

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

By *Sanners Gow*

The Three Roads o Castle Eden.

As I write this there's a bit o a storm comin in aff the Moray Firth and the aal windae in my study is rattlin wi the gusts o ween as it tries tae punch its wye in. I've the fire weel stackit tae conteract the caal druchts blawin in throwe the leadit glaiss peens.

This is a strange story but I canna claim tae be its author as the man that wrote it lies at the aal kirkyard at Kinnedart as he's deen for the last hunder an forty odd years. That man wiz my three times greatgranda the Reverend Gordon S. Gow.

He wiz the meenister here at Eden for forty aicht years fae 1820 – 1868. He wiz a prolific writer and kept amazingly detailed journals and I'm lucky enough tae own them. They are written in a close neat hand in the copperplate style o the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They, by their very content, were niver meant tae be published.

He records in great detail stories o ghosts, witches, Devil's imps and ither strange ongyans o the occult about the pairish. For a man o the cloth he'd a great respect for folklore and niver made a fool o local beliefs so obviously steeped in the pagan times. But noo in these mair enlightened times I think that some o his tales should be published, something he daurna hae deen in his ain time. I hiv published a few stories fae his journals already but niver named him as their author. They are 'The Lichtin Green' 'The Steens That Turned' 'The Prechum Steen', 'The Meal Giral' tae name but a fyowe. The ideas for many o my ither stories also come fae his journals so his influence is throughoot aa my ain writing.

Donnty Galbraith wiz walkin hame ae nicht fae the Mill o Eden faar he vrocht. He enjoyed bein oot intae the fresh nicht air aifter aa day among the styoo comin aff the mull. He wiz takkin up the hill and jist at the bend faar the road turned doon tae the fairm o Bowiebank fan an aal man coughed fair at his lug. He loupit clear shoutin "Aliss ye hoor!"

Whit a fleg he got and said intae the darkness "Gweed sakes min ye near stoppit ma hairt in ma breest ye silly bugger!"

But naebody made an answer and Donnty thinkin it wiz some o the loons fae the mill oot for reels at his expense made a dive up the bank faar he thocht they were hiding. Aa he found though wiz an aal yowie blinkin at him an hoasted again like an aal man afore rinnin awa. Laachin tae himsel for bein spookit he gid on the road. As he cam roon the corner towards Castle Eden he could see its aal waasteens standin oot by the scam o the meen. He stood a meenitie lookin at the ruins and tried

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tae imagine fit it wid' ve lookit like centuries ago on a fine saft nicht like this. The castle hid stood guard here abeen the three roads since the fourteenth century at least and he tried tae picter aa the fowk that hid passed this wye an windered fit kind o lives they hid lived. That's fin he heard the bairn greetin. It wiz a low miserable sound like a bairnie at the eyn o its tether so Donnty hid a gweed look aroon but nae sign o the bairn could he see ava. So he speired "Faar aboot are ye bairn? I can hear ye but I canna see ye!"

The greetin grew louder intae hairtbrakkin sobs and that's fin Donnty saw the bairn sittin ablow a sign faar the three roads met on the wee triangle o girss. The bairnie wiz cooried doon wi its airms about its knees rockin back an forrit in its misery. Donnty gid inaboot an speired at the barnie fit wiz wrang. As he did this the bairn lookit up at him wi the saddest painfilled een he'd ivver seen and shook its heed afore startin tae sob again as if its hairt wiz brakkin. Donnty bent doon tae pick the bairnie up but his haans passed richt throwe. Donnty didna hing aboot ava. He jist teen tae his heels wi a strange whimper comin up his thrapple. He nivver lookit ower his shooder incase the bairn wiz aifter him wi the horns o Hell stickin oot ilka side o its heed!

It wiz a fyowe days later fin Donnty gid tae see the minister at his mither's insistence. He'd been in sic a state ower fit he'd seen that he wisna getting sleep for thinkin aboot it. His mither wiz beginnin tae get worried for him. So minister it wiz tae be. Donnty felt a richt gype gan tae see Reverend Gow but onywy he did it and tellt him exactly fit hid happened. Donnty wiz surprised that the minister didna chase him for comin oot wi sic nonsense but he seemed genuinely interested and even got him tae show him faar aboot the bairn hid been sittin. Donnty, reassured noo that he wisna gan aff the heed because even the minister believed him, gid hame the wye wi a spring in his step tae his aal mither.

Ower the next puckle wiks Reverend Gow in the course o his pastoral duties wid speir at the aaler fowk if they'd ivver heard ony strange things happenin at the three roads o Eden. He got a begaik at the amount o folklore there wiz aboot the aal castle but naebody mentioned onything aboot a bairn bein seen faar the three roads met. He lookit back the records o the previous ministers but they it seemed kept gey desultory notes tae say the least. Some o them hardly keepin records o births, mairriages and deaths let aleen onything else. That wiz until he got tae the records kept by a Reverend Latimar fae 1623 till 1631. Now he keepit meticulous records and seemed tae be a richt 'Hell Fire' kine o minister.

In readin throwe the books it seemed that he'd gotten leave tae tak tae trial the suspect o a foul murder committed against an Elspeth Sangster, a widow woman. She'd been found in her hoose at Tocher Knowes brutally murdered by a billyheuk. The only suspect wiz her twelve year aal stepson Charlie Sangster. He'd

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

been heard shoutin that she Elspeth hid been the daith o his faither by her greed for land.

The laird at that time hid been een o the first impover lairds and he encouraged the clearin o the muirs tae plant. Apparently if ye cleared roch land ye got the use o it for a token rent. She Mrs Sangster hid aye been on at her man tae clear even mair grun. This gid on till eventually he'd torn the guts oot o himsel and deet o overwork.

Aabody said she wiz a cruel woman and treated her man and stepson like they were beasts fae the field. She wisna affa weel likit by her neebours. Some fowk said she'd been haein a cairryon wi the minister Joshua Latimar the very man that hid noo been given leave tae judge young Charlie Sangster for the murder.

Fin Charlie heard that his stepmither wiz deed and that he wiz getting the blame he'd ran awa but wiz found hidin in the widdies at Forglen at the ither side o the Deveron fae Eden. He'd been put in chines an brocht back. He wiz only a bairn and although twelve he'd the stature o a laddie much younger and wiz slow minded. A bad treated bairn he wiz feart o his ain shadda an widnae hiv said boo tae a goose. Onywey they threw the bairn intae a cell at the castle tae awyte his trial. Eventually he wiz brocht tae trial and the whole proceedings were owerseen by Reverend Latimar by him standing on a podium and writin aathing doon that wiz being said. He wiz questioned by some o the kirk elders and they werena ower worried about the methods used tae extract a confession fae Charlie.

The bairn protested his innocence sayin he'd nithing tae dee wi the murder o his stepmither. In his dimwitted wye he even tried tae get help fae Latimar tae clear his name by sayin he wid ken that he hidna killed his stepmither because his horse wiz at the hoose that very day. Nae help wiz forthcomin as Latimar said he wiz tellin lees aboot his horse bein there. Charlie did conter him but tae nae avail.

Aifter a good beetlin by the elders Charlie eventually owned up tae killin his stepmither wi the billyheuk. Latimar hid written wi obvious relish as he'd passed the sentence o the court. Charlie wiz tae be strippit nyaakit and be given a thoosan lashes o the the cat-o-nine-tails.

He wiz duly tied tae a frame erected faar the three roads o Eden met and given his punishment. It teen a hunder an twenty lashes for Charlie tae die in agony. The man at the lash stoppit layin on fin he seen the bairn wiz deed but Latimar ordered him tae complete the punishment o the court. Aifter a thoosan lashes there wisna an affa lot left o Charlie tae beery but his remains were laid in the wee triangle o girss faar the three roads met so his soul should forivver be lost nae kennin fitna road it should tak.

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

Reverend Gow wiz fair seeck readin about fit they'd deen tae peer wee Charlie and he could feel the anger comin up his thrapple.

Later he found oot mair about Latimar. He'd gaen on tae become a witch hunter doon about the Borders faar he'd enjoyed pittin peer aal weemin tae the ordeal. Nae one person wiz ivver spared that came afore Latimar and aa ended up bein brunt at the stake. He met his eyn in a drunken brawl ower a hooer an ended up bein gullied in the guts an teen mair than a week tae die in pure agony. A fittin eyn tae an animal like that thocht Gow.

That he'd been involved somehow in the murder o Elspeth Sangster didna seem muckle in doubt. Gow felt in his bones the bairn didna dee it but hid been made tae pey for anither person's crime. Though it could nivver now be proved if Latimar wiz the murderer an affa lot o things seemed tae point in his direction. The apparition o Charlie at the three roads if true wid go some wye tae provin Charlie's innocence if nae Latimar's guilt.

He thocht lang an sair as tae fit he should dee. Eventually decidin he'd nott some outside help he gaed intae Macduff tae see Father O'Maley a retired priest that bade up in the wee priory at Chapel Hillock. Father O'Maley could be a richt contermaschious aal bugger at times but the twa men although o different beliefs were the very best o freens. Weel intae his aichties Father O'Maley hid vast experience in the unseen world o the occult and the spirits therein.

Father O'Maley listened, quaitly sippin at the whisky Gow always teen him. Een o his parishoners hid a relation that bade up the Cabrach wye so there wiz ayewis a dram or twa passed on tae Gow.

Aifter Gow feenished his story Father O'Maley jist sat awa sippin at his fusky. Aifter a fyowe minutes he cleared his thrapple sayin tae Gow that as he wiz in gey peer health there wisna ony wye he could dee fit needit tae be deen but that he'd gie Gow the tools and the method tae set the bairn's soul free.

As I said afore although they were o different beliefs they were the best o freens on a personal livvel and Father O'Maley often bade at the manse faar Gow's wife doted on the aal priest treatin him like the grandfaither she'd nivver seen. There he regaled her wi stories o 'Owld Ireland' about the Bainshee combing her golden locks or the 'Little People' nae higher than yer knee. Mrs Gow wiz ayewis on at him tae come and bide at the manse faar she could look aifter him an see that he ate eneuch. He ayewis passed it aff wi an evasive answer an a wee laach.

Fin he returned tae the manse he put by the things Father O'Maley hid geen him. He'd hiv tae awyite the twentieth o December afore he could dee onything for that

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

wiz the date Charlie hid died.

Onywe on the appointed nicht Reverend Gow teen oot the stuff that he'd been geen by Father O'Maley. There wiz a bottle o Holy Water aa the wye fae Rome, a big brass crucifix, a lock o St Drostan's hair deen up in a wee gold box wi a glaiss front forbye three prayers rolled up an sealed wi reed wax. Gow hid nivver deen onything like this afore so he wiz understandably nervous. He'd been tellt nae tae show ony fear or doubt fin he came face tae face wi the spirit o Charlie but tae spik tae him and offer tae release him fae purgatory. He hoped he'd manage tae dee aathing richt even though deep inside he doubted if he'd see onything ava.

Pittin aathing intae a wee clout pyoke he made his wye tae the three roads. He gey near forgot the very thing that Father O'Maley hid been so insistent aboot so he gaed doon tae the glebe and teen the milkin stool fae the byre. Yermin the milk coo wiz in her staa half asleep and fin she saw him she stared wi her bonny bovine een. He gaed inaboot and made a fuss o her scrattin her heed and giein her a puckle fresh hey. He'd a fyle tae wyte for darkness so he cleaned her oot an pit in fresh strae intae her staa.

Afore nicht he made his wye tae the three roads armed wi his clout pyowk an the milkin stool. He placed the stool richt in front o the place Charlie hid been seen by Donnty Galbraith. Next he laid oot the Holy Water, the crucifix and the wee gold box wi St Drostan's hair and awytit the licht tae fail. Really nervous now as darkness came doon it teen aa his belief tae bide there.

In the event he wiz sittin on the milkin stool for nearly three oors and freezin wi the caal. He wiz thinkin tae himsel he should've teen his big walkin cloak fin he heard the first whimper. He thocht he'd been mistakken an that it hid been the sound o some nicht craitur. He heard the whimper again much closer and felt the hairs on the back o his neck birrs up like a cat. His een ,weel accustomed tae the dark by noo could mak oot much o his surroundins but nae a sign could he see o the bairn. The whimperin got mair pathetic and even closer. He said much the same as Donnty "I can hear ye bairn but I canna see ye!"

Slowly at the bottom o the signpost the bairn came slowly intae focus. Gow felt the fear grippin his intimmers and he near teen tae his heels. The bairn wiz sittin jist as Donnty hid said: cooried wi its airms aboot its knees and rockin back an forrit, a pure picter o abject misery.

Though Gow feelin really scared now managed tae control the urge tae rin awa. But as he seen how sair made the bairn wiz his hairt near broke. "Oh ye peer bairn. Fit ails ye Charlie?"

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At the soon o his name the bairn stoppit greetin and lookit up at Gow and in the saddest voice he'd ivver heard in his life say, "I didna dee't I didna!" Gow getting braver replied "I ken that Charlie. That's fit wye I'm here tae set ye free!"

The wee facie lookit sae sad as if he didna believe him and jist shook its heed an startit showdin back an forrit again. Gow then speired at Charlie if he kent faa hid killed his stepmither. The look o terror on his facie made Gow think he'd feared the bairn's spirit awa but it remained visible- jist the look o horror on his face.

Gow didna ask again but said one word "Latimar?" Charlie didnae respond but he didna need tae -his silence wiz mair than eneuch for Gow.

Charlie startit howlin in his distress and wi his airms aboot his knees began tae showd back an forrit again. Reverend Gow stoppit speirin onything aboot Latimar and speired at him instead if he wintit tae be free o this horrible place. But Charlie howled that he wiz tae bide here in purgatory until the Day o Judgement. Gow tellt the bairn that he could be set free for he wiz guilty o nae crime and that if he'd let him he'd set him free. The wee facie fair lichtit up at this so athoot fear now Reverend Gow gaed throwe the ceremony as dictated by Father O'Maley.

First he sprinkled the bairn wi the Holy Water sayin a prayer in Latin then he passed the relic o St Drostan three times deesil (clockwise) roon Charlie's heed again sayin prayers in Latin. Aa this wiz deen while sittin on the milkin stool. Father O'Maley hid been really insistent on this point sayin the milkin stool represented 'Earth's Bounty' and each o the three legs were The Father, The Son and the Holy Ghost and wid protect him and the bairn fae ony malevolent spirit fae entering this now Holy place.

Next he placed the crucifix on the very spot Charlie sat and he felt a slight resistance as his hand passed throwe the bairn tae lay the cross on the grun. Continuing saying the Latin prayers, Charlie slowly disappeared fae sicht, his wee facie fair beamin. The darkness wiz now total and Reverend Gow sat there shakkin wi the caal swyte rinnin fae him. A chill breeze sprung up and near teen him aff the seat. But Father O'Maley hid tellt him tae expect this as the angry demons fae purgatory wid be wantin anither soul tae replace Charlie's. He'd nae tae leave the seat ava until he feenished the ceremony. So wi a different Latin prayer he then scraped a wee hole and put in the three prayers rolled up and sealed wi reed wax then covered them. The breeze then stopped and darkness got back tae normal and he could see oot aboot eence mair.

Next day Reverend Gow and the aal gravedigger made their wye tae the three roads. They dug doon faar Charlie hid appeared and in nae time came across his remains. Carefully liftin them they teen them back tae the kirkyard and gave his remains a

Stories in the Doric from the Monastery of Fable

Christian beerial. Sadly there wisna a marker for Charlie's father, nae record for that could he find but he put the bones in a place that jist felt richt.