

**“PROVOST” JACK,**

**NEWTYLE.**



Provost Jack

**A MAN O' PAIRTS.**

## XXII.

### “PROVOST” JACK, NEWTYLE.



And still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.—GOLDSMITH.

It may not be necessary to assume that the Jack family had “a boat o’ their ain” at the Flood, like the Macphersons, but if one is to get at the true inwardness of their genealogical tree, it is a *sine qua non* to start at least with Ian MacIan, Lord of the Isles, a lateral descendant of whom, born in 1660, came to Braemar in 1705, and to Blairgowrie in 1707, when the name was changed to the familiar “Jack.” His son Thomas, by a second marriage, was the father of Stewart Jack, and a younger son, John, grandfather of our esteemed friend in Newtyle. It almost seems as if there was something in a name, after all, as the Irishman, anxious for a first-class tenor voice, thought when he wished he had been christened Sims Reeves. Anyhow, the sons of MacIan appear able to hold their own with the rest of the world, and the doings of many of them are among the “things that matter.” The “Provost”—who, it may be explained, inherits his courtesy title from an old charter of Charles II. in respect of old “Newtyld”—was born at Dunkeld in 1832, where his father was a slater. His parents came to reside in Newtyle in 1834, and used to declare that theirs

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies :

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was the first "reekin' lum" in the new village. Our friend has vivid recollections of

### THE EARLY DAYS

of the railway, with its three steep inclines, stationary engine at the top of each, horse haulage with thick hempen ropes used on levels between, and later on the Carmichael-built locomotives to supersede the horses. At the top of Balbeuchly incline was a very sharp turn, and it happened frequently that the engine was unable to bring the three light carriages comprising the train round the curve, but there were always accommodating passengers ready to jump out and give a shove! Between the years 1862-9 a series of diversions reduced the gradients to their present levels, and increased the distance from  $10\frac{1}{2}$  to 17 miles. The late Sir George Kinloch, father of the present M.P. for East Perthshire, made "siccar," however, that though the Company "might take him round by John o' Groats" to Dundee, the old fare (1s) should not be exceeded. Our potential "Provost" learned the joiner trade at "Thrums;" returned on the completion of his apprenticeship and the simultaneous death of his father, to Newtyle, to become the head of the house, wrought eight years as journeyman, then went to Dundee as architect's assistant to the late Mr Christopher Kerr, and finally

### RETURNED TO NEWTYLE

once more on being appointed Inspector of Poor for the parish in 1864, starting as joiner on his own account at the same time, and retiring two years ago from the latter. And now for some catalogue work, for which one would almost require a Stolzenberg

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patent indexing apparatus. As a lover of instrumental music, our friend flirted with all the members of the flute family in turn, then settled down seriously to the bass ophicleide, indulging in occasional recreative wrestlings with the tenor horn and other brazen relatives. Becoming acquainted with sol-fa, he taught gratuitous classes, juvenile and adult, for many years, and was appointed F.C. precentor in 1856, retiring after 43 years' service. As might be expected, he has had many amusing experiences in this connection. He confesses to having “stuck” more than once; but, as he put it, “I ‘stuck’ when I felt I was wrong, but some precentors don’t know when to stick. There’s an art even in ‘sticking!’” One day he came away without his “specs.” That to an ordinary precentor would have proved a “floorer,” but the precentor in the present instance was no ordinary one, so, reaching up to the pulpit, he asked the minister to give a loan of his. The “specs” were duly handed down, and the Psalm sung. Then they were returned to the minister for the reading;

### HANDED DOWN AGAIN

for the next singing; back to the pulpit for the sermon, and so on throughout the service. “Let brotherly love continue!” But for coolness and nerve the following would be difficult to beat—in some respects it is quite unique:—A stranger was in the pulpit one day, and something put our friend off his key. He fairly “stuck;” tried again, with no better luck; and a third trial showed no improvement. “Well,” said he, “I saw it was of no use trying any longer with the wrong key bumming in my head, so I determined to turn up another tune in a

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different key." He was busy hunting up the tune when that rash young cleric had the temerity to rise in the pulpit and say, "Let us pray!" This was more than flesh and blood could stand. "No, no," exclaimed our friend, looking up at the minister, "haud on a wee—I'll get it in the noo!" The minister didn't pray any at that time, but dropped into the well of the pulpit like a harlequin down a trap door. It is comforting to learn that a suitable tune was captured at last, and Psalm and tune were sung

WITH GREAT "GO."

The "Provost" was 23 years among the volunteers, starting as private, and retiring in 1882 as Captain. He holds the long service medal. The post of band sergeant, which he filled for many years, is noticed in passing. As a well-known authority in matters apiarian, he delivered a series of lectures throughout Berwickshire and the Borders as far back as 1882. He confesses to dabbling in rhyme also, and more than one sly "skit" on current events is traceable to his pen. As a leading member of the Literary Society, a number of years ago he wrote a domestic drama which was played on two occasions with great success; instructed the players; with the assistance of a painter provided the requisite scenery—the "drop" displaying a representation of old Bannatyne Home—and acted throughout as stage manager. He is Inspector of Poor and Collector of Rates for the parish of Newtyle, and the oldest Inspector by office in Forfarshire; Inspector and Collector for the parish of Eassie and Nevay; Clerk to the School Board; Secretary and Treasurer to New-

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tyle Public Library, having held office since its institution in 1856; Secretary to the Angus and Mearns Association of Inspectors of Poor; and an elder in the U.F. Church. In his capacity of Inspector of Poor he has had some interesting experiences. On one occasion he was over-reached when the old Parochial Board, against his advice, instructed admission of liability to another parish for a lunatic pauper on the alleged grounds of birth settlement. Eight years afterwards, during which period the parish maintained the lunatic in the Asylum, it was discovered that this man had been born in Ireland, the real man coming to the front in a fresh claim from another parish. Our friend determined to get quit of the spurious pauper, and started for Ireland. After a hard hunt lasting nearly a fortnight he settled the birth-place and early history of the man, returned home, got the necessary papers prepared for the lunatic's removal, and, setting out one afternoon with the “daftie” in charge, had the satisfaction of landing him at a Union Workhouse fifty miles inland from Belfast early next morning. The Board did not grudge his holiday. Our friend's

### INFINITE VARIETY

was cleverly hit off in a “par.” which appeared in the “Dundee Advertiser” in 1897, when he retired from the precentorship and was the recipient of several handsome gifts from the congregation. It is reproduced here:—

The visitor to Newtyle will find every trade represented in the village. For instance, if you want a house, you will apply to the house-agent, Mr Jack, a gentleman well known not only in Newtyle but in Dundee and throughout Forfarshire. If you want the house painted or put in order, apply to Mr Jack, painter and paperhanger. If you want your house furnished, apply to John Jack,

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cabinetmaker. If you want to pay your rates, you will find J. J. at the receipt of custom. If your clock is out of order, Jack, clockmaker, will leave his desk at the Public Library (where he is Secretary and Treasurer) and mend it for you. If you walk into the Free Church on Sunday morning, you will find Elder Jack at the plate, and presently you will see him walk into the precentor's box. If you attend a concert, Mr Jack is there, sings a solo, and superintends the programme. If a lecture is advertised, when you get to the hall you will hear a lecture, perhaps on bee-keeping, perhaps on capillary attraction, perhaps on the French Revolution, and the lecturer will probably be Mr Jack. If you want to get into the Poorhouse, or think yourself ready for the Lunatic Asylum, you had better see Mr Jack, Inspector of Poor, as soon as possible; and if you want to be buried, Mr Jack is the very man for you. In short, he is Jack of all trades and master of them all!

That is from the outside point of view; but we believe that his own modest aspiration is that it may be recorded of him at the end simply that he was one who "tried to do his duty."