

**JOHN BRIDIE,  
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



*Mr. J. R. Bridie.*

**MAGISTRATE,  
ARTIST,  
LITTERATEUR.**



### XIII.

## JOHN BRIDIE, BLAIRGOWRIE.

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A marvellous witty fellow.—“ Much Ado About Nothing.”

Were one called upon to name the outstanding characteristic by which John Bridie was best known while alive and is most aptly recalled now he has gone, it might with safety be put down as geniality. He carried about with him a variety of this commendable quality wherever he went peculiarly his own, and whether in the workshop, on the bowling green or the ice, presiding at the Council Board or some social function, on holiday with a congenial companion, or merely having a talk on passing events at a street corner, it found vent in such “ quips and cranks” and “ wreathed smiles” as never failed to put even the most dumpish of mortals on better terms with himself and all the world. His manner was to look at things from the brightest point of view. The common habit with people of “ worriting” themselves about matters which might never occur had no place in his philosophy. He was fond of telling a story about a gardener in the North who fell into

#### A DESPONDENT STATE

about the deplorable Government they had, and the rottenness of things in general. “ What’s

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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wrang?" asked the cook. "Everything's gane wrang thegether," declared he; "the very State's gaun to ruin." "An' what needs ye fash about that?" answered the cook; "aren't ye as weel as ever ye were, wi' the same kind maister, the same guid wages? What needs ye trouble your head about the State?" "Ah, Janet, Janet," sighed the disconsolate democrat, "ye ken naething about it, but if ye read the 'Aberdeen Chronicle' ye'll see hoo meeserable ye are!" To our friend all the world was a stage, and "all the men and women merely players." The business was to make the performance as acceptable as possible; and when the curtain fell suddenly in the middle of the play, as it did in his case, the audience realised they had seen the last of one who had sensibly contributed to their profitable entertainment. After the play comes the criticism, but the heart of the community is right when it places John Bridie among those whose memory it would not willingly let die, and the present article is a "Stone of Remembrance" upon his cairn. He was born in Dundee in 1829, and served his apprenticeship there as a house painter, working afterwards in some of the best establishments in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and elsewhere, finally coming to Blairgowrie, and starting there for himself in 1855. His exceptional abilities as a tradesman very soon received recognition, and the inside of many a mansion in the district, as well as shop fronts, signs, &c., still testify to his great taste and skill. In the spirit of the true artist, he inspected all the good "jobs" he could manage to get at in the West of Scotland and in England; and rarely went on holiday but had some side show of this sort in his eye. Far above ordinary house painting, however, he had

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### SUCH DISTINCT GIFTS

as a painter in oil and water colours as, had he chosen to cultivate them, might have given him as good a claim to public recognition as that which another house painter of the district—Mr David Farquharson, A.R.S.A.—has won for himself. As it was, his canvases frequently graced the walls of local exhibitions, while, as a very reliable judge of good work, his critiques of the Royal Scottish Academy exhibitions appeared in the local newspapers for a number of years. In passing it may be noted also that he was local correspondent for the “Dundee Advertiser” for some considerable time. He had a particularly happy knack of turning out on short notice special designs for public functions—one of the most memorable being for the great Russell banquet of 1863, and others the speaking likenesses of Handel, Mendelssohn, and other composers for the Choral Society’s concerts. Whatever he did, whether some fine graining, a shop sign, or an ornate interior, bore his sign-manual of thoroughness; the amount of pay he was to get for his work being the last thing to enter his consideration. In public affairs he always took a great interest; entered the old baronial Town Council in 1867, ultimately becoming Baron Bailie; was a member of the Police Commission, of which he rose to be Chief Magistrate, and, on the 1892 Act coming into force, was the first to receive the title of Provost; served many years on the old Parochial Board, on the Water Commission, &c.; was President of the Horticultural Society; Vice-President and at one time Secretary of Blairgowrie Curling Club; Vice-President of the Bowling Club; Vice-Chairman of the Liberal

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Association; Session Clerk to the U.P. Church,  
&c. Touching

### HIS LITERARY ACTIVITIES,

while still a youth in Dundee, he joined a Debating Society which used to meet in an artist's house, and on coming to Blair he immediately associated himself with the Mechanics' Institute, which was then the great centre of "light and leading" for the district, and may fairly claim to be so yet, although other agencies have taken up much of the work it inaugurated. There is some pathos in the fact that of the twelve members constituting the first Committee (1853), only that veteran, Bailie Steven, remains, and still takes an active interest in the concerns of this useful institution. Mr William Davie, Dunkeld, was probably one of the original members, although not on the first Committee. They were a band of genuine worthies, those, that used to meet once a week in the old Chapel in George Street to discuss such strenuous matters as "Geology," "Phrenology," "Ethnology," "Human Capability," "Progress of Science and Art," "Physical Geography," "Galvanism," "Gravitation and Inertia," "Influence of Literature," "Motion and Pressure," "Human Frame," &c. Bridie was the life of many a meeting, and although his tastes were literary, he contributed at one time and another papers on such subjects as "Colour," "Fine Art in Architecture and Sculpture," "Encouragement of Fine Art," "Pre-Raphaelitism," besides many others. But, as already indicated, his preference was literature; his favourite branch of it poetry; his favourite poets, Shakespeare, Milton, Hudibras," and Burns. He had a splen-

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did memory, and it would have been difficult to find his match for aptness of quotation, more particularly from Shakespeare. When in happy mood his speeches and even his conversation reminded one of the dresses of some fair dames, the texture of which cannot be seen for the embroidery. This faculty, together with his wit, readiness of repartee, and

### UNFAILING GOOD HUMOUR,

made him a nimble adversary, but he was the opposite of an aggressive one. He would sacrifice an argument at any time, if not a principle, for the sake of peace; but the temptation to let off some of his fireworks, even among the sober feet of the "City Fathers," and at the risk of personal offence, was irresistible on occasions—only to be followed with profound apologies immediately thereafter. He was an inveterate punster. Wendell Holmes would have lynched him without mercy for his "verbicides." But his witticisms came as naturally as his puns. One of the former was connected with the memorable answer of the French General to the query of Napoleon just before the Franco-Prussian War broke out, whether everything was ready: "Yes, sire, to the last button." Birdie and some friends happened to be touring in France after the war, and on the road to Versailles he picked up a regimental button. "This, gentlemen," said he, showing off his find, "is no doubt the 'last button!'" But the Bailie—the public ignored the Provostship—was in the "full meridian of his glory" at some social gathering—for preference a curling supper after a glorious day on the ice. It was then that his facile

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gift of verse had full play, and most of his happiest efforts in this line were inspired by special occasions. He finds an honoured place in Edwards' "Modern Scottish Poets," and as a good specimen of his style the following parody is quoted. It was written on the occasion of a bazaar for the Mechanics' Institute. Mr James Luke (now in Calcutta) was manager; the late Mr Struth had an exhibition of machinery; and Mr Hector W. MacCallum (now in Perth) ran an "art(ful) exhibition."

### THE GALLANT BAZAAR.

The Charge of the Light (-Fingered) Brigade,  
Lord Luc-an Commanding.

"Have a league, have a league,  
Advertise onward,  
All in the newspapers  
Bode the Six Hundred.  
Forward the Light Brigade,  
Charge for the goods," he said;  
"Into the pirley-pig  
Get the Six Hundred!"

Forward the Light Brigade—  
Was any one dismayed?—  
Not though they guessed that the  
Sum would be under'd;  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to make 'em buy,  
And in the pirley-pig  
Put the Six Hundred.

Ladies to the right of them,  
Ladies to the left of them,  
Ladies in front of them,  
Raffled and plundered;  
Storming each fop and swell,  
Boldly they sought and well,  
Into the pass-book and  
Into the cash-box to  
Put the Six Hundred.



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Twinkled their eyes so rare,  
Flashed as they looked so fair,  
Screwing the sinners there,  
Charging so sweetly that  
    All the folk wondered!  
Plying the lottery-poke,  
Right through the crowd they broke,  
Cheque-book and cash-book  
Yielded their notes like smoke,  
    Scattered and sundered:  
Then they summed up, but not—  
    Not the £600!

Ladies to right of them,  
Ladies to left of them,  
Ladies behind, who had  
    Raffled and plundered;  
Struth with mechanic spell,  
What-you-May-Call-him's "sell;"  
Gorilla, bagatelle,  
Came to the common fund,  
Having done very well,  
Though they were short of it—  
    Short of Six Hundred.

How can it all be paid?  
Oh, the high charge they made!  
    All of us wondered;  
Bother the charge they made,  
"Count the four C's," he said—  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
    Nobby Four Hundred!

### TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Bailie Bridie devoted ungrudgingly a large amount of his time and ability. In matters of policy he always showed an honest endeavour to hold the balance evenly between contending interests, and if to some people he appeared too anxious at times to please everybody—with the proverbial result—his social spirit was the explanation. One of the last kindly offices he performed was to act as mediator between employers and employed in a local strike a few

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days before his death. This latter took place very suddenly on the 26th June 1894. The following beautiful and heartfelt tribute of an old and intimate friend appeared a few days afterwards:—

Farewell, old comrade! first to reach the goal  
Though starting later. With what wondering eyes  
Thou gazest on the new and grand sunrise  
That bursts upon the emancipated soul,  
For ever widening as the ages roll  
To new horizons, brighter, lovelier skies.  
Behold the home dreamed of with vague surmise,  
With Love Infinite brooding over all!

To all the beauty and wonder immanent,  
'Thine was the fresh child-heart that opened free;  
Life's deepest shadows ever were to thee  
As artists' foils for splendours opulent;  
Where shadows deepest gloomed, glowed Light intense,  
Self-luminous, too bright for mortal sense.