

**“OLD DOCTOR LUNAN,”  
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



**A PHYSICIAN  
OF THE  
OLD SCHOOL.**

I.

## “OLD DOCTOR LUNAN,”

### BLAIRGOWRIE.

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A man he was to all the country dear.—GOLDSMITH.

When “Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush” appeared some eight or nine years ago there was but one opinion in the Blairgowrie district as to the identity of “Dr MacLure.” It was well known that the author, Dr Watson (“Ian MacLaren”) was at home in Blairgowrie; had several uncles and aunts in the neighbourhood; had spent many a long summer day at Kinloch, at Gormack, and at Bendochy in his boyhood, and later on had even preached in some of the churches; and, it need hardly be added, knew Dr Lunan familiarly. It was nothing strange, therefore, to find the worthy old man figuring in the new author’s book. The sketch was a perfect likeness. The self-devotion, the regardlessness of pecuniary reward, the kindness of disposition, the distaste for praise or “plaister,” the skill, the pride in his profession, the occasional bluntness of manner, were self-evident transcripts from the living, active, popular personality in Blairgowrie. When told of the likeness in the book it was characteristic of the man to declare it was “a’ buff and nonsense;” but the author himself has informed the present writer that Dr Lunan, whose “hard and priceless work” and “the honesty and reality of whose character” he knew, was one of several country doctors who sat for their portrait as Dr MacLure. Well, Blairgowrie

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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folk can afford to the others the uncouth figure and checked trousers, but everything else belongs to "Old Doctor Lunan," of Blairgowrie.

### ROBERT LUNAN, SURGEON

—to give him his correct title—was born at Kinnettles, where his father was minister, in 1813. He served his apprenticeship with his uncle, Dr William Smith, who was also Provost, in Forfar. He used to recall with a chuckle how one of his jobs was to pound down some old broken tombstones which his master had got hold of in order to make grand "marble mixture" for infantile diarrhœa! He studied at Edinburgh, and walked the Infirmary when Dr Knox, of Burke and Hare notoriety, was anatomist there. He afterwards sailed to Baffin's Bay and other Arctic parts as surgeon on board a whaler, and was always very fond of the sea. One of his earliest planned voyages never came off; if it had, he would never have planned another. He and a companion had arranged to sail from Leith to Arbroath, but overslept themselves, and lost the boat, which was lost altogether. As it was, old Father Neptune had a nice collection of medical literature added to his private library, the adventurers having sent off their books in advance.

### COMING TO BLAIRGOWRIE

in 1836 he was 23 years of age, and one of the finest-looking young fellows ever seen—over 6 feet 2 inches in height, with fair hair and complexion, swank, cheery, and active, with a bright smile and ready joke for every one he met, the very embodiment of health, and hope, and helpfulness. His coming into a house was like the "sun itself in the heavens," and in a very short time no figure was more familiar than the

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## “Old Doctor Lunan,” Blairgowrie.

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young surgeon scudding all over the district on his favourite mare. When recommended by a well-disposed residenter to flit, as Blair was well off for doctors already, he replied—“See here, sir, I’ve got as much as will keep me for three years though I don’t earn a penny, and three years I mean to remain.” And so he did. For 58 years thereafter—practically up till a short time of his death in the spring of 1894—he was the devoted servant of the community, not only in Blairgowrie and Rattray, but

### UP AND DOWN THE GLENS

— Glenshee, Strathardle, the Stormont—anywhere he was wanted, there he was. One has only to mention the fact that during all these years he never once rendered an account to get at the heart of the man. What stories are told of his intolerance to poor people—when they plagued him for their “accounts!” He has been known to take a pestering auld body who was ridiculously anxious to “pay her way,” by the shoulders, and push her out of his surgery door, pointing to a fine lady on the other side of the street, who, he assured her, would pay the old woman’s account! Per contra, there is

### A GOOD STORY

told of a lady calling upon him one day, and asking what she owed him. The doctor made a pretence of looking up his books. After a bit he said, “Oh, ay, madam; perhaps five pounds.” “Oh, dear me, doctor, that’s far too little, you know!” “Well, let’s see,” said he, consulting his oracle again, “we’ll say £10.” “That’s little enough yet, doctor.” “Just your pleasure, madam.” “Make it £15, doctor,” and that was settled. The doctor then politely shook hands with the lady, and bade

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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her good day. After she was gone, he turned to his assistant and asked who she was! The doctor was never without capacious pockets in his coats, and many a package of tea, tobacco, beef, &c., did they carry on his journeys. His business was to make people better, and food was a good deal more efficacious than physic on many occasions. A bent old woman came into the surgery one night. "Ye'll be wantin' some medicine, I daresay." "Deed ay, doctor." "Weel, see, tak' that," thrusting a shilling into her hand, "and get a bit steak and a drink o' porter for yourself!" Another old woman reminded him she hadn't paid anything for ten years. "That's a' richt, Janet," said the doctor. "Weel, maybe," replied the old woman, "but there's ae thing ye canna say, doctor, that I ever gaed past ye!" His skill, particularly as an accoucheur, was known all over the county. He was a man of simple remedies; his famous "blue-pill" was a terror—if not to evil-doers, to bad livers!

### A LOVER OF GOOD STORIES.

He was a great lover of good stories—and could tell them, too. There are many floating about, but—ahem—they do not read well in this colour of ink! There's the lady and the stiff umbrella, for instance; the recruit who did not pass; the old fiddle and the old wife. Talking of fiddles, the doctor was a connoisseur on certain lines, and possessed a number of good instruments—most of them presents from grateful patients, or their relatives. The present writer can recall with what complete satisfaction the doctor journeyed to Broughty Ferry, and there handled everyone of the small but valuable collection of violins belonging to Mr Orchar. In Drumtochty parlance—it was "a

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michty day.” One of the most curious incidents the doctor could remember was going into his surgery one night, and, finding a fine old viola da gamba lying there—from whom he was never able to discover. He played a slow air fairly well—the “Light of other days” was a great favourite of his—but never posed as a player. As a judge of fiddles, however, his opinions were always of consequence, and he certainly had some original ideas. On fine days he used to hang out his fiddles, upside down, on an old apple tree in his garden. “Fiddles like fresh air and sunshine as much as folk,” he would declare. Fortunately, no boys happened to see them and “pap” stones at them. Then, he would weigh his fiddles once a year or so, to see what effect age was having upon them, and nothing delighted him more than to spend an afternoon—a day—a week, if necessary—trying the effect of a new bridge or soundpost. Everything about the instrument had great fascination for him, and he had all the measurements as to length, width, depth, thicknesses, height of bridge, length of soundholes, &c., &c., at his finger-ends, and usually carried a specially marked inchtape with him. His fiddles were all known by name: there was “Rosemount,” “Cramond,” “Dr Dodds,” “The Yellow Fiddle,” “Johnnie Robertson,” “The Wasp,” &c., every one of them, too, had its own history—some of them curious and interesting. The doctor was

### A CHAMPION SHOT

in his day, and carried off many a trophy against all comers. One of the best stories told is in regard to his great feat of nerve and skill at St Andrews in the sixties, when, after a three days’ contest, he was about to fire his last round

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies.

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at a thousand yards, and the friend of a rival for the principal trophy rushed in, for the obvious purpose of putting him off his aim, with the information—which the doctor had studiously avoided knowing anything about—that he would require to make a bull's eye to win. This put the doctor's back up. "By George, sir,"—or something stronger—exclaimed he, "and I shall win!" He kept his word. It was probably the year after this that he was shooting at Almondbank, near Perth, and in this connection there is a curious dream story which is worth relating. It is said that one of a party of gentlemen who were travelling from Aberdeen to Perth to take part in the same Wappinschaw told his companions of a strange dream which he had had the night before, in which he had seen the winner in the forthcoming contest. He described his appearance minutely, and no sooner had they alighted at Perth Station than the tall, handsome figure of the doctor caught the narrator's eye, and he recognised him at once. However that be, the doctor annexed the trophy right enough. A keen curler was he also. The legend runs that one very hard winter an intimation was affixed to the surgery door that no patients would be visited while the frost held.

In January 1891, after 55 years of active service, public esteem found expression in the presentation of an illuminated address and a silver dinner service; together with a diamond and pearl necklet to Miss Lunan. Three years later he passed away—"the last o' the auld schule"—and Blair has been the poorer ever since. He was succeeded by his son, Dr C. S. Lunan, but the memory of the "old doctor" will "smell sweet and blossom in the dust" for many years to come.