

## XXXVII.

### THE DEIL O' GLENISLA.

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Rab, ye're an honest rogue!

—Baillie NICOLL JARVIE.

This extraordinary character, the "Deil o' Genisla," has been likened to Rob Roy in at least one particular—his habit of confining his unwelcome attentions practically to the best paying class of customers and letting his poorer brethren alone; even sharing his spoils with some of them at times. Hence the equanimity with which his irregular methods were regarded generally. It was only a very small section of the community that suffered, and they might go hang while the majority enjoyed the sport. The victims themselves were frequently forced to grin and bear it rather than raise a din about things which would have put them in a more ridiculous light. But we miss the glory and romance of the bold Macgregor: no gory dirks or swingeing broadswords or mortal combats or feats of prowess on generous dramatic lines figure in the history of the Deil, and if there was blood upon his head—or his hands—nothing more serious than sticking a stolen sheep or thraving the necks of some old wives' fowls was likely to be the cause. All the same, his life and environment are sufficiently strange to

#### EXCITE ASTONISHMENT

that such things could be. His real name was James Ramsay, and his birthplace Dundee,

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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where he first saw light in 1777. He was variously known as Ramsay, "Bamff," "the Deil o' Glenisla," and "the King o' Lintrathen." "Bamff" was his own preference, as that implied some recognition of his claim to be connected with the Ramsays of Bamff. It was never ascertained, however, that the family were particularly anxious to have the relationship established. When he left Dundee is not known, but he begins to be heard of in the Alyth and Glenisla districts about the beginning of last century, and for a period of over 40 years we know of his cantrips. For a long while he occupied a house at the corner of a field about three hundred yards to the east of the present inn at the Kirkton of Glenisla. The floor of the cottage was only a little above the level of Melgum Water, close by. One night, when a sudden spate came down, the Deil awoke to find everything under water that could not float, with the cat sailing about on the top of the bellows. He was supposed to work a bit of land and "troke" away with agricultural produce by means of a horse and cart; but the fact probably is that he found it much more profitable to ignore squeamish distinctions as to *meum* and *tuum* than bother about the price of stock or grain, and relied much more upon his wits than the sweat of his brow. Nobody seemed particularly anxious to know how he lived, and his horse was chiefly supported by "grab." One of the earliest stories about him is

### A SMUGGLING ONE.

He was coming along the road towards Alyth one day with two ankers of stuff concealed in the bottom of a cart, when he espied two gaugers approaching. Before he had caught their eye he turned off into a steading which happened to be

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close by, buried his kegs in the pigs' reed, and got back to the road before the officials came up. They made an inspection of his cart, with a joke, but, seeing nothing, passed on. By and bye, when he considered it safe, he returned to the steading, lifted his malodorous kegs, and, seeing no one at hand, could not resist the temptation to carry off three or four fowls that persisted in getting in his way. These were missed next day, and the guilty party suspected, but no trace of them could be discovered, and when accused he had the presence of mind to refer the farmer to the gaugers, who testified there was nothing in his cart when they searched it. He was never without a smuggled "drap" in his house, and at night, especially in winter, many a rough scene was witnessed there. One night the company was particularly hilarious, and the Deil, in the best of moods, prepared supper. A farmer present had lost a sheep shortly before, and his host showed great anxiety that he should not spare the mutton, "For," said he, "that's a' ye're likely to see o' your wether!" On one occasion he made off with a score of sheep, drove them to Dundee, and disposed of them before they were missed. He appropriated a cow on another occasion, and had her sold at Alyth market before the irate owner put in an appearance. The Deil simply snapped his fingers in reply to the swearing he got.

### HE WAS CAUGHT

helping himself from the corn bing at the farm of Foldend, Lintrathen, one day by Mr Fenton, the farmer. "What are you daein' there, Ramsay?" asked he sharply. "Oh, juist takin' a pickle cauff, sir; juist a pickle cauff!" replied the Deil in his blandest tones; and so completely was the good-natured farmer taken in

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that he actually assisted the rascal to carry out the sack of corn to the cart outside. He had a collie dog that knew its business well. One day the couple were passing the smithy at Kilry, and the dog captured a fine plump chicken, which his master quickly hid at the bottom of his cart. But the guidwife saw, and flew out upon him. "Far are ye gaen wi' ma chuck!" exclaimed she. The Deil was indignant. "Your chuck!" quo' he; "hae ye lost ane?" "Ay, fine ye ken that, ye scoondrel, and hae it this verra meenit in your cart there!" Now, Dutch chickens have the peculiarity of lacking the tail, and the Deil, fumbling at the bottom of the cart, managed to deprive the luckless fowl of that appendage. "Fat sort o' bird was it, noo?" asked he. She told him, whereupon he produced the only one he had, which was manifestly Dutch, and he drove off before the dumfounded wife had recovered speech. He was offering a cartload of peats for sale. John How, flesher, Alyth, asked him where he had got them; nobody ever supposed he came by anything honestly. "Fat needs ye speir?" was the reply; "I ca' frae the moss as lang's there's peats to ca', syne I jüst help mysel' at ony peat-stack where they can be spaired!" On the same lines was his reply when he asked the "lend o' a cow" from a farmer, and the latter said—"Far hae ye meat to gi'e a cow, man!" "Tak' ma wird for't," retorted the Deil, significantly, "gin I hae a coo she'll no want meat!" Anything on the roadside to which he took a fancy he never hesitated to appropriate if able, but the curious thing was that although the owners missed their property and knew where it had gone, they never made any complaint. They simply went to Ramsay and mentioned they were

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in a bad way for such and such articles, and their own goods, if not perishable, were generally returned to them. He was such

### AN INCORRIGIBLE PILFERER

that a former innkeeper took a stolen spade of his own out of the Deil's cart twice in one day—almost as good as Petticoat Lane, where one might have his handkerchief stolen at one end, and sold to him at the other. A farmer having missed a bridle, and our friend having passed that way, his son was sent after him, found the bridle in the cart, and managed to get off with it without being noticed by the unconcerned driver. One day the Deil ran off with the minister of Glenisla. The rev. gentleman was jogging along on his nag to Kirrie market, when he made up on his Satanic Majesty. He did not just say to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" but it amounted much to the same thing, for he invited the Deil to ride at his back, warning him at the same time, however, to "behave himself." The Deil's hoofs—or feet—were tired, and he was only too glad to accept the offer. Things went all right with this odd-looking couple till they reached the market-stance, when the minister asked the party behind to get down, instead of doing which the disturber of peace gave the animal a great whack with his stick, which set it off at a trot, while he bawled out at the top of his voice for the entertainment of the unsanctified crowd, "Ha, ha, lads! Juist see here—the

### DEIL'S AWA' WI' THE MINISTER!"

Another very amusing trick he played upon a couple of shoemakers. He ordered a pair of boots from each, the understanding being that he was to pay for them on delivery. But when

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delivery came, to each of the messengers in turn he confided as something quite unprecedented that he was short of cash, but he would look along to Alyth in a day or two to pay for the boots. The messengers had strict orders—c.o.d.—or bring back the boots. The plausible schemer managed, however, to get one of each consignment left behind—for different feet, depend upon it—and, although a little “off” as a pair, they were “a gran’ fit,” he declared, “an’ far wad ye get a chaper pair?” He was on the road to Kirrie on one occasion when he was met by the farmer of Pitewan, who gave him a line to an ironmonger for a pair of iron rings for cart wheels, and arranged with the Deil to take them to the blacksmith at Pitmuddie (David Grewar), where they were to be left. The Deil not only brought the rings to the smith, but got them put on his own cart wheels, and drove off with them in great glee. He met Pitewan coming along with his cart to the smiddy. “Did ye get thae rings a’ richt, Ramsay?” inquired the farmer. “’Deed did I,” replied he, “jist look at them. Man, aren’t they rinnin’ round fine?” and off he bolted. His landlord ordered him to quit his house, but he would not budge and had to be ejected, his “furniture” being thrown into the road, and, to make things siccar, the old “rickle” of a building he had occupied was razed to the ground. The man of resource had expected as much, however, and without any concern took up residence in a neighbouring sandhole. Here he did a big business, and managed to get the use of another old house at Dyke End, Lintrathen, when winter came on. There he remained for many years thereafter, his horse occupying one end and he the other, one entrance serving for both. By

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and by, age telling upon him, he became more and more dependent upon the kind offices of his neighbours, who did not fail him, for, as already hinted, the Deil was not so black as he was painted, and was known to have done

### MANY A GOOD TURN

when it was in his power. With his old grey horse and his cart he was at the bidding of any one who required his services, for which he would never take money, a bite or sup and a dram for himself, and a feed for his horse from those who could give it, being all his demands. He generally carried a pocketful of pease with which to treat the boys, with whom he was in great favour, but he was a terror to the girls, as he always professed to be in a great state to kiss them. It was a sad day when, having become unable to look after his horse, it had to be sold. Then, weakness increasing, he was taken away by some relatives, with whom he ended his days some time about 1855, when nearly 70 years of age, and was buried at Lintrathen. Our esteemed friend, "Auld C." (Mr John Smith, Alyth), touches off the Deil in this lively fashion.

A richt queer billie was the De'il,  
A rattlin' loon to rive an' steal;  
Auld Nickie schuled his name-son weel  
    To work his wab;  
The saintly sheep he weel did keel,  
    But ne'er luit dab.

Stravaigin' wi' his horse an' cairt,  
Aye turnin' roond some ither airt,  
Aye leavin' nocht in hale or pairt  
    Gin he had room;  
He neither had the hand nor heart  
    To drive hame tume.



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Baith stock an' stockin' slipped awa',  
Kail, neeps, hay, tatties, girse, an' straw,  
Stooks o' corn, hale stacks an' a'—

Naething cam' wrang;  
The De'il took credit for them a'—  
His score ran lang.

At times the cadgin' trade he tried,  
But stinkin' fish he always cried,  
An' richt or wrang, it's no denied—  
The story's true,  
For neither tongue nor hands were tied—  
Baith would be noo.

In yon wee shiel at the Dyke-end  
Mony a wicht his wye wud wend,  
For meat an' drink o' ilka blend—  
Sometimes his ain—  
An' fowls whase pedigree nane ken'd  
Were put frae layin'.

But noo I maun gie owre this spring,  
Nae mair wi' glee yon rafters ring,  
An', glad or sad, I canna sing—  
Peace to each shiel—  
Lintrathen lang syne lost its King,  
Dyke-end its De'il.