

BIRNIE, ALEXANDER (1826–1862), poet and journalist, was born in the north of Scotland, it is believed in Morayshire. The place and exact date of his birth are unknown; but he has himself left it on record that he was born in 1826. His life was erratic. At an early age he came to England, and was at one time a baptist minister in Preston. He was in that town when it passed through its great labour strikes, and he wrote letters to the local journals on the events of the day. In 1860 he arrived in Falkirk, footsore and penniless, having walked all the way from Lancashire. He obtained some employment, but, being dismissed from it, entered the Carron works, Falkirk, as a painter. He appears to have struck all with whom he came in contact by his brilliant powers. Birnie was ultimately dismissed from the Carron works for intemperance. While in Carron he began his journalistic notes under the signature of 'Cock of the Steeple.' He was ultimately taken upon the regular staff of the 'Falkirk Advertiser;' but several weeks before that journal ceased publication, he began the 'Falkirk Liberal,' which was published at one halfpenny per copy, and printed in Stirling. Although this journal was the recognised organ of the feuars of Falkirk, it speedily began to be apparent that it could not succeed. The printers lost by the speculation, and Birnie, 'sorrowing and penitent for his sins, went to his death, crushed in spirit that he could only raise 3*l.* 10*s.* to pay an account of 27*l.*' It is stated that his party promised to support him, but failed to do so.

Birnie's death was melancholy. One morn-

ing in March 1862, he was found in a straw stack near Stobhill brick works, Morpeth, where he had been concealed without food or drink for a fortnight. His statement to this effect was corroborated by a diary which he had carefully kept for some weeks. He was removed to the workhouse hospital; mortification of both feet set in, and he succumbed at the age of thirty-six years. It appears that Birnie made his way to Edinburgh, hoping to meet with employment there. In one of the dens of that city he was robbed of the whole of his little stock of money, and resolved to commit suicide. He obtained a large quantity of laudanum, which he swallowed; but his stomach being unable to retain the quantity of poison, which was far too large, his life was saved. He now started on foot for Newcastle, and made daily entries in a little journal which has been printed. Reaching Morpeth late in the evening, he spent his last penny on a roll. Mistaking his road, fatigue overpowered him, and he crept into a stack, with the intention of sleeping or starving to death, as the last entry in his diary testified. He requested in it that some kind hand might make a selection of his articles and speeches in this and in another diary at Chester-le-Street, as well as from the 'Chester-le-Street Liberal,' and 'Falkirk Advertiser and Liberal,' and publish them on behalf of his widow and family. A subscription was raised on behalf of Mrs. Birnie and her children, but it does not appear that the request for a collection from the deceased's writings was carried out.

[Gent. Mag. 1862; Falkirk Herald, March 1862; Newcastle Chronicle, March 1862; and other journals of the time.]

G. B. S.

BIRNIE, SIR RICHARD (1760?-1832), police magistrate of Bow Street, London, was a native of Banff, Scotland, and was born about 1760. After serving his apprenticeship to a saddler he came to London, where he obtained a situation in the house of Macintosh & Co. in the Haymarket, saddlers and harness-makers to the royal family. Having on one occasion been accidentally called upon to attend on the Prince of Wales, he did his work so satisfactorily that the prince on similar occasions was accustomed to ask that the 'young Scotchman' might be sent to him. The patronage of the prince secured his advancement with the firm, and he was made foreman and eventually a partner in the establishment. Through his marriage with the daughter of a wealthy baker he also obtained a considerable fortune, including a cottage with adjoining land at Acton, Middlesex. After his marriage he

rented a house in St. Martin's parish, and immediately began to distinguish himself by his activity in parochial affairs, serving successively, as he himself said, 'every parochial office except that of watchman and beadle.' In 1805 he was appointed churchwarden, and, along with his colleague and the vicar, he established a number of almshouses for decayed parishioners in Pratt Street, Camden Town. He also gave proof of his public spirit by enrolling himself in the Royal Westminster Volunteers, in which he became a captain. At the special request of the Duke of Northumberland he was placed in the commission of the peace, and from this time he began to frequent the Bow Street police court, in order to obtain a practical acquaintance with magisterial duties. In the absence of the stipendiary magistrates he sometimes presided on the bench, and with such efficiency that he was at length appointed police magistrate at Union Hall, from which he was a few years afterwards promoted to the Bow Street office. In February 1820 he headed the police officers in the apprehension of the Cato-street conspirators. He took the responsibility, in the absence of the soldiers, who failed, as they had been ordered, to turn out at a moment's notice, of proceeding at once to attempt the capture of the band, before they were fully prepared and armed. In this dangerous enterprise he, according to a contemporary account, 'exposed himself everywhere, encouraging officers to do their duty, while the balls were whizzing about his head.' At the funeral of Queen Caroline in August 1821 he displayed similar decision and presence of mind in a like critical emergency, and when Sir Robert Baker, the chief magistrate, refused to read the riot act, took upon himself the responsibility of reading it. Shortly afterwards Baker resigned, and he was appointed to succeed him, the honour of knighthood being also conferred on him in September following. During his term of office he was held in high respect by the ministers in power, who were accustomed to consult him on all matters of importance relating to the metropolis. He also retained throughout life the special favour of George IV. He died on 29 April 1832.

BIRNIE, WILLIAM(1563–1619), Scotch divine, was only son of a fabulously ancient house, William Birnie of ‘that ilk.’ He was born at Edinburgh in 1563, entered student in St. Leonard’s College, St. Andrews, 3 Dec. 1584, proceeded in his degree of M.A. in 1588, became a ship-master merchant, but sustain-

ing heavy losses at sea returned to his studies, and attended divinity three years in Leyden. He is found in exercise at Edinburgh 25 Jan. 1596, and was presented to the vicarage of Lanark by James VI on 28 Dec. 1597. There had been internecine feuds in the parish for a number of years. But Birnie, a man of commanding presence, was able to wield a sword, and thus is said to have gradually reconciled parties. He was constituted by the king, 4 Aug. 1603, master and economus of the hospital and almshouse of St. Leonard's, and appointed dean of the Chapel Royal 20 Sept. 1612. Earlier he had shown sympathy with the brethren confined in Blackness Castle previous to their trial in 1606 at Linlithgow. He appears as a member of the general assembly of the kirk of Scotland in 1602, 1608, 1610. He was nominated 'constant moderator of the presbytery' by the assembly of 1606, and the presbytery were 'charged by the privy council 17 Jan. thereafter, to serve him as such within twenty-four hours after notice, under pain of rebellion.' He was also named on the court of high commission 15 Feb. 1610, and presented to the deanery of the Chapel Royal of Stirling, which was 'to be hereafter callit the Chapel Royal of Scotland,' 20 Sept. 1612. The acceptance of the 'constant moderatorship' showed episcopal leanings. In 1612 he was transferred from Lanark to Ayr, to 'parsonages *primo* and *secundo*, and vicarages of the same, and to the parsonage and vicarage of Alloway'—the scene of the Tam o' Shanter of Burns—on 16 June 1614. He was a member again of the high commission 21 Dec. 1615, and one of the commissioners for the suppression of popery agreed to by the assembly in 1616. He married Elizabeth, daughter of John Lindsay, parson of Carstairs. Their issue were three sons and two daughters. He died on 19 Jan. 1619 in the fifty-sixth year of his age and twenty-second of his ministry. A kind of doggerel epitaph runs:—

He waited on his charge with care and pains
At Air on little hopes, and smaller gains.

For generations stories were told of him all over the southern shires of Scotland. One represents him as so agile that he could make the salmon's leap 'by stretching himself on the grass, leaping to his feet, and again throwing them over his head.' He was the author of a prose book entitled 'The Blame of Kirk-bvriall, tending to perswade Cemeteriall Civilitie. First preached, then penned, and now at last propyned to the Lord's inheritance in the Presbyterie of Lanark by M. William Birnie, the Lord his minister in that ilk, as a pledge of his zeale and care of that

reformation. Edinburgh, printed by Robert Charteris, printer to the king's most excellent maiestie, 1606' (4to). This was reprinted in 1833, in one hundred copies, by W. B. D. Turnbull. Birnie here deprecates interment within the church. There is considerable learning in the book, but its lack of arrangement and an absurdly alliterative style make it wearisome reading.

[Scott's Fasti, ii. 86-7, 306; Reid's History of Presbyterianism in Ireland, i.; Blair's Autobiography; Stevenson's Hist. of Church of Scotland; Calderwood's History; Boke of the Kirke, 318; Orig. Letters; Melvill's Autob.; Nisbet's Heraldry, ii.; Anderson's Scottish Nation, for ancestry and descendants.] A. B. G.