

**JAMES BAND,
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



COUNTRY HANDYMAN.

XXX.

JAMES BAND, BLAIRGOWRIE.

Not in the roll of common men.

—SHAKESPEARE.

The strong traits of individuality so characteristic of the opening years of the past century have, as has been frequently remarked, almost disappeared in the present day, owing principally to the greatly increased travelling and reading facilities now available. The old order of natural and independent development in rural districts had not quite passed away when James Band, the subject of the present sketch, was born on the Braes of the Carse about the year 1829. What schooling he got was very little, and his parents being both engaged in farm work, he was only a boy when sent to work on the farms in the district. In after years he wrought as ploughman, cattleman, &c., in various parts of the Carse and the Valley of Strathmore; then he became tired of the work, and was goods porter at Blairgowrie Railway Station. After a few months at this, he threw up the job, and started as vanman to a Blair firm of grocers. But although he peregrinated the country for a number of years retailing his employers' goods and his own jokes with equal readiness and acceptability, it was not until he entered the employment of Mr William Davie, ironmonger, Blairgowrie, that the square man and the square hole seemed to come together, and he developed all those

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SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE HANDYMAN

which distinguished him thereafter till his death—which took place in 1898—many years after the business had passed into the hands of Mr W. Kirkwood. Here he found demands incidental to the trade made upon him for the exercise of mechanical skill in a large variety of forms, such as the fitting up of ranges, grates, &c., and the multitudinous character of his achievements was a marvel to the ordinary five-eighth man. There was probably nothing that Jamie Band would not, with duty and credit as inducements, have attempted. He was a splendid hand at laying the fancy tile-hearths seen in gentlemen's mansions—none better in the district; and whether in forming a section of the pavement, building a wall, or closing up rat-holes, he had no superior with his cement or concrete, his pail and trowel. He was equally good at putting in grates and ranges as at window panes; could fit a key to a lock, or a lock to a door, or a door to a room; could paint a shed or make one; and, in short, was not to be beaten by anything in wood or iron. During the winter of one year he managed in his own spare time to make a two-wheeled barrow and a spring-cart (wheels excepted)—all completed and painted in fine style. No production of any coachyard could have give uhim such satisfaction as when he first used the spring-cart for business purposes, seated on front, with pipe in full blast, and a look of triumph on his honest countenance, which he was well entitled to. He is even credited with attempting to repair a grand piano. The story is worth telling. Many years ago, when "Penny Readings" were in vogue, the want of a piano for accompaniments was a "long-felt want," and

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Miss Speid of Forneth kindly offering an old "grand," Jamie was sent out on a lorry for it. One or two of the wires being broken, the donor asked our handyman whether he could not mend them, and he, with no more idea of music than hoodie-craw, and with a notion that this was much the same as repairing a wire fence, expressed his perfect readiness to

TRY HIS HAND AT THE NEW JOB.

Assisted by the coachman, the piano was uncovered, and, unappalled by the complex mechanism which met his gaze, he went at it with a will, hammering and screwing and twisting things about till he had a dozen strings curling all over the place instead of a couple. Ultimately he had to close down the lid in despair. "Man," said he to the coachman, "there's something kittle about the guts o't, but I'll guarantee I'll twist her up a' right whan I get her to Blair!" It turned out an expensive experiment for the Committee, and in after years if Jamie was asked how he was getting on with piano-tuning he immediately "sang dumb." Amongst other duties he had the making up of orders in the seed-lofts during the spring months, in which department he posed as a great authority. There was a seed-cleaning machine driven by a crank-handle on the premises, and upon this he attempted many improvements, one being the substitution of a small steam-engine for the hard work its manipulation involved. The seed mill when in motion was always a great attraction for the school children, with whom James was a prime favourite. One little fellow, who had never seen any kind of engine except a locomotive, stood gaping at it one day for a long time, keeping at a safe distance all the while, but apparently greatly disappointed. At last he

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turned away in disgust, exclaiming, "Sic an engine Jamie Band has!—it canna move oot o' the bit!" Great as his pretensions were as to the qualities of seeds, he was no less an authority on their cultivation, and as an amateur gardener he took a high position in the local Horticultural Society, and had his employer's garden under his charge. Spring was the busy time in the warehouse as well as in the garden, and he usually got woefully behind with the latter. Yet, no matter how busy he was, he was most decidedly unwilling to receive assistance, and appeared jealous of any interference with what he happened to have in hand. One spring affairs got out of joint to such an extent that a stranger was put in the garden. Well, he didn't survive long, for the day was hot, the work dry, and the worker ditto, while, as fate would have it, the garden was very steep. The result was that the newcomer lost his balance and went rolling down hill into a sturdy old gooseberry bush at the bottom, where he was discovered bruised and bleeding by our friend Jamie, who didn't conceal his jubilation at the discomfiture of the enemy, and in having a chance of clearing him off the premises.

A VERY DEFECTIVE MEMORY

caused him to fall into many awkward mistakes in the naming of people and things. He was never at a loss for a word, his plan being, apparently, a phonetic one of his own invention. A well-known variety of rose was invariably called by him "Glory to John;" his greatest favourites in bedding-out plants were "gerāānums," the foliage of which was admired for its "bonnie green *huge*;" and nothing pleased him better than to make up "a grand *bucket*" for any lady visitor. One of the latter asked him if he had "propa-

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gated" a certain plant. "No," was his reply, "I didna '*profliate*' that ane; I got it frae Bob Brechin!" He was a great believer in naked truth and Scotch neat; naturally, therefore, he had nothing but contempt for the "'*unfrequented*' wine" some congregations affected at their Sacraments. It must be recorded that his successes were not always commensurate with his efforts, and that he didn't always arrive at the port he set out for. He generally started off with the assurance that he was to "pit archetecry in't," but from want of plan and inability to arrange details he not unfrequently got so mixed up that he had to call a halt and confess the "job was bouched," and make a new start. He could not concentrate his attention for any length of time on any particular job—and no wonder, considering the extremely miscellaneous character of the demands made upon him. He was continually mislaying and losing his tools, but there were plenty more in the shop, and if an ironmongery shop wasn't for supplying workmen's tools, what was it for? One unprincipled fellow was heard to say "it was aye worth while watching where Band was working" in order to profit by his forgetfulness. But Band would forget other things. He would become so absorbed in his job, whatever it happened to be, that he would

FORGET ALL ABOUT HIS FOOD,

and go steadily on till he had carried out his idea. He has been known even to forget to draw his wages, coming back in a fume accusing himself for his stupidity by remarking, "The daftest man gaein' kens Martinmas ar' mealtime!" Nothing pleased him so much as to be asked by householders to exercise his skill in putting things right that were causing domestic discomfort. If a

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smoky vent was the nuisance he had original ideas for improving the draught. If the washing boiler was foul, with a bottle of vitriol he made everything clean and sweet. So when firebricks required to be replaced in a grate or an ashpan to be made, or outhouse to be covered with felt or corrugated iron, a garden to be enclosed with wire netting to keep out the hens—or a thousand-and-one other jobs, Jamie Band was the salvation of many a ruined temper and distracted housewife's heart. And it could be said of him that he was like nature herself—he never did the same job twice in the exact same way, and the man who expected to find any new-fangled “interchangeability of parts”—or wholes—in what he did was doomed to disappointment. Each job stood upon its own legs, and had a character all its own—in fact, a child might understand the job was done by Jamie Band. And “Ance dune, aye dune,” was his motto. On one occasion he fixed in a range as a prospective cure for a smoky grate. It was “fixed in its everlasting seat” so securely that nothing short of taking down the house seemed adequate for its removal, should that be required. “And if it doesna dae after a’,” said the doubtful housewife, “an’ has to be ta’en oot again?” “Wife,” said Jamie, significantly, “the day that range has to be shifted, I houp I’m at Kirk-michael!” He was very

HUMAN IN HIS PLEASURE

at other people's approval of his work, and those who expressed it always stood correspondingly high in his favour. A very “pernickity” customer once tried his patience to such an extent that he was heard to say—“Naebody could please him; he'll no be pleased when he's deid!” Having a

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stock of paints at his command, he became great at mixing colours, although some of his tints were difficult to name. A well-known local house painter used to make great fun of "Professor Band," but said Professor had his revenge out of him on one occasion. A garden seat, which the critical painter had got from Jamie's employer to paint in oak, had been neglected so long that the "Professor" started to paint it himself, and managed to please a purchaser with the work. Along came the house painter, who, casting a scornful glance upon the seat, glistening with new varnish and ready for delivery, declared it would not do at all. "Dae!" exclaimed Jamie, "it maun dae! An' hoo muckle better are you? If I canna dae't, you winna dae't!" One day he had a neat, sly dig at a local banker, who had transferred his vote shortly before from the Liberal to the Unionist side. Jamie was painting the gate at Millbank in one of his own patent and strictly copyright shades, when the gentleman referred to stopped and inquired—"What colour do you call that, Band?" "Od, man," said the Radical painter at once, "d'ye no ken? That's Salisbury green!" His interrogator passed on without another word. But by far the most ambitious and most amusing incident connected with his work as a painter was a conjoint affair between him and the late James Crossgrove, tinsmith, decidedly clever in his way, and, among other things, a bit of an artist. It was in 1887, the late Queen's Jubilee, and the two determined to become collaborators in the painting of a banner which should

ASTONISH THE WORLD.

Accordingly a disused loft was selected as the workshop, safe from the scrutiny of

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“fools and bairns,” and the design agreed upon—a half-length portrait of the Queen, with an angel on each side holding a wreath of some sort over her head, while beneath was to be the legend—“Long Live Queen Victoria.” Each of the artists was intensely jealous of the other, but as Band could not draw, Crossgrove had, perforce, to be allowed to outline the bust of the Queen—copied from a favourite calendar. But the angels were a staggerer, and not all their combined imagination, working at 2-donkey power, full steam on, was of the slightest avail in conjuring up satisfactory outlines for these celestial beings. A brilliant idea struck our handy man, and he speedily unearthed from a dusty corner of the shop an old-fashioned coffin plate, on which were a couple of first-class angels. These James the artist made an enlarged sketch of. Prospects brightened, and immortal glory was shimmering down upon our friends when the tinsmith insisted upon having a quantity of black paint with which to do some shading and bring out the white figures better. Jamie Band, however, flatly declined, sternly declaring he “widna alloo a single smodd o’ black about the angels.” On this the other James threw down his brush and threw up his job, and the Queen wept bitterly when she was informed of the banner which was never finished. What became of it is one of the historic mysteries which will probably never be solved. But we must agree to a halt. During the spring of 1898 our friend suffered from a severe attack of influenza, and on the forenoon of Sunday, 17th April, while the church bells were ringing, our friend breathed his last. Few men in his position were better known; no one was better liked for his obliging disposition, his pawky manner, his truthfulness, and sterling honesty.