



to be baptized, and one after another came forward until there were eight of them. These were all baptized on the following Sunday in Loch Fada. McMillan was a fine young fellow, and afterwards went through College. He was placed as a missionary in Inveraray. But after only a few years' ministering to the people he died, on 10th April 1829, at the early age of twenty-seven. His illness was only of a few days' duration."

The college which John MacMillan attended was probably Rawdon College (formerly Horton), where Rev. Sinclair had been trained himself. The funding of his education must have presented problems, but things were to be no easier for his distant kinsman Donald, half a century later. John's father had been the butler to Sir John McNeill, a man of spectacular wealth and ability who might possibly have helped (in spite of his considerable antipathy to the Baptist Faith); whereas Donald's father, Alexander McMillan, was a humble rabbit catcher with a large family on his hands.

Possible identification of "Finlay of Colonsay"

Nonetheless, Donald's family, although quite modest, may have a considerable claim to fame. A probable relation, Finlay McMillan, may prove to be "Finlay of Colonsay, a deerstalker to Campbell of Islay", a man whose image is amongst the treasures of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. This was the work of Robert Adamson (1821 – 1848), a pioneer photographer whose studies included portraits of two Colonsay members of the Colonsay ruling family, Archibald McNeill (1803 – 1870) and Rt. Hon. Sir John McNeill G.C.B. (1795 – 1883). In all, three images of "Finlay of Colonsay" survive, all taken on 17th April 1846. This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that photography was in its infancy at the time, having been only invented in 1839 and introduced to Scotland barely four years later.

Colonsay is very fortunate that one of her inhabitants was selected as a subject at such an early date; the portrait was taken in a studio, probably at Rock House, Calton Hill, Edinburgh, and one might imagine that Finlay was recommended for the study because of his occupation. Clad in plaid and sporran and complete with trademark telescope, his weather-beaten features and powerful bearing make him a striking subject, but it was probably his stalker's ability to remain motionless for three or four minutes which led to his selection.

Family Background of Donald McMillan

Rev. Donald McMillan was descended from another Finlay McMillan, a "Wood Ranger", who had married "Peggy" Smith on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1808. Their eldest son was Alexander, born 18<sup>th</sup> July 1812 and baptised 30<sup>th</sup> January 1813, and the next recorded child was John, baptised 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1821. Finlay McMillan, the grandfather, died at "Black Park" (i.e. Loch End, Colonsay) on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1868, aged 80 yrs. He was therefore born c. 1788 and we know that his parents were Archibald MacMillan and Margaret Galbraith. Perhaps this was the same MacMillan family that has come to be associated in Colonsay with the events of 1745, when two McMillans were reputedly invited to help guide the forces of Prince Charles.

From the 1841 census we see that "Findlay McMillan" (50 yrs.) and his wife "Margret" (50 yrs.) were both living at Garvard and that their 25 yr. old son, Alexander McMillan, was still living in their household, together with a "Kirsty McMillan, 2 yrs." The census was taken in early June, and later that year, September 26th, this natural daughter was baptised as: "Hester, daughter of Alexander McMillan by Margaret Stewart"; she would therefore become a half-sister to the future Rev. Donald McMillan.

A few years later, May 31st 1845, Alexander McMillan married Mary "McDougald" and she gave him five additional children, Flora, Finlay, John and twins Archibald and Mirren. In the 1851 census, Alexander McMillan is listed as a "gamekeeper" and living in Garvard, but his wife is not recorded as

present. In fact, Mary is a shadowy figure, as was Hester's mother, Margaret Stewart – they are hard to identify in the available records. Alexander and Mary's children, however, are clearly listed as Flora (6 yrs.), Findlay (4 yrs.), and John (18 months). Janet Galbreath, 30 yrs, was a visitor to the house, presumably helping with the children. Alexander's wife Mary was certainly still alive, because twins were born a few months later. Possibly she was staying with her parents in the pre-maternity period? The baptismal entry for the twins appears as follows: "Born Octr. 20th to Alexr. McMillan and Mary McDougal his spouse residing in Garvard, their two infants Archibald and Marion, and Baptised 8th Decr. '51".

The 1851 census also shows us that Alexander's parents, Finlay and Margaret McMillan, had now moved from Garvard to Lochend and were evidently raising his first child for him there – she appears as "Chirsty", their 11 yr. old grand-daughter, but confusingly their own ages are now given as 48 yrs. and 50 yrs. respectively. ("Lochend" is shown on old maps, but no trace of it survives).

These were difficult times in Colonsay – smallpox in the 1820s had been followed by years of grinding poverty and near-famine, then the potato blight had been followed by an outbreak of cholera; tuberculosis had become a scourge, and the records seem to suggest that death, like emigration, was centred upon the most vigorous age group, persons in their late teens to mid-thirties. Alexander seems to have been widowed at about this time, although it is unclear as to whether Mary was lost through disease, or in childbirth. She was evidently still a young woman when she died, either in or soon after October 1851.

#### Childhood of Donald McMillan

By the time of the next census, young Donald McMillan himself is included in the entries, son to Alexander by a second wife, Christine. The new bride had undertaken the charge of at least four surviving children from the first marriage (identified in 1861 as Finlay, John, Archibald and Mirren), and a further nine siblings were to be born to the new family – of whom the first were Alexander (1856), Donald himself (1858) and Peggy (1861). So it was a large household and perhaps initially reasonably prosperous, to judge from Alexander's ability to attract a second wife. Nonetheless, as the family grew and the breadwinner aged, there will have been little enough to spare and young Donald was to be unable to enjoy much of an education.

In the days of "The Old Laird" some children had gone on to great achievements - John MacMillan has already been mentioned, another example would be Professor Donald Mackinnon (1839 – 1914), a crofter's son who prospered to become first Chair of Celtic Studies at Edinburgh University. A closer contemporary of Donald McMillan was Doctor Roger McNeill (1853 – 1924), an authority upon epidemiology and one of the first to realise that tuberculosis was not in fact an hereditary condition. Rather later would come Murdoch McNeill (1873 – 1959), a noted botanist and Gaelic scholar. All these people rose to prominence in their chosen fields from the humblest of beginnings; despite all the odds, Donald McMillan was to do the same.

At the census of 1871, the family was still in the cottage at Garvard. Alexander (57) is still listed as a rabbit catcher, living with his wife "Christina" (34). By then they had six unmarried children staying in the house: Mary (17), Alexander (14), Donald (12), Catherine (7), Peter (5) and Elizabeth (3). His obituary states that only a little later, at the age of 13 yrs., young Donald McMillan left Colonsay and went "to a neighbouring island to begin an apprenticeship as a gamekeeper", presumably referring to a period spent in Oronsay.

The family appears again in the census of 1881, although by now young Donald is long-gone from the nest. Alexander (68) is now a "labourer", with his wife Christina (45) and their children Peter (15), Maggie (9), Ann (7), and Roger (4); the house, ("Tigh Mhairi Ruaidh"?) still stands and was re-

roofed in recent years to provide a possible nest-site for choughs; it had just two rooms with windows. Alexander died soon afterward that census and by 1891 the family has disappeared.

#### Donald's conversion and faith

By his own account, Donald was 16 yrs of age when "I was brought to know the Saviour. Some months after my conversion I was baptised and admitted into the fellowship of the Baptist Church in my native isle, Colonsay." This would have been in 1875, and that date is supported by a statement that he made in 1884: "At the age of sixteen I was led to think of my need of a Saviour through a Christian friend speaking faithfully to me. On the day \_\_\_\_\_ ken to I found peace through believing on Jesus. I have been a church-member for nine years. Although having fellowship with Adelaide Place Baptist Church, while attending the Glasgow University, I have always retained my membership in the Church at home in Colonsay."

After his conversion, young Donald still remained in Colonsay: "for fully two years I was at home, fishing in summer and doing farm-work in winter. By this time I had a desire of devoting myself to the work of the ministry but my father was only a game \_\_\_\_\_ per with a large family and I could not think of it, or rather, I could only think of it."

Thus it was not until 1877 that Donald left Colonsay, and in that summer he was engaged as an under-gamekeeper at Oban, where he attended the "Independent Chapel", there being no Baptist one. The minister in Oban took an interest in him and, over a meal, learned of Donald's ambition. He knew of an Independent minister who was prepared to train young men in preparation for Higher Education, Dr. Flett of Paisley. "So, on 7th July 1877, I was accepted as a student of what was then called "The Highland College". It was very Highland I must say, there were nine of us and we were all very "green"".

In the summer of 1879, after two years at the college, Donald was accepted as a student of Glasgow University and commenced the five-year course which he completed in 1884. In 1882, he was enrolled as a student of the Baptist Union. Throughout this period, Donald experienced a secret but growing desire to devote himself to work of the Foreign Mission; eventually he sought guidance from a mentor for whom he had an especial respect, Dr. Culross of Bristol, and noted his somewhat equivocal response: "I would cherish the desire and seek the Lord's guidance. He will make your way plain."

By the summer of 1881, with two years of university training, Donald was able to be employed in the service of the Home Missionary Baptist Society and he entered enthusiastically into the work; indeed, for the first few seasons, he acted as a missionary at home in Colonsay. By 1884 he was able to record some growing success elsewhere: "My labours have been much blessed last summer and more especially this summer. During the four months I have been with the Church here [Branderburgh, Lossiemouth] I have had the joy of seeing not a few led to put their trust in the Saviour and twenty-six added to the Church".

#### Donald applies to the Overseas Missions

It was whilst he was still fulfilling his six months placement at Lossiemouth that Donald acted upon his growing desire to commit totally to his vocation. On 6th August 1884 he wrote from Ivy Cottage, Stotfield, Lossiemouth N. B. ["North Britain"] to A. H. Baynes of the Baptist Missionary Society, London. "I have perused with much interest the pages of the Missionary Herald for the last two months. In this number, the question is asked "Who will go?", followed by an appeal. Conscious of my own weakness and inability for a work so noble and important, still, I am compelled to answer "I will go. Here am I, send me". "Go and preach" is the command of Jesus my Master, and go I must".

(This communication is, of course, clearly inspired by Isaiah 6:8 "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." Also by Mark 16:15 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.")

Although India figured largely in the appeal, Donald made it clear that he would go wherever he might be sent, save that he was anxious to be able to "preach Christ "at once"" – in other words, to be sent where English could be understood. All the same, he was not afraid to learn: "All the knowledge I have of English is acquired. I have a liking for Greek. Gaelic is my mother tongue". The actual destination was to be left in the hands of the Committee: "All I have to say is "Here am I, Lord; send me where Thou wilt". I do not wish to have anything whatever to do with the matter." His natural diffidence was further exemplified in the naïf response to a questionnaire: "I thought to answer some of these questions in my former note but I always feel that the less I say about myself the better." In all fairness, he did feel obliged to mention that although in generally good health "I had a break down during one session. I may say however, that I consulted a doctor privately and he told me that I could go to any part of India perfectly well..." Later that month he repeated that "I also consulted a medical friend who told me that my constitution would suit a tropical climate."

Events moved rapidly and by 6th September he had been interviewed and soon afterwards had informed his congregation and referees of his decision. He was somewhat unsettled by their reaction – evidently there were some who felt that he had work to which he was perhaps better-suited here in Scotland, others who wondered if he had fully considered his decision. He had another, and much graver, cause for concern, as will shortly be seen. By 14th September he was writing urgently to A H Baynes for help in this turmoil: "I should like to get a "definite word" from you by return." He was evidently struggling with severe doubts, palpable in his over-stated protestations: "As I said before, I am entirely in the hands of my Lord and Master; if He wants me to go, then my own prayer is that nothing whatever may keep me, while on the other hand if He would not have me go, then may He Himself put some stumbling block in the way to keep me back." He also agonises about parting from his congregation, and "that I have to part with a widowed mother with three little ones. But the Lord who knows all this says "If a man love father or mother more than me, he is not worthy of me." [Matthew 10:37]

#### Doubts about his health

By now, the referees had been consulted. One of his lecturers, I McLellan, held him in high esteem and noted the "evangelical character of his views of divine truth." He had heard him preach: "his sermon was well put together, simple in style and earnest. He spoke with apparent ease, and with no small power." But the writer voiced reservations about Donald's physique: "He does not appear to me to be sufficiently robust for the tear and wear of missionary work, especially in Africa."

Another person, John Urquhart, knew Donald especially well and had formed "a very high estimate of his Christian character and zeal... 'Tho' not a brilliant student he has been painstaking and has done his work well. He is intelligent and conscientious and would find no insuperable difficulty in acquiring the language." On the other hand, John Urquhart mentions that "Mr McM. does not look strong and, as a matter of fact, is not strong", having had to suspend his studies for a time in consequence of overwork.

George W. Emslie. Secretary of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, was next to write, on 7th September 1884. He referred to Donald McMillan's seasonal postings to his native isle, Colonsay: "[From] reports which he from time to time forwarded and the results which, under the Holy Spirit, appeared to follow his labours there, the Committee came to entertain a very high opinion of his ability to undertake the duties of a missionary of the Cross." Mr. Emslie wrote at some length and spoke very highly of the candidate, but did feel obliged to add a note of caution. "Mr

McMillan had a serious illness during last winter brought on by overwork which necessitated his residence at McQuarriers Homes at Glenoan(?) for a short time in the early spring." Mr. Emslie urged that "your medical men should satisfy themselves that he possesses the necessary physique to enable him to face the climate of the "Congo"".

It was, perhaps, remarkable that all three referees had felt obliged to query Donald's physical capacity for the work. What was even more remarkable was that George Emslie wrote again almost immediately (9th September), to enclose a letter which had just come into his hands. The letter was from Donald McMillan's physician, Dr. Dun, who had attended him in his illness the previous year; it seems that Donald had contacted Dr. Dun to intimate his intentions and to seek reassurance as to his suitability. Dr. Dun had evidently replied in no uncertain terms, and had taken it upon himself to write under separate cover to the Baptist Home Missionary Society to avoid any misunderstanding. His letter, dated 8th September, was brief and to the point: "With reference to Mr. Donald McMillan, I think he is not at all physically suited for missionary work on the Congo, and I feel sure he is making a mistake in ever thinking of taking such a step as he proposes. I am, yours very truly Wm. G. Dun M.D."

On September 23 James Culross, Donald's original confidant and advisor, wrote from Bristol. His letter, although belated, was supportive: "Having known him for some years I look upon him with sincere respect for his character, piety and general deportment. Throughout my intercourse with him I found him unassuming and sensible. He had early advantages, which probably he has not fully overcome, but while under my observation he was uncommonly diligent and anxious to learn ... I think his conscientiousness may be trusted, whatever he undertakes." But, once again, there is a note of caution: "Whether he is constitutionally fit for work on the Congo I should not like to give an opinion - Dr. Roberts will decide that question."

Thus it was that, barely 8 weeks after he had penned his application, Donald McLennan presented himself at the premises of Dr. Roberts of 53, Harley Street, on October 1st 1884. The report was brief: "I have examined Mr. Donald McMillan this morning - his health is quite satisfactory and I consider him fit for work on the Congo." Under the circumstances, this seems to be a surprising assessment.

### The journey to Africa

Everything was now in place and Donald began to make his arrangements. He was invited to a surprise "Farewell Meeting" in Glasgow; he was a little disappointed that he was unable to invite Mr. Baynes to be present, but was evidently greatly heartened by the support and encouragement that he received. On 23rd October he was informed that he would be sailing from Liverpool on board the S.S. "Corisco" (Govan built, 1876), and that at least one Livingston Missionary would be on the ship. He is asked to claim his expenses, but it is clear from his reply that he is somewhat lacking in confidence in this and practical matters - he is unsure where he will find lodging in Liverpool or how much it will cost to transport his boxes etc.

On the 1st November 1884, Donald wrote again to A.H. Baynes, thanking him for money received and for various communications. "I shall pay scrupulous attention to all the instructions given. Only three days more now, and I shall be on my way to the Congo. Let me thank you most heartily for all the kindness you have shown me since I first wrote you. The Lord Himself reward you for your kindness. I trust if the Lord spare me to work on the Congo I may be an honour to the Society which sends me and above all an honour to the cause of Jesus Christ my Master, whose I am and whom I serve."

Unfortunately, it was not to be. On 4th November he sailed for Africa on board the West African

Mail steamer, having said in his parting address: "If I be spared, and come back, then all is well; if not, then all is well." On the voyage, it was noted that Donald "spoke faithfully to each one of the crew about the way of Eternal Life." He kept a diary, recording his hopes and worries; after his arrival at "Masuto" (Matadi) he made his way the short distance "upstream" to Underhill Baptist station, named in honour of E.M. Underhill, a noted academic and former Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society. (E.M. Underhill is perhaps most famous for his edition of a seminal work by Roger Williams: *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, originally published at London, 1644). On New Year's Day 1885, Donald wrote: "How is this year to be spent? In useful service in the vineyard of my Lord, or called home to see Him as He is and behold His glory and majesty for ever? Lord, Thou knowest best..."

Donald McMillan arrived at a critical period. He must have joined the team of John H. Weeks (1860 – 1924), who had arrived there in 1881 and had founded the mission station at Underhill. Weeks was to have a long and distinguished career, and is widely known for his opposition to the outrages committed in the name of King Leopold II of the Belgians, who was ruthlessly engaged in carving out an empire in the region. We are told that: "Weeks' name is also associated with the earliest production, in the Congo Free State, of travelogues, amateur ethnographies and sensational accounts of exotic Africa. Weeks was a prolific writer, his oeuvre including the voluminous *Among Congo Cannibals* (London, 1913), *Among The Primitive Bakongo* (London, 1914), *Congo Life and Jungle Stories* (London, s.d.), and many contributions to the BMS journal *The Missionary Herald*." It was in fact Weeks who had first codified the local language and committed it to writing.

The area was, of course, immensely remote but it was of great strategic importance. As a consequence, a regular postal service was introduced in the very year of Donald's arrival, and although it was not until 1898 that the telegraph arrived it is noteworthy that its route lay close at hand: "The line has to make two very important crossings of water, one across the Congo a little above Underhill Point (Hell's Kettle), the other across the Kassai near its mouth. At the crossing of the river at Underhill the wires are supported by trellised steel towers, the piers of which are distant 800 metres from each other; and they are placed 73 and 63 metres respectively above the bed of the river at the highest flood." Today, as then, the significance of the area is due to the important port of Matusi, the highest navigable part of the river for ocean-going ships.

#### Donald's tragic death

Donald threw himself into the work of the mission, studying the language (Boloki), teaching in the school and spreading the Christian message. But within weeks he fell a victim to fever, and thereafter was dead within a very few days. Later that month, another missionary died of the same cause and we have a harrowing account of the circumstances: "He took to his bed on Tuesday... and on Friday morning he was too weak to stand the bilious fever. His temperature was almost down to normal in the morning, but it at once commenced to rise ... when it reached 106 degrees he became delirious.... He soon became comatose; I poured in quinine, brandy, beef-tea etc. per enema; applied blisters etc., wrapped him in a wet sheet and plenty of blankets, but all to no purpose. Just after one I took his temperature, and it was 110 degrees, and I knew then his recovery was beyond hope... his heart beat very irregularly, and at two o'clock ceased to beat altogether." In just such a way, on 9th March 1885, Rev. Donald McMillan of Colonsay met his end at Underhill Station beside the mighty waters of the River Congo. Seven short months had elapsed since he had answered the call – "Who will go?"

The Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society to March 31<sup>st</sup> 1885 was published before news of the death could be recorded, and it was very positive: "Doubtless King Leopold's greatest joy is this, that not only is he benefitting millions of his fellow creatures, but that he is the chosen instrument in God's hand of accomplishing this end.... At Underhill, Mr. Hughes has just been joined

by our new brother, Mr. McMillan. The beautiful wooden house sent out from England is complete and the station is in good working order." In the accompanying accounts one can see that Colonsay Baptists had raised £1.0.0 for work in China, and had also forwarded a donation in the amazing sum of £76.9s.5d for Naples Distress (i.e. cholera epidemic).

It fell to a fellow student, M. Duncan, to pen the biographical notice which was to appear a few months later, in the June 1885 edition of "The Missionary Herald" under the heading "Further Loss on the Congo." In his opening remarks, the author states plainly that his subject was "Naturally meek, quiet, and affectionate, he was thoroughly ingenuous and free from that sophistry which veils character." After an admirable and considered tribute to his late colleague, he urges: "Let the heroic example of McMillan and other young Congo martyrs stimulate us to like noble service.... The millions that people the Congo Basin must not be left in hopeless night, to pass, benighted and sorrow-stricken, in a never-ending procession from their cradle to their grave."

#### Footnotes:

Finlay McMillan was baptised on April 4 1824, to parents Donald McMillan and Mary Buie, who had married on February 9 1806. Donald McMillan and his wife Mary (aged "60" and "55") appear in Kilchattan in the 1841 census, together with Malcolm (35), Alexander (20), Findlay (15), Angus (12), Ann (25) and Francy (5 months) – Malcolm, Ann and Francy may be a new family unit. By 1851, only the widowed Donald McMillan (70) and one son, Angus (22) remain on the croft. One might imagine that young Finlay had moved away, in pursuit of his career as "stalker to Campbell of Islay".

MacMillans and the '45: Ian McMillan is said to have acted as a pilot for the Young Pretender, married a French woman and settled in Dunkirk, but his brother Hector reneged on the assignment. Hector is said to have hung onto an advance with which he had been entrusted, and to have enjoyed a prosperous life in Colonsay.

S.S. "Corisco" was wrecked the following year, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1885, on the coast of Liberia. All on board were saved, including the notably anti-Christian King Oko Jumbo, who was returning from Liverpool to Bonny (now part of Nigeria).

Donald's Grave: Is there a Colonsay grave on the banks of the Congo to mark the sacrifice of this remarkable man? The site of the old Baptist station is at Pointe Underhill, less than 4km from the important port of Matadi and the author has made numerous attempts to obtain information. Unfortunately the location is close to a strategic bridge and power-line and to date there has been no response from religious, diplomatic or local sources.

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