

**WILLIAM DAVIE,
BLAIRGOWRIE AND DUNKELD.**



LOCAL HISTORIAN AND ALTRUIST.

XLV.

WILLIAM DAVIE,

BLAIRGOWRIE AND DUNKELD.

Among the curiosities of human nature to the reflective mind must always be reckoned patriotism. To many people the suggestion may be the only curious thing about it; but when one considers the supreme exaltation over every other nation which each nation makes of its own particular allotment on the earth's surface, and how every man has a weakness for believing in his heart that his own native parish or village or county is the finest in existence, and is always the dearest, there is sufficient matter to give one pause, since it is manifest that all cannot be right. Early associations doubtless count for much in the explanation; there be those, however, who are inclined to think that physical causes of a less elusive character count for more. The mere fact, they argue, that this "too solid flesh" has to subsist on the products of the soil, vegetable and animal, cannot but bind us to the particular spot we fondly designate "home" in a manner as indissoluble as it is inevitable; and all the spirit and beauty of our native land blossom and breathe through its children as truly as through its fields of waving grain, its storm-tossed forests, its leaping waters, its heather-clad hills. We are "one with nature" indeed because we cannot help ourselves, and patriotism is as much a matter of birth and breeding as filial affection. The subject cannot be pursued here, however

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interesting, but is suggested on taking up the consideration of the

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS

of our friend the late Mr Davie; than whom no one ever had a more intense love for his place of birth and everything and everybody connected with it. He was born in Blairgowrie, where his father was an ironmonger, in 1832; served his apprenticeship in the shop, and afterwards proceeded to Kilmarnock and Dundee in order to acquire additional experience before returning to Blair and succeeding his father in the business. To this he added the seed trade, and wrought the whole up to be one of the most prosperous in the county, our friend being always in the van of progress and improvement. Amongst other things, he was one of the first to recognise the advantage of having different colours of paints put up in small quantities, and had paraffin lamps on sale before any one else so far north. Over 20 years ago, after a long spell of close application to business, he retired; built a handsome villa for himself at Dunkeld, and there resided for the greater part of the year—never, however, slackening the ties of affection and memory which bound him to Blair. Only a week before his death he had been making a round of visits in his native place.

Intellectually, Mr Davie was of a keen, inquiring turn of mind, more particularly for science in his early life. Back in the early fifties, when he was one of the old

LEADING LIGHTS

of Blairgowrie Mechanics' Institute—Bailie Steven is the last now remaining—he read a very ingenious paper entitled “A Trip from the Earth to Venus,” in which he not only showed great familiarity with the views of the time regarding

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electricity, astronomy, &c., but advanced certain theories of his own in respect to the question of the inhabitation of Venus, the relation of electricity and ether to the vital forces, and other matters of curious interest. He was the last of those who had attended the early meetings of Blairgowrie and Rattray Y.M.C.A. in 1848, and always kept up his connection with that body. He was also a member of the old "First Free," Blairgowrie (St Andrew's U.F. now), from the beginning, in 1843, and never ceased to take an active interest in its welfare.

He had many hobbies—including the violin, gardening, photography, &c.—but there was none of them yielded such delight as dabbling in local history, and in that line he came to be recognised as

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in all matters pertaining to the district. He wielded a facile pen, and a good deal of his work saw daylight, but very much more was held back, our friend being one of the most modest of men, and one of the most generous with his material. The present writer has had to acknowledge his indebtedness to him on more than one occasion, and every one taking any interest in local history has the same tale to tell. Nothing came amiss to him, and his well-stored and retentive memory never failed to respond to the most exacting demands made upon it. From the Roman invasion and the much debated battle of Mons Grampius down to the removal of some old signboard; from the true signification of the "Druidical stones" down to the shape of Post Reid's hat, it was all the same; he seemed to have gleaned all there was to know on the subject. Was it a question of the authenticity of an anecdote? a date to be

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settled? a genealogy? some old custom or tradition? the configuration of Blair in old times?

“ASK MR DAVIE!”

and ten to one satisfaction would be the result. An evening's "crack" with him at his social hearth, when, say, the "old Fair o' Blair" and the "characters" of his boyhood were the theme, his features aglow as he laid the matter off in great style, was an experience never to be forgotten, and never to be enjoyed by the present generation again. Other *laudatores temporis acti* remain, other local historians, but there was only one William Davie. He could turn out very good verse also on occasions, generally with local themes of a humorous character; he even attempted musical composition, a number of song and dance melodies remaining to his credit.

In passing, it may be noted that Mr Davie was a man of very handsome features, with forehead high and broad, rather bushy eyebrows over deep-set, bright, and penetrating eyes, never without a humorous twinkle within their depths; well-formed nose; mouth always on smile; chin full and inclined to dimple—a kindly, attractive face, one that claimed the beholder's allegiance at once. His voice and manner were in perfect keeping with it; there was a certain old-world flavour about his never-failing courtesy to friends that was as rare as it was charming.

Touching his connection with public affairs, there is, of course, in the very forefront of consideration the vexed question of

THE DAVIE PARK,

gifted to the burghs of Blairgowrie and Rattray in 1887 by Mr Davie and his sister, Mrs Nicoll. Mr Davie's express wish and understanding was that his gift of the 11-acre field

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should be added to by the purchase of an adjoining one of 9 acres, upon which he had obtained an "option" at a low figure; but the scheme fell through owing to the mismanagement of the Committee, and the donor handed his gift over to the two Provosts for the time being and Mr J. B. Miller, solicitor, as trustees, till such time as the "Park" should bring in funds as an arable property sufficient to wall it in, lay it out, &c.

The only return Mr Davie got was a plentiful supply of abuse for not doing more. There is a stirring of the waters at present which almost seems to augur the throwing open of the Park to the public at an early date. His

HANDSOME DONATIONS

(£1000) to Blairgowrie and District Cottage Hospital, an institution in which he took great interest; his bequest of £1000 for a mortuary; his donations to St Andrew's U.F. Church, Blairgowrie; to the U.F. Church, Dunkeld, &c., are well known; and his private benefactions were equally creditable to the goodness of his heart.

The last occasion on which the writer visited Mr Davie at Dunkeld was a few weeks before his death. It was a day which the deceased gentleman devoted to his friends' service with that whole-heartedness which characterised everything he did. Before making a start for the railway station the writer tendered his thanks for all his kindness and apologies for monopolising so much of his time. The reply he made will always remain a memorable one.

"Don't mention it, don't mention it," he exclaimed, lying back in his chair with a short laugh, and spreading his hands abroad; "I don't think there's another man who lives a more altruistic life than I do. I am entirely at the service of my friends."

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The words were uttered simply and unaffectedly, and, difficult though they were, became no one better than our old friend.

IT WAS ONLY FITTING

that such a man who, as was truly said of him after his death, was exceptional in wearing “ ‘ the white flower of a blameless life’ amid the fierce light which beats on those who dwell among their own people in a small country town,” that his end should be peaceful. And so it was. It came suddenly on Sunday night, 12th October last, in the midst of a few friends who had come to pass the evening with him. The following expressive lines, written by Mr Davie’s life-long friend, Bailie Steven, fittingly close this brief appreciation of a very worthy Christian gentleman:—

True friend and brother, worthy of a place
In our remembrance through the coming years,
Loyal to truth and duty ’mong thy peers;
Warm-hearted, generous in blame or praise,
Accepting life, weightied with hopes and fears,
Wearing aspect benign through cloudy days,
As God’s good gift; living as one who hears
A voice from the unseen ’mid life’s perplexing maze;

Gone from our sight with no word of farewell,
To linger over as we think of thee,
And that is sad for some who loved thee well
And prize last words of thine in memory
Of vanished years and old-time friendship’s spell;
This hope remains—“What was, again may be.”

And still we think of thee as gone away
On some kind errand just as heretofore;
Welcome wert thou at many a friendly door,
And in kind converse would prolong thy stay.
Why should it happen otherwise to-day?
God’s sunshine floods the landscape as of yore,
In ordered sequence life goes as before,
And thy old friends remain as yesterday.

Still, God’s hand holds thee, and the vacant chair
Awaits thy coming as an honoured guest,
Where thou may’st take thy place among the rest,
And all the household love and goodness share,
And be to those who knew and loved thee best,
An ever-welcome unseen Presence there.