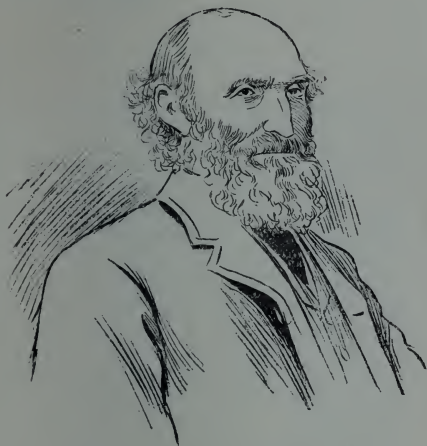


# JAMES CROCKART.



INVENTOR, CHAMPION SHOT,  
AND ANGLER.

## XLIII.

### JAMES CROCKART, INVENTOR, CHAMPION SHOT, AND ANGLER.

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It is astonishing the pleasure everybody experiences in people of "individuality;" in that respect, at least, these are always interesting, whatever their status in creation or society. If one asks the reason why, there is but one answer—it is because they act simply, naturally; because they allow their real personalities free play and expression. If a step farther be taken, and it is inquired how it comes about that this naturalness is always attractive, the only answer seems to be that we somehow get into closer touch with the inscrutable source of all being, animate and inanimate, than is possible with the ordinary custom-encased, self-willed, and self-conscious man. Individuality was the dominant note in James Crockart's composition, as it was in that of his old and intimate friend, the late Dr Lunan, who predeceased him by some two years. The doctor, however, was necessarily much more in the eye of the public than Mr Crockart, who spent the most of his time in his workshop among his guns and fishing-rods and ingenious contrivances. For tastes they had much in common, but although the man of medicine was a noted shot in his day, he never was an angler, while the subject of our

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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sketch held a premier position as both, and was famous as a maker of guns and fishing rods to boot. He was

### A REMARKABLE MAN

from every point of view—even in appearance, having a finely developed head, particularly about the imaginative and reflective faculties; a strongly curved nose, rather high cheek-bones, and small but deep - sunk penetrating eyes. The Gask district claimed him as a native, the year of his birth being 1817. His father lived for several years at the "Brig o' Isla," near Cargill and the confluence of the Isla and the Tay. Here the piscatorial inclinations of his boy James had full scope for development. Never having been taught any trade, he took readily to toll-keeping like his father, and like him, was located in different parts of the country—Newtyle and Eassie among others—before finding a permanent home in Blairgowrie, which he did in 1852.

By this time he had managed, by pure force of mechanical genius, to teach himself the use of the turning-lathe and other tools connected with gun and rod-making, and he started a shop in the Wellmeadow, where the old Perthshire Arms used to stand. The excellence of his work brought such business that he had to remove to larger premises on the east side of Allan Street, after a number of years in which he built a large shop and workshop for himself on the opposite side, where he wrought for the remainder of his days. It is difficult saying whether it was for his guns or his rods that he was most celebrated. With respect to the former, it is well known that in the early days of the rifle he effected certain alterations in the rifling which greatly improved the trajectory

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## James Crockart.

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power of that weapon, but, neglecting to patent them, other makers became acquainted with them, and duly annexed them. The

### OLEVER BLAIRGOWRIE GUNSMITH

was by this time sending out his own make of rifle all over the country, so that it was quite an easy matter for any one in the line to copy his ideas. When it is stated that he made rifles, the word is to be understood in its fullest sense, for he designed and made every part of them, "stock, lock, and barrel," and beautiful samples of workmanship they were. He made his own tools also; no matter how delicate or intricate the work he was asked to do, if he did not possess the requisite tools for the purpose, he set to and contrived them—all, be it remembered, without ever having received a lesson in one thing or another. He was emphatically a man of mechanical ideas, a man of resource and device.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who declared that a man who could not bore a hole with a saw and saw with an augur was of no use in the world, would have delighted in the Blairgowrie genius, who had hand and eye so perfectly trained that he could make a fine thread inside a narrow tube on a turning-lathe as accurately with an ordinary steel point as with a "tap." It was with

### HIS OWN MAKE OF RIFLE

that both he and Dr Lunan performed their remarkable exploits in the early sixties at Aberdeen, Forfar, and St Andrews. The last-named place, as related in the sketch of Dr Lunan, was the scene of probably the greatest triumph of the two cronies, who fairly "swept the boards" in the way of prizes during a wappinschaw there,

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

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the principal trophies—a cup and piece of plate for the county and city respectively—together with some other things of less note, becoming their property. It was all arranged beforehand that the gunsmith should enter for the one great event and the doctor for the other, and both came out at the top.

Crockart managed his share of the contract all right some time before his partner, whose last shot at a thousand yards was fired under most dramatic conditions—a party rushing forward just as he was preparing to aim with the information, obviously intended to put him in a state of nerves, that he would have to make a “centre” (counting two in those days) to tie with his opponent, and a “bull’s-eye” (counting three) to beat him. What the brusque, plain-speaking Blairgowrie doctor said in reply was never intended for ears polite, but the on-lookers enjoyed it immensely; and when at last the final bullet found its billet as

### A “BULL’S-EYE”

their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Our friend the gunsmith was never able to use the rifle again, however, after a certain occasion when he received from behind the contents of a gamekeeper’s gun at fifteen paces distant—some of the pellets going right through the back of his neck into his throat. Even up till his death he had some thirty remaining in his head; it seems miraculous he was not killed outright.

He was always ready for a day’s sport with the fowling-piece notwithstanding this, and was a prime shot. From the time that the late Mr Grimond acquired the estate of Glenericht (in 1868) till within a year or two of our veteran sportsman’s death, he never missed a Twelfth with the genial laird. As an angler, again, he

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## James Crockart.

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had no equal in the district; probably not in Perthshire. His instinct for the proper flies, where to find the fish, and every other matter of importance to disciples of the immortal Izaak was as infallible as it was incommunicable.

While other anglers of experience would be fumbling at their hookbook in a state of desperation for something to tempt the fish, or whipping the water with barren results, the veteran angler, father of them all, seemed to take the first fly that came to hand, the fish seemed to rise at the first cast, and he would go on quietly

### FILLING HIS BASKET

without any trouble or fuss whatever. Rare old Izaak and he would have chummed it thoroughly had they known each other. One can imagine the English worthy whispering in the ear of his northern brother—"It is said by many that the angler must observe his twelve several flies for the twelve months of the year: what think you of that, Piscator?" "I never think of it at all." That makes the old man laugh, and he adds—"I say, he that follows that rule shall be as sure to catch fish and be as wise as he that makes hay by the fair days in an almanac!" Then, touching the excellence of our friend's rods, how the angler's patron saint would have gloried in the possession of one! Every one of them was a work of art; the maker took as much care in the selection of the wood, in the balancing of the different parts, the varnishing and fitting, as though he were trying to emulate Stradivari with his violins. He had made violins, too, in his youth; the probability is that had he continued at them he would have come out among the noted Scottish makers; but his sporting tastes drew him into the gun and fishing tackle

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## Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies.

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business, and monopolised his time and abilities. As it is, his work is the prized possession of innumerable patrons scattered all over the world.

### OUR WORTHY OLD FRIEND

was a keen politician, a great Radical, with clear, well-defined views about all public questions. The South Free Church, Blairgowrie, was his home in religious matters, but he was ruled by charity rather than dogma in all his thoughts and actions affecting others. Possessed of a splendid constitution, he enjoyed the best of health throughout a long life till near the close. The death of old Doctor Lunan, his life-long friend, was a great blow to him; the spirit of the warrior seemed broken, and he declared himself that he would not be long in following. As a matter of fact, he had a serious illness shortly thereafter, managing to pull through with difficulty; but was overtaken at last by the sure-footed and insatiable hunter of men on the 12th October 1896, in his 79th year.