

**“FACTOR” PANTON,
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



Mr. J. Pantou

**A MAN OF
AFFAIRS.**

XI.

“FACTOR” PANTON, BLAIRGOWRIE.

This world belongs to the energetic.—EMERSON.

With the word “efficiency” so much in the air at present, it is only natural to associate it with the name of John Panton, the subject of our present sketch, than whom no one ever believed in the thing indicated by the name more firmly or observed it more thoroughly in all his transactions. He was one of the most remarkable business men that the East of Scotland, if not a much wider area, has ever produced, and requires no apology for inclusion in our series. His father, William Panton, was the trusted manager of the Blairgowrie estate for many a long year during the absence of the proprietor in New South Wales, and it was here that his son John was born in the year 1833. It thus happened that he became acquainted with all the details of agricultural work at an early age, and no one ever took to his environment more heartily. He received his educational start at the Parish School, where he was noted for his

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INTELLIGENCE AND PERSEVERANCE,

fellow-scholars recalling that even when he had been at work at nights, while other boys were at play, he invariably appeared next morning with his lessons well prepared. He completed his education at Glasgow, and afterwards entered the law offices of Duncan & M'Lean, Perth, attending the law classes of Sheriff Barclay at the same time. His ability and industry in the office were soon rewarded with the confidence of his employers. Procurator-Fiscal Duncan esteemed him so highly that he used to take him about with him when any business of importance was to be done—greatly to the benefit of our "Factor," who thus became acquainted with a large number of people and places which he found exceedingly advantageous in after life. When quite a young man he returned to his native town, and in company with one Dallas, started as solicitor. The partnership was of short duration, however, both gentlemen agreeing to separate, and each opening an office for himself. Young Pantou's business increased rapidly, and in 1857 he added banking to law, a branch of the Royal Bank being opened at Millbank that year, of which he became the first agent. Things prospered so well that in 1872 it was found necessary to erect and remove to the handsome block of buildings in Allan Street in which the bank, law offices, &c., are at present located. Here the "Factor" became the centre of such

WIDE-REACHING AND MANY-SIDED ACTIVITY

as Blairgowrie had never before witnessed, and can hardly ever witness again. He was entrusted from the start with the factorship of Blairgowrie estate, and to this he added in time that of Park-

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hill, Banff, Gleneloch, Coupar Grange, Drumore, and Clayquhat, together with a large number of smaller properties, and thus obtained the cognomen by which he was most frequently known. He acquired large concerns as maltster at the Hill of Blair and at Craigie, Perth, and had a meal mill and a wood mill at Blairgowrie. He had also large businesses as grain merchant in Glasgow, Stirling, and Arbroath, and early in his career had a ship of his own in connection with the grain trade. His auction mart at Blairgowrie was one of his most successful ventures. He became tenant of a number of farms; and by and by he acquired the valuable estates of Dalnagairn, Kirkmichael; Carsie, near Blairgowrie; Inchmartine, Carse of Gowrie; and Buttergask, near Coupar Angus, always taking as many of the farms into his own hands as he could get and working them all with consummate skill and commercial success—what might happen to be the despair of other agriculturists being transformed into profitable concerns from the very start; and those who shook their heads at his novel methods usually finishing up by adopting them themselves.

ONE GREAT SECRET

of his success as an agriculturist was in his generous treatment of the land and skilful management of stock. As has been hinted already, “efficiency” was ever his watchword; no matter the expense, get everything well done, thoroughly done, and done once for all. While the last man to tolerate waste or extravagance, his instructions to his grieves were in effect *carte blanche*—to spare nothing needful. Inchmartine, for instance, which he obtained at a profitable figure with intention to resell, he afterwards determined to retain in his own hands, and proceeded in his

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wanted style to improve right off into one of the finest properties in the Carse, spending as much as £20 per acre laying it down in grass, top-dressing it, bringing in a supply of water from the hill for each field, &c. Carsie, again, was well wooded when he got it, but the great storm of November '93 co-operated with the Factor in clearing large tracts of it of trees, and there he mapped out a large number of small fruit farms, which he let at from 30s to 40s per acre, erecting commodious dwelling-houses for 5 per cent. on the outlay. The large farm of Gothens, on the same property, he managed himself, and, somewhat in the style of the racing bicyclist, took that veteran and model agriculturist, Mr M'Laren, whose farm adjoins Gothens, as his "pacer"—the standing order to his grieve being to "keep up with Pittendreich!" In addition to all this he rented many thousands of acres of grazings in Perthshire, on which he had so many sheep that one hard winter he was

PAYING NEARLY £100 A DAY

for their feeding. It is said that after hearing a sermon on one occasion on Job and his wealth in bestial, he remarked that "except for the camels" he could "beat Job easy himself!" Special trains were frequently required to bring his cattle to market, and his bill for feeding stuffs—chiefly oilcake from the Newtyle Mill—of which he was a leading Director—would amount to over £10,000 per annum. He came to have so many properties in his hands—houses, shops, hotels, &c.—that the story goes that an old wife who had been out of the town for a number of years, returning to find "F.P." stuck up at most street corners gave vent to her astonishment by exclaiming, "Michty me, half the toon belongs

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to Factor Panton noo!” As solicitor he had a large share of the law business not only of the town but the county, and was nothing if not thoroughly in earnest about his clients’ interests. No matter how difficult or complicated the case submitted to him, if there was a way out into the light the shrewd and hard-headed lawyer would find it. Many a tedious and doubtful process at law has he dispensed with by the exercise of that

EXTRAORDINARY KEEN-SIGHTEDNESS

and forcible practical commonsense which were amongst his most outstanding characteristics. His business was always with men—not professionals merely. On one occasion he sent his chief solicitor to Edinburgh to negotiate a very difficult matter with another firm. He came back as he went—not a step farther forward. A question or two showed the factor where the trouble lay. Off went the factor by the first train, and returned next day quite happy. Apart from business proper, he found time to serve on the County Council, the Parish Council, and Blairgowrie Water Committee, of which last he was Chairman. It was largely by his influence that water was introduced from Benachally, eight miles off, in 1870, and it was chiefly by his insistence upon our magic word that the town and district enjoys the present greatly improved system. It is also due to his energy that Kirkmichael has now the benefits of the telegraph and a capital water supply. One of his most cherished schemes—and at which he was busily engaged at the time of his death—was the establishment of the Cottage Hospital for the district, which has been so happily consummated since, chiefly through the

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unwearied efforts of Dr MacLaren. He was also a Director on the Scottish Board of the Royal Insurance Company.

CHARACTERISTICS.

Touching those qualities of mind which seemed to have most to do with Mr Panton's success in life, his unerring instinct for character was surely among the very first. No matter the work he required done—in the law office, in the bank, on the farm, or elsewhere—it was all one: let the new man for the post be brought before him, and with a swift glance of those keen grey eyes of his and a few well-directed questions he had him “sized” up to a nicety. It is doubtful that he ever made a mistake as to character in his life, and it was this gift which enabled him to choose the best men he could get for this and that responsibility, then leave each to attend to it—his quiet eye upon them all the time—while he himself sought other outlets for his energy and enterprise. He always paid his employees well, and that they liked his service is shown by the fact that they rarely quitted it. Here is

AN ILLUSTRATION

of the perfect accuracy with which he could gauge character. A farmer in a neighbouring county had his lease about to expire, but did not wish to renew it because his brother was expected to purchase an estate within a twelvemonth and he the (farmer) would be called upon to manage it; moreover, the rent of his present farm—£270—was far above its value. Off he goes to Blairgowrie and puts his difficulty before the factor, who listened steadily all through. Then taking

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out his watch he asked his client how long he had till his next train. “Twenty minutes.” “Very well, then,” was his reply, “you get a snack somewhere before you go, but don’t lose a minute getting home and going straight to Mr F—, and you tell him that you will keep on the farm for another year but don’t feel inclined to give more than £200.” “But, factor, he will never agree to that,” exclaimed the incredulous farmer. “Don’t you waste your time arguing about it,” was the reply; “just go and do as I tell you and let me know how you get on.” The result was precisely as the long-headed Blairgowrie man of business had anticipated; the tenant got the farm on his own terms. The factor knew his man, but his client didn’t; that was all the difference—but such a big one! No one ever saw the factor in a hurry, and no matter how busy he was he had always

A FEW MINUTES TO SPARE

for the casual visitor in search of information or wishing to have a chat over local affairs. As Chairman he was inclined to “rush” things a bit on occasions, but his horror of irrelevancy, “gas,” incapacity, and short-sightedness might be urged as partial excuse, at anyrate. Like Dr Johnson, he always went straight to the point of the argument; there was no formal preparation, no flourishing of the sword—his opponent was transfixed before he knew it. Like the Doctor, too, he was a good hater. Withal, the factor was of a social turn, was a keen curler, and greatly enjoyed an evening with a few kindred spirits, when he would drop the *œs triplex* of business, and become the genial companion. Of his passion for getting the best of a bargain—a feature of his character by no means

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singular to himself—many stories are told; but there are clergymen and others interested in charitable work in the district who can testify to his readiness to help forward both by purse and influence such objects as appealed to his practical common-sense. This strong man departed life on the 29th September '98, and the general voice now is, "there were waur men than the factor!" He had his faults, but, "use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?"