month period of strenuous deputation work on behalf of the mission. Returning to China in 1921, they were proceeding back to their station in glad anticipation of a vigorous Autumn's work when the home call came with great suddenness.

The 'China Inland Mission' Monthly Notes of Sep 1921 carry an appreciation of Mr. Macleod from the pen of a colleague, Mr. W. H. Warren:

While on board a small coasting steamer en route for Ninghai, Mr Macleod was seized with cholera in a most virulent form. He was transferred from the outgoing steamer to an ingoing one and eventually carried to the Mission House at Ningpo, but medical care was of no avail and he passed away in 1921. He is buried at the foreign cemetery there.

It is freely acknowledged that the Chinese language is not an easy language for Westerners to acquire, and for a crofter's son from a thatched house in Park in the 19th century to embark on a life of missionary work in China,

the challenge and the difficulties were enormous. Many of his Island compatriots, at that time, had a hard time of it making themselves understood in English far less Chinese. In contrast, nowadays, regrettably, many of us in Lochs find it difficult to speak in our native Gaelic language. There is no alphabet in the Chinese language. Instead, one must memorise thousands of characters or ideograms, each of which is a symbol of an idea or several ideas. There are no inflections to denote gender, number and case, but each sound has different tones and these are very important to distinguish. The Standard National Language has four tones for each word, but the Amoy dialect has seven, and Cantonese nine, which greatly complicates speaking.

One begins reading a Chinese book at what we call the back of the book, and the characters are in vertical columns, so that one begins with the right hand column to read from the top of the page to the bottom. Also, many Chinese sentences have the opposite word order to the English order; thus, a commentary on the epistle to the Galatians appears in Chinese as, 'Galatians Epistle Commentary'. Perhaps Kenneth Macleod's knowledge of Gaelic may have helped him to acquire Chinese. Missionaries also had to learn something of Chinese history and culture before engaging gradually in Evangelistic work.

To quote his son Alex who was also a missionary, 'that a foreign missionary with halting speech could sometimes communicate the Good News to Chinese audiences was due to the Grace of God'. Four children were born to Kenneth and Katherine Macleod, Alexander Napier, born 1901, Annabella Martha, born 1903, later Mrs. Aubrey Parsons of Melbourne Australia. Catherine Margaret, born 1905, died in 1956, and Mary Christina, born 1911, later Mrs. H.T. Howard, Philadelphia, USA, who died in 2005.

The first two were Gospel Missionaries in China as well. Kenneth's son, Rev. Alex N. Macleod married Dorothy Miles in USA in 1929. The Presbyterian Church in the USA appointed them as Missionaries to China. They reached China in 1930, and after a few years of language study and general Church work, they were assigned to the staff of the North China Theological Seminary, which is a Theological Seminary for the training of Chinese ministers. Although History was Alex's special subject he became Professor of New Testament Studies there. Mrs. Macleod taught music which was her special subject.

Their early years in China were difficult years. In 1931 the Japanese invaded the Eastern province of Manchuria and organized a puppet state there, independent of China. Later on the Japanese crossed the Great Wall and overran a large area of North China, including the area in which Rev. & Mrs. Alex Macleod worked. After some years the U.S.A. Government advised all women to leave that war torn country and Mrs. Macleod and their 2-year-old son had to return to U.S.A.

Following the Japanese attack on the U.S.A. in 1941, Alex N. Macleod was taken prisoner and remained in prison until 1945. The Macleods returned to China in 1948 and resumed teaching at the North China Theological Seminary, now moved to East Central China in the hope of surviving the Civil War that was then raging in China. At that time the country was in a state of political crisis and economic collapse after 17 years of war. Inflation was rampant. It cost four million Chinese Dollars to buy a loaf of bread.

In 1949 the Chinese Communist armies overran this area, and once again their work was interrupted by war. They escaped to Hong Kong and three years later he was assigned to the post of Professor in the Theological College in Taipei, Taiwan (formerly called Formosa). They retired in 1973 after 23 years in China and 21 years in Taiwan. They went to live in Toronto, Canada. Rev. Doctor Alex N. Macleod holds the following degrees - PhD from Edinburgh University, BA MA BD and Master of Theology TRM, all from U.S.A. universities and colleges. In Taiwan he engaged in literary work as well as teaching in the Seminary. He wrote in the Chinese Language, commentaries on the First Epistle of Peter, on the Sermon on the Mount, on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and the Philippians, all of 300/400 pages each. He also prepared several booklets for Bible Study Classes - Outlines and Questions on New Testament Epistles, Colossians, Galatians and Peter.

In collaboration with Chinese friends, he translated into Chinese, 'The Way of Life' by Charles Hodge, 'God speaks by Means' by Oswald T. Allis, 'The Apostles Age: which is it?' by Thomas Witherow and 'Are You a Biblical Baptist?' by George Marston. Also, the Taiwan Association of Theological Schools commissioned him to compile 'A Bibliography of Chinese Theological Books' with all Titles and Publishers listed in Chinese and English.

In looking back over decades of both turbulence and peace in China, Dr. Macleod summed up their life there in the words of the 23rd Psalm, 'Goodness and mercy all my life have surely followed me'. Dr & Mrs. Macleod's son Alexander Donald Macleod is Associate Minister of Knox Presbyterian Church, Toronto.

On the adjoining croft of 11 Habost Lochs, Hector, the brother of Alastair Macleod 10 Habost, settled. Hector's son, Rev. George Macleod (1854 - 1929) was educated at the local school, University of Glasgow and Free Church College. Ordained in 1886 and inducted to Knock Church of Scotland at Garrabost, he was Clerk of Presbytery from 1902 to 1928. From the same croft came George's nephew Rev. Norman Macleod, born 1886, son of John Macleod 'Iain Eachainn'. He was Church of Scotland Minister in Uigen, Lewis.

From the foregoing, we get a glimpse of the influence and contribution some of the deprived crofter's sons and their offspring of the past and present generations bring to bear on a variety of situations, at home and overseas.

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