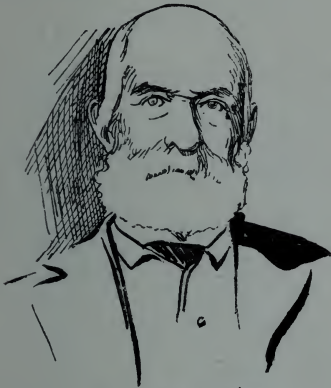


“UNCLE TOM,”

MEIKLEOUR.



Mr. T. Mc Lachlan.

**QUARRYWORKER,
GENERAL MERCHANT,
ANGLER, AND
DISTINGUISHED FREEMASON.**

XVIII.

“UNCLE TOM,”

MEIKLEOUR.

Age, too, shines out, and, garrulous, recounts the feats of youth.—THOMSON.

There are two enjoyable adjuncts to a holiday at Meikleour which the sensible visitor never overlooks—a sight of the Beech Hedge and a “crack with ‘Uncle Tom.’” The one is as remarkable for its grandeur as the other for its desirable simplicity. Tom lays no claim to any outstanding personal achievement; all his greatness in the public world appertains to his baptism, for which he was not responsible, and the distinction of being the Freemason of the longest standing in Scotland, or perhaps the world—an honour which only comes with age.

In the parish of Little Dunkeld, Perthshire, away back in 1818, was born a male descendant of the real Clan MacLachlan, who was to be christened Thomas. The baptism, however, was not such an easy matter. The minister on the appointed day was to journey to Edinburgh, and young Tom was to be carried to a toll-house, on the way to “kep” the minister. Here it was arranged that the ceremony should be performed, but by some cause or other the baptismal party was late for the rev. gentleman, and after catching him at another part of the road, had to ask the loan of a bowl at a neighbouring house, and get the child christened at

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the roadside. The subject of that ceremony is "Uncle Tom," now an aged grandfather of 84 years, frail and rheumatic certainly, but still able to take a daily walk, and as hearty as ever.

Tom was the youngest member of the family, and his father, besides working in Birnam Quarry, owned a bit of land and a few cows. In the days of Tom's education all the scholars during winter had to carry to school each morning either a piece of firewood or a peat. In Little Dunkeld, the seat of our old friend's learning, the schoolmaster in those days was an excellent educationalist, but, Tom remarks, he was terribly hard. After undergoing what was then thought a good training, our old friend, at the age of 16 entered Birnam Quarry, where his father was employed. Here he worked for the long period of 21 years under the guidance of a kind master, Mr Harris. When Tom left in 1853 to start the business of grocer and general merchant in Meikleour—which he still carries on—it was with tears in his eyes that Mr Harris exclaimed—"Weel, Tom, you've served me faithfully an' honourably a' that time, an' I'm sweer to lose ye. But it seems the best o' friends maun pairt, an' so maun you an' me."

Here mention might be made of Mr Cuthbert, who also worked in the slate quarries, and has been a life-long friend of Mr M'Lachlan. This old gentleman is also a Freemason, as every man in Dunkeld seemed to be in those days. Mr Cuthbert was once taken to a metal quarry in the district belonging to his master to do some blasting. The blast, however, went off prematurely, and Mr Cuthbert, then a comparatively young man, had his leg and arm broken and was deprived of the sight of both eyes. He is the father of Mr Cuthbert, aerated water manufacturer, Dunkeld, who carries all

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the news between the two old cronies now that they are unable to visit each other.

Though nominally carrying on the business of general merchant at Meikleour, Mr M'Lachlan was early called upon by the “folks at the Big Hoose” to work in the garden. The “gentry” also took a notion to him for the fishing, for he was an expert in the art, and he did duty on the Tay for Lord Lansdowne and his guests as long as he was able. Many pleasant experiences, humourous (and true!) fishy stories, he can recall, and nothing delights Tom better than to tell of the goodness of his employers. The ladies of the Lansdowne family seem to have been true devotees of the sport. Every morning at ten o'clock Tom had to put in his appearance at the mansion to see if Lady Emily (now the wife of Colonel Digby) desired to go shooting or fishing. For these regular services as well as for his usefulness and ever helpful advice, Tom is still remembered by Lord Lansdowne, Lady Emily, and her husband. Colonel Digby especially is a regular visitor when in the vicinity, and never shakes with an empty hand.

Tom was over 70 years of age before rheumatism troubled him. He could stand the cold as well as any of the fishers, and he tells with delight a story of a competition amongst the members of a party to decide who would longest refrain from admitting the cold. Needless to say, Tom won. Even yet he declares that if he had the use of his right leg he “would be a young chap.”

Mr M'Lachlan's long connection with Freemasonry must be referred to. For 68 years he has been a true and interested member of the secret craft, and probably this is a record. His father and eldest brother had already taken the

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vows of St John's Operative Lodge, Dunkeld, when, along with an elder brother, Tom was induced to join the craft. He then wanted some months of being the required age of 18 years, but this was overlooked when the two brothers joined at the same time. This brother, who was forester at Murthly at the time, died under rather sad circumstances a few years after. It was on the occasion of the visit of the late Queen Victoria to Scone Palace, and a huge bonfire was being lit on the top of a neighbouring hill in honour of the event. After the lighting ceremony had been performed several of the men, including young M'Lachlan, started in a race, but as the smoke was blowing across their path, they did not notice that they were running towards the edge of a cliff, and M'Lachlan was over before he could be warned.

This is the only member of the family who did not reach a ripe old age, for Mr M'Lachlan comes of a long-lived race. His father was working in Birnam Quarry at 82 years of age, when he was suddenly laid down with rheumatics; his paternal grandfather was 103 before he died; while his mother's father lived for 85 years. His eldest sister died unmarried at 88; another reached 93; while a third, who married the innkeeper at Meikleour, was, as Mr M'Lachlan puts it, "just 74." Stewart Jack, elsewhere accounted for in these pages, was a friend of Tom's, and according to the latter's opinion "quite a young chap" when he died at 76. Mr M'Lachlan's partner in life still enjoys excellent health at 77, and her father was a patriarch of 90 when he died in Canada.