AN ABERDEENSHIRE AUTHOR.

BY ROBERT ANDERSON.

1. "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk." Douglas.
2. "Sketches of Life among my Ain Folk." Douglas.
3. "Notes and Sketches illustrative of Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century." Douglas.
4. "Isaac Ronald the Dominie" *(Life and Work*, 1882).
5. "The Peasantry of North-Eastern Scotland" (*U.P. Magazine*, 1884).
6. "The Making of Aberdeenshire" (Transactions of Aberdeen Philosophical Society, 1884-92).
7. "Aberdeenshire Character and Characteristics" (*Onward and Upward*), 1891.

THE recent death of William Alexander, LL.D., Aberdeen, has removed from the ranks of Scottish literature a leading exponent—precursor, mayhap, would be the more proper term—of the modern school of delineators of provincial life and incident, the writer whose works abound more in character sketches and illustrations of dialect than in the evolution of a plot, or even the telling of a consecutive story. Twenty years before Mr. Barrie gave us his "Auld Licht Idylls," or Mr. Crockett "The Stickit Minister," or Fergus Mackenzie his "Cruisie Sketches," Mr. Alexander had published "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk," and "Life Among my Ain Folk." Mr. Barrie has immortalised Kirriemuir and the stern old Seceders who once dwelt in the Forfarshire village; but long before his day Mr. Alexander had, in similar fashion and with equal success, depicted life in a rural Aberdeenshire parish, and sketched the Disruption struggle—not as it presented itself on the high and historic plane of the Church Courts and Law Courts, but as it affected ordinary people, who were neither ecclesiastics, nor lawyers, nor politicians, but who, nevertheless, were interested in and influenced by the issues of the controversy. This he did, too, in the simplest possible manner. There is no pretence or affectation about his work, no straining after effect, no exaggerated conception either of character or incident, no excursions into the field of the new and highly artificial humour. Humour there is in his books—plenty of it; but it is the legitimate offspring of his characters, the natural concomitant of the dialect they employ. The environment is never lost sight of; the homely characters harmonise with their homely surroundings—they do not startle us by the expression of brilliant ideas, or the use of epigrammatic language utterly alien to their rank in life. They are rigorously confined within the sphere they occupy; and, as a consequence, their portrayal is remarkable for its perfect fidelity. The felicity of Mr. Alexander's sketches of rural life and character is equally conspicuous, and may be attributed, in large measure, to the author mainly contenting himself with the part of narrator. Mr. Alexander's works are not characterised by any marked or distinctive literary style. This, in truth, he did not possess; nor, to his credit, did he affect it. He was perfectly satisfied to tell his story briefly and concisely, in the simplest and most straightforward terms possible; for everything beyond, to let his characters speak for themselves, and that chiefly in their own dialect and idiom. Hence the great success of his works. They are natural pictures of ordinary rural life, of scenes, incidents, and types familiar, more or less, to all Aberdeenshire people; not idealistic or idyllic conceptions of rural character, the fanciful work of brilliant imagination, but remote from, and difficult to associate with the actualities of the everyday-life in which the characters are supposed to move and have their being.

The selection by Mr. Alexander of Aberdeenshire character as the groundwork on which to base his stories resulted, in all probability, from his familiarity with it, and the thorough knowledge he possessed of all its varying phases. Born in the rural parish in the county to which he afterwards (in "Johnny Gibb") gave the name of Pyketillim, the son of a blacksmith who eventually acquired a small farm, his earlier associations were necessarily with the humbler peasant class. He shared their rude and hardy life; their still ruder and hardier toil. He received no more education in his school-boy days than the indifferent village schooling which was then the common lot; and, like his fellows, he was speedily drafted from the school to ordinary farm labour, being apprenticed to it, as most youngsters then were, as a "herd loon." An accident he met with when he had just passed his teens, which led to the amputation of a leg, summarily closed his prospective alliance for life with what has been termed the staple industry of Aberdeenshire—agriculture. The enforced idleness was devoted to study; the study led to essay-writing and the like; and the youthful essayist drifted into journalism in the county town, became identified with the leading paper in Aberdeen, the *Free Press*, and died recently, after an honourable and distinguished professional career, amid unwonted expressions of public respect and regret. Fortunately, Mr. Alexander's removal from his native parish did not occur before he had become familiar with rural life in all its aspects and with rural character in all its forms. To close and accurate observation, he must haved added penetrative insight—the swift, ready perception of the skilled artist; and to these faculties we may attribute the perfect pictures of men and manners, that he, in after years, drew for the delectation of thousands of readers.

The material for such pen-pictures was abundant. The people of Aberdeenshire have always been people of distinctive character. This they owe, in some degree, to their origin—to their descent from the Northmen, particularly the Norwegians; but probably their circumstances have contributed a more potent element in the shaping and development of their character. Hemmed in by the Grampians on the south, and washed by the sea on the east and north, Aberdeenshire is, in a sense, a separate, if not quite isolated district of Scotland—practically isolated it must have been in the early years of the century, at all events, when railways were not, when the roads were bad, and when inter-communication was not only difficult but infrequent. Isolation develops individuality; character is formed in the struggle with nature. Nature has not been over-kind to Aberdeenshire. John Hill Burton has described one large portion of the county as "A flat cake of granite, which nature has clothed inland with heather and seaward with sand"; and in an agricultural survey, published in the end of last century, another large district is described as "One of the most rugged and naturally barren regions that is to be met with in any of the low parts of Scotland," the writer adding—"By the industry of the inhabitants, a considerable part of these inhospitable wastes has been converted into fertile fields, at an expense that is perhaps unequalled in any other part of Europe." The larger part of the county that is now arable has, indeed, been reclaimed from heather and whins, moss and bog, and waste and stony land, by indomitable perseverance and well-nigh unceasing toil. Much of the soil thus reclaimed has not proved excessively productive—it remains thin and poor; and the Aberdeenshire farmer has, in addition, to reckon with a variable and often severe climate, and to make his account with many a bleak, ungenial season. All these circumstances have naturally contributed to the formation of a distinctive type of character. Mr. Alexander, in his papers on "Aberdeenshire Character," has enumerated the following as among the leading characteristics of the Aberdeenshire man:—Endurance, tenacity of purpose, caution ("apt at times to degenerate into a sort of dogged 'thwartness'"), moral reliability, enterprise and determination, physical stamina, intelligence, and resource. The Aberdeenshire character, moreover, has found expression in a special dialect, abounding in proverbs and a proverbial phraseology all its own. Ruskin is cited by Mr. Alexander as describing this dialect as the "sweetest, richest, subtlest, most musical of all the living dialects of Europe." That is, perhaps, not an opinion that everybody will endorse, and even Aberdeenshire men may shrink from making such a high claim for their native tongue. Few men, however, were better entitled than Mr. Alexander to express an opinion on the subject; and this is what he says:—

"While there are different forms of Scottish dialect, the claim put in for the Aberdeenshire form is that it is the absolutely best and most expressive, not excepting even the Ayrshire form which Burns used. This, I think, nobody who really knows it, and is capable of judging, will seek to deny. As purely spoken, say by a nearly extinct generation of educated gentlemen and gentlewomen of the old school, it had a graphic force and an expressiveness alike on the side of humour and pathos, and of kindly sentiment, peculiar to itself."[1]

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[1] "Aberdeenshire Character and Characteristics."

This general sketch of Aberdeenshire and the Aberdeenshire character has been rendered necessary as a prelude to the consideration of Mr. Alexander's works, the appreciation of which must depend largely, though not wholly, on a knowledge of the materials of which they are compounded—on some general acquaintance with the matters with which they deal. The work at the head of this notice, "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk," was the one first published; and on it Mr. Alexander's reputation largely rests. It appeared originally in 1871, and has since gone through ten editions, numbering in their totals as many thousand copies. The intention of the writer was declared in a preface to be:—

"To portray, as faithfully as he could, some forms of character not uncommon in the rural life of Aberdeenshire a quarter of a century ago, at least; the effort being to make the purely ideal persons introduced literally 'true to nature' as it had manifested itself under his own eyes, or within his own experience, in their habits of thought and modes of speech. Illustrations of real life, mainly of an old-fashioned sort, and of a local dialect, which is getting gradually pushed into the background, or divested of some of its more characteristic forms of expression, have been attempted, rather than anything in the nature of a formally constructed story."[1] The principal character is Johnny Gibb himself—"an inconsiderable person, speaking and acting as the impulse moved him, in accordance with what he believed at the time to be right"; one who "followed his own path of duty, quite irrespective of the state of opinion round about him." He is counterbalanced, as a type, by Peter Birse, the farmer of Clinkstyle, "sair hadden doon" by his wife—an excellent specimen of the hen-pecked husbands who, in the sarcastic remark of another character, cannot "ca' the niz o' their face their nain withoot speerin' leave." Peter's better half, Mrs. Birse, is one of the most vivid personalities in the book—a thorough representative of a class of farmer's wife by no means extinct yet in Aberdeenshire and elsewhere. She was "a managing woman, a very managing woman"; thrifty, but mean in her thrift; driving hard bargains and haggling over quantities and prices; in bad odour with the farm-servants for the scrimp and unsatisfactory nature of the diet supplied—one of the most delightful sketches in the book, by the way, is that of a dispute between her and the farm hands on this common subject of quarrel, she asking the objection to "gweed sweet neeps to yer supper," and the men clamouring for "a cheenge files." She is skilfully depicted as a masterful, artful, scheming, intriguing woman, by no means scrupulous in her methods; "there's mair wyes o' tellin' the trowth nor ane, man," she says to her husband on one occasion, "ye're seerly aul' aneuch to ken that ere noo." She apes gentility, too—gives herself airs and selects her company; and she has ambitious designs for her children, particularly in the matrimonial line—designs that are sadly frustrated. Much more even than her husband a foil to the stern downrightness of character of Johnny Gibb, she divides with him the honour of being the principal character in the work; and it is not improbable that many readers, not given to the study of the subtleties of character, find her and her doings of far more interest than the life and demeanour of the nominal, and, after all, the real leading character. Besides those enumerated, there is a group of minor characters, such as is to be ordinarily met with in any country parish—Rev. Gregory Sleekabout, the parish minister, representative, more or less, of "the caul' morality o' a deid moderatism"; Jonathan Tawse, the schoolmaster; Mains of Yawal, the largest farmer of the district; Andrew Langchafts, the merchant; Dawvid Hadden, the ground officer—"a win'y leein' bodie"; Hairry Muggart, the wright; and several others, including Meg Raffan, the henwife—the champion gossip of the place. Not only are these various characters true to life—they were, despite the modest disclaimer in the preface, drawn from life. The names are fictitious, but the persons portrayed were real individuals belonging in the main to the parish of Pyketillim—in other words, the parish of Chapel of Garioch, at the foot of Benachie, in the centre of Aberdeenshire.

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[1] The terms of this preface, it may be noted, were slightly altered in the *edition de luxe* (with illustrations by Sir George Reid, P.R.S.A.) published in 1880. The amended version contained this sentence:—"Believing the common life of the region in which the scene of the story is laid to have sufficient strength and individuality about it to be worth somewhat careful study and limning, his chief endeavour was to make the characters sketched at once typical and true to nature; not ideals, by any means, but rather roughly realistic figures."

"Johnny Gibb" divides itself into two parts, distinct but not separate, linked together yet practically detachable. One part is a narrative of the Disruption struggle in the parish just named, with glimpses of the "conflict" in Aberdeenshire generally; the other is a sketch of the life and habits of the people in the parish about the '43 period. The book might thus be regarded as appealing to two different sets of readers; and in fact it has been described both as "a Disruption idyll" and as "a Scotch classic." It may be doubted, however, whether the popular appreciation of the volume has turned much or at all upon the fact that it chronicles a phase of the Non-Intrusion movement. Some there may be who cherish it on this ground, and one modern historian, Mr. Spencer Walpole, has quoted from it approvingly, subjoining a footnote—"Mr. Alexander's story, illustrating as it does the feelings of a Scottish parish, is less well known south of the Tweed than it deserves to be."[1] In this particular respect—that of illustrating the feelings of a Scotch parish at the time of the Disruption—the work, if not altogether unique, has never been approached. Mr. Alexander was himself an eye-witness—not improbably a participator to some extent—in the local "movement" he here describes, and he attached himself to the Free Church, becoming a very ardent supporter of that denomination. He witnessed or heard of the events he narrates when he was at an impressionable age, and he accordingly describes them intelligently and sympathetically. There is a great deal that is interesting, much that is even amusing, not a little that is pathetic, in the narrative. Petty persecution for conscience sake, the struggle of a handful of "fanatics" against the "powers" of the parish, the trouble in getting a site for a church, the sacrifices made in finding the necessary funds, the "lapsing" of former sympathisers, prayer meetings, public meetings, opposition to settlements—all these and much more are detailed, and detailed so skilfully that one's sympathies, be his preconceived notions or his leanings what they may, go out irresistibly to the pioneers of the new movement, and unreservedly to Johnny Gibb, the leader—a nineteenth century Puritan of the finest and best type.

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[1] "History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815." Vol. iv., p. 466.

(To be concluded).

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II.

THE Disruption story, however, after all, does not bulk so largely or so vividly in "Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk" as the general description of rustic life. Here the author is at his best. The naturalness of his characters, the verisimilitude of the life he depicts, evoke admiration. He has reproduced the scenes of daily life, the sayings and doings of his actors, with photographic accuracy; and the charm of the picture is heightened by its setting, for the story is told almost wholly in the dialect, which gives to the characters and the scenes alike a pawkiness and humour, a vivaciousness and force, that would be well-nigh, if not totally lost, were the story told in English. The book may be regarded as a complete repertory of Aberdeenshire rural life in the times with which it deals. If the whole economy of farming is not presented, all its leading features are recounted, from the hiring of farm-servants at feeing markets up to the competition for farms or additions to farms, and the sampling of the then new manure, "that ga-ano stuff 't they speak aboot"—which last furnishes one of the most amusing incidents in the book. Then there are details of rustic courtship, of the "shifting" propensities of the farm-servant, of the difficulties in the way of his marrying and getting a house to live in, and an admirable account of a rustic wedding. "Cracks" at the "smiddy," bargaining at "the merchan's chop," the talk of farm-servants, the gossip of the parlour, descriptions of school and school life, sketches of "the laird" and his factotums—these and other illustrations of rural life are set before the reader in a manner most attractive and charming. The individuality of the various characters is never lost; and much of the talk—even of the humblest of the personages introduced to our notice—is marked by shrewdness, common-sense, and a wealth of observation and profundity of utterance by no means uncommon in people whose lives are concentrated in their own district and the work that falls immediately to their hand, and who, moreover, spend most of their lives in the open air, and are accustomed to note the weather, the seasons, and the general operations of nature. Specimens might be culled almost on every page, but one of the best is where Johnny Gibb talks to his wife on his termination of the occupation of Gushetneuk:—

> "Here's oorsells noo 't's toil't awa' upo' this place fae youth-heid to aul' age, an' wi' the lawbour o' oor nain han's made it's ye may say—Gushetneuk the day's nae mair fat Gushetneuk was fan we cam' here nor my fit 's a han'-saw. Sir Seemon ca's 'imsell laird o't; but Sir Seemon's deen nae mair to the place nor the man o' France. Noo you an' me can gae roon' an' roon' aboot it, an' wi' a' honesty say o' this an' that—'Here's the fruit o' oor lawbour—that'll bide upo' the face o' the earth for the eese o' ithers aifter we're deid an' gane.' Noo this is fat I canna win at the boddom o' ava. I'm weel seer it was never the arreengement o' Providence that the man that tills the grun' an' spen's the strength o's days upon't sud be at the merciment o' a man that never laid a han' till't, nor hardly wair't a shillin' upon't, to bid 'im bide or gang."

. . . .

> "An' though Sir Seemon may ca' the rigs o' Gushetneuk his, I'm maistly seer gin the rigs themsells cud speak they wud ca' me maister raither nor him. But it mak's na' muckle back or fore. They'll be mine to the sicht o' my een maybe as lang's I'm able to see the sproutin' blade or the yalla corn sheaf; and Sir Seemon's lairdship canna gie 'im mair."

The foregoing quotation is a fair sample of the dialect of

Aberdeenshire that abounds in the book, but an even better specimen is to be found in the opening sentences, which are now familiar to all Aberdeenshire men of any education, and can be repeated by many of them:—

"Heely, heely, Tam, ye glaiket stirk—ye hinna on the hin' shelvin' o' the cairt. Fat hae ye been haiverin' at, min? That cauff saick 'll be tint owre the back door afore we win a mile fae hame. See't yer belly-ban' be ticht aneuch noo. Woo, lassie! Man, ye been makin' a hantle mair adee about blaikin that graith o' yours, an' kaimin' the mear's tail, nor balancin' yer cairt, an' gettin' the things packit in till't."

"Sang, that's nae vera easy deen, I can tell ye, wi' sic a mengyie o' them. Faur'll aw pit the puckle girss to the mear?"

"Ou, fat's the ecse o' that lang stoups ahin', aw wud like to ken? Lay that bit bauk across; an' syne tak' the aul' pleuch ryn there, an' wup it ticht atween the stays; we canna hae the beast's maet trachel't amo' their feet. Foo muckle corn pat ye in?"

"Four lippies—gweed missour—will that dee?"

"We'se lat it be deein'. Is their trock a' in noo, I won'er?"

"Nyod, seerly it is."

Without committing one's-self to any extravagant praise of the Aberdeenshire dialect, it may be conceded that it lends itself to felicity of characterisation in a way that makes ordinary English—or even the English equivalents—poor in comparison; and in substantiation of this a few samples may be cited from "Johnny Gibb" (some of them probably difficult of easy translation by Aberdeenshire men of to-day):—"An orpiet, peeakin, little sinner"; "A settril, braid-fac't chappie"; a "preen-heidit ablach," a "peer, win'y smatchet"; a "nabal vratch"; "A queer-leukin' hurb"; "A sauchen, saurless breet"; a "puchill, upsettin' smatchet"; "An inhaudin', unedicat taupie chiel in a kwintra chop"; "That fair-tongue't howffin"; "Yon bit pernicketty wally-draggle"; "Ony wil' ranegill or ca'd aboot neer-do-weel"; "It's a likeable spot, an' richt weel-in-hert kin'ly grun'ie." The dialect also, when embodying proverbial remarks and aphorisms, gives to these an additional force, as for example:—"Fan fowk comes hame wi' a face like a Halloweven fire, there's rizzons for't"; "Them that sets to coortin' the lasses maun temper their nose to the east win' as weel's the south"; "She was nae mair like fat she hed been afore nor caul' sowens is like het aleberry." Most readers would have to turn to the glossary for the interpretation of "maroonjous face," of "a set o' cairds rinkin' aboot the pumphel," and of "as snell a nizzin as they've gotten yet"; while a quite obsolete form of illumination is indicated in the exclamation—"The vera nethmost shall of the lamp's dry." There is remarkably little description of natural scenery in the book, but there is one exquisite picture of a wintry day, given, too, in very few words:—"Awat it was a snell mornin'; Benachie as fite's a washen fleece, an' oorlich shoo'ers o' drift an' hail scoorin' across the kwintra." These specimens of an expressive dialect may be concluded by the quotation of one other, chosen because it also forcibly illustrates the familiarity of the old-fashioned domestic servant, who was cook and tablemaid in one:—

"The dinner was a capital dinner, for Baubie's capabilities as a cook were unimpeachable, and she served no less efficiently than she cooked. Her master spoke familiarly to her, and Baubie, in turn, spoke just as familiarly to the guests. And thus, as Braeside sat masticating, long and seriously, with his knife and fork in either hand set in a perpendicular attitude on the table, she would coaxingly urge him to "see an' mak' a denner o't noo—an' nae min' fowk't eats as gin they were on a waager," while to Drogemweal's mock profession of his sense of obligation to her for the numerous good dinners she had provided for him, she retorted promptly, "Oh, it's weel kent that aten meat's ill to pay."

"Ye hae him there, Baubie, at ony rate," quoth the Dominie. "If ye had been wise, Doctor, ye wud 'a keepit by the aul' proverb that says, 'Dit your mou' wi' your meat.' Isna' that the wye o't, Mains?"

"Mains, who had been acting on the proverb by keeping perfect silence and attending to his dinner, declared his belief that the Dominie was quite right, and added something about Jonathan's "leernin'" giving him such advantage, in a wide comprehension of these "aul' ancient byewords."

"Johnny Gibb" has been dealt with thus fully because it is Mr. Alexander's best-known, and, on the whole, perhaps his most representative work. It was followed, in 1875, by "Life Among My Ain Folk," a work that has also gone through several editions. It consists mainly of a series of short tales—"Mary Malcolmson's Wee Maggie," "Francie Herriegerie's Sharger Laddie," "Baubie

Huie's Bastard Geet," and "Couper Sandy." These stories are, like "Johnny Gibb," descriptive of various aspects of Aberdeenshire rural life, but some of the phases of life they depict are deeper, tenderer, more sacred, than any sketched in the earlier work. The two stories first-named deal with the tragic elements in human existence, and touch the higher springs of emotion; in them the author demonstrated that he had command of pathos as well as of humour. Indeed, as purely literary productions, as sympathetic descriptions of the sorrow and death and suffering that come to everybody alike, they are unequalled by any other work from the author's pen; and the opinion may even be hazarded that the representation of character in them, particularly as typified by the honest, hard-working, upright, and devoted agricultural labourer, who, notwithstanding his rough life, has a warm heart and keen feelings—this representation is as skilful and felicitous as in any of the diversified types in "Johnny Gibb." The third story, as its title implies, relates to a failing only too conspicuously identified with the peasantry of Aberdeenshire; but its treatment is conducted with judicious reticence, though no attempt is made to conceal or gloss over the causes—or some of the causes at any rate—to which this social evil is attributable. "Couper Sandy," on the other hand, is a broad and humorous picture of the business side of agricultural life, in which cattle-dealing, farming, banking, farm-letting, and marriage-making are all blended—it is one of the author's most genial and successful sketches.

The other works of Mr Alexander in the list prefixed to this article are of too minor a character to call for detailed notice, with the exception of the "Notes and Sketches illustrative of Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century." This little book was published in 1877, and was to some extent supplemented by the paper on "The Making of Aberdeenshire," read before the Aberdeen Philosophical Society in 1888. Mr Alexander had in contemplation the preparation of a volume on the history of agriculture in Aberdeenshire for the New Spalding Club, and no man was better equipped for the task, or could have prosecuted it with more enthusiasm. The subject is an attractive one, for it would involve nothing less than an account of "the conversion of the county from a bleak, comparatively treeless, wholly roadless region, abundantly dotted with undrained swamps and dominating stretches of heather and stony waste, to one of the most skilfully cultivated counties of

Scotland, and certainly the best for cattle-rearing." The era of effective agricultural improvement commenced about the middle of the eighteenth century, and Mr Alexander's general propositions regarding it were that in its inception and intelligent prosecution, for at least half a century, the whole credit was due to the landed proprietors; that during this period the tenants were poor, inefficient cultivators, averse to change in their outworn modes of husbandry, slow to adopt improvements, and stoutly opposed to those forced upon them; and that during the present century the position was entirely reversed, the tenants having directly carried out the greater part of the improvements effected, or borne the charge of carrying them out.

"The tenants of Aberdeenshire have to be credited with a substantial contribution to the making of the county. Under improving leases many hundreds of acres were reclaimed and made arable by tenants, larger and smaller, whose only inducement was the security of possession given by an ordinary nineteen years' lease, entered upon at the full value of the holding at the date of entry, while in not a few cases the capital they could command, apart from their own habits of indomitable industry and rigid thrift, was marvellously small." *

The "Notes and Sketches" volume not only deals with the old forms of cultivation—such, for example, as "the twal owsen plough"—and the early improvers—the improvers of the breeds of live stock as well as the improvers in cultivation; but it is interspersed with descriptions of domestic life and social habits, contributory industries, vagrancy, popular amusements, &c. This survey, fascinating in itself, is rendered additionally interesting by the constant introduction of illustrative anecdotes and proverbs—pregnant proverbs like the following:—"Tulzyin' tykes come haltin' hame," "They liket mutton weel that licket faur the yeow lay." "It'll be fan the deil's blin', an's een are nae sair yet." But none of the anecdotes surpasses one that appears in "The Making of Aberdeenshire":—"Dr. Johnson, descanting upon the bleak and treeless aspect of Aberdeenshire, remarked to a native proprietor that if he searched his whole county he would not find a tree older than the Union. 'At all events,' replied the sturdy laird, 'we have no such era in Scotland as the Conquest!'"

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* "The Making of Aberdeenshire."

Such, then, is a brief outline of the leading features of Mr Alexander's contributions to Scottish literature. They were not numerous, but they were of the kind whose quality is not to be gauged by their quantity. Simple, unaffected, homely sketches of life and character, they worthily hold a place in the records of "the short and simple annals of the poor;" and their author may be ranked among the writers who have invested these annals alike with humour, pathos, and the charm and felicity of accurate description. But Mr Alexander's literary work has a claim to higher recognition than even this. It is largely endowed with one notable feature that is destined to secure for it enduring merit and appreciation. It has stamped with permanence the modes of life, the habits of thought, the manners, and the distinctive characteristics of the people of Aberdeenshire; and it has preserved, in enduring form, the native speech of the district. The influences of the age, with their tendency to uniformity of type and mediocrity of character, have penetrated to Aberdeenshire as well as to other parts of the country; and the dialect is in danger of disappearing before compulsory education in English. In a short time the language of "Johnny Gibb" will become obsolete, and the characters portrayed by Mr Alexander will cease to be recognisable. To have placed both on imperishable canvas is no slight or insignificant lifework; and this considerable and conspicuous feat it was Mr Alexander's distinction to have accomplished.