

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A MODEL SCHOOLMASTER.

“ Who watches o’er the bent of youth,  
And while a paltry stipend earning,  
He sows the richest seeds of learning,  
And tills their minds with proper care,  
And sees them their due produce bear.”

ROBERT LLOYD, 1733.

**P**ERHAPS the greatest boon vouchsafed to a rural parish is a good schoolmaster. Apart from his teaching abilities, his character ought to be of such a high standard as to influence his pupils, for we know that the young minds are greatly influenced by the individuality of their teachers. Many notable men have borne testimony to this.

Mr. George Gillan had been for many years schoolmaster in the parish of Aberlour. He was succeeded by Mr. Murdoch, M.A., a graduate of Aberdeen University. Until his advent geography was only taught to one or two pupils. Upon the revolving globe he made geography a special item in his curriculum. Maps were hung upon the walls that hitherto had been bare of any educational or pictorial prints. In a short time Mr. Murdoch “got a church.” When it became known that he was to be succeeded by Mr. Grant, the late esteemed schoolmaster of the parish, the people of Aberlour rejoiced greatly. He was well-known to them personally, and his high reputation as a teacher was widely recognised. Young men from surrounding parishes went to his school to “finish” under his able tuition. He was as fine a type of Strathspey man as could have been found between the two Craigellachies. An accomplished violinist, he composed several fine Strathspeys, and rendered them with true Highland taste and spirit. His intimate knowledge of Strathspey music made him an authority upon the difference of the time that should be played to the real Highland reel and the Strathspey proper. The violin was only one of Mr. Grant’s accomplishments. As an angler he was perhaps the most successful and the neatest at throwing a

line on "the run o' Spey." His inborn love of flowers made the schoolhouse garden a perfect paradise. To sit with him there of an evening and listen to the graphic account that he was wont to give of his adventures with the rod and gun never failed to entrance the listener. His hospitality was unbounded, and dispensed with a grace that was characteristic of a true-born Strathspey man. It was with reluctance that he permitted me to publish the following verses. The reader will see that along with other accomplishments he possessed the poetical gift in no small degree.

## SONG—BANKS OF NETHY.

Dearest lassie, come wi' me  
An' scent the flow'rs that feed the bee,  
An' pu' the nuts frae hazel tree  
In woods o' Abernethy.

The groves are vocal wi' the sang  
O' little birds the trees amang ;  
The cuckoo's note re-echoes lang  
Through woods o' Abernethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

Oh, Jeannie, lass, while through the braes  
We gather'd hips an' hawthorn slaes,  
Too short to me seem'd summer days  
Wi' you in Abernethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

Red evrans frae a heath'ry sheet,  
Ripe brawlans an' blaberries sweet  
I'll gi'e to thee if me you meet  
Upon the banks o' Nethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

Oh, Donald, lad, ye ken fu' weel  
My heart to you's been true an' leal,  
Since bairnies runnin' through the dell,  
Beside the banks o' Nethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

When I your locks to rowans tied,  
An' you my cheeks wi' brambles dyed,  
I promised then to be your bride,  
Upon the banks o' Nethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

My lowly shieling is nae braw,  
Nae lofty rooms, nor painted ha',  
But wi' my Jane I'll share it a',  
Upon the banks o' Nethy.  
Dearest lassie, &c.

Cairngorm's wint'ry snow  
 May down the rocky Garvault blow ;  
 But Jane nae cauld nor want shall know  
 Wi' me on banks o' Nethy.  
 Dearest lassie, &c.

I ha'e a craft, wi' twa-three kye,  
 Four score o' sheep, an' lambs forby ;  
 Wi' you, my Jane, I'll live an' die  
 Upon the banks o' Nethy.  
 Dearest lassie, &c.

When the late Miss Grant of Aberlour attained her majority, a party of ninety local gentlemen met to celebrate the event. Mr. Charles Grant was in the chair. Mr. Wharton Duff of Orton remarked to the chairman that the event ought to be embalmed in verse. Two days after, Mr. Grant wrote the following lines :—

#### NELL OF ABERLOUR.

When ev'ning spreads its sable cov'ring  
 Over yonder Tuscan tower,  
 The blissful hour is then returning  
 To meet sweet Nell of Aberlour ;  
 Her breath is sweeter than the zephyr  
 Wafting perfumes through this dell ;  
 Ye fickle fates, grant me favour,  
 My young, my charming, lovely Nell.

Sweet's the harebell's early blossom,  
 Sweet as cowslips in the dell ;  
 Sweet are rosebuds when they open,  
 But sweeter far is lovely Nell.  
 Their fragrance gives a transient pleasure,  
 Their beauty's fading every hour,  
 Unlike to her who is my treasure,  
 Lovely Nell of Aberlour.

Cairngorm's wild and dreary,  
 Tow'ring hills are frowning nigh ;  
 Through Glens'an from rocky eyrie  
 Eagles soar with lonely cry.  
 There my fancy lov'd to wander,  
 Where the stormy tempests lour,  
 But chief o'er all my thoughts now ponder  
 On sweet Nell of Aberlour.

Benrinn's moors I've travers'd over,  
 With my trusty dog and gun ;  
 I have angl'd Spey's deep river  
 And its silver monarch won.  
 These sportings are but vain and fleeting  
 To beguile a vacant hour,  
 May she who has my heart in keeping  
 Be mine, sweet Nell of Aberlour.

Many of the Grants appear to have possessed the true interpretation of Strathspey music. The late Mr. Donald Grant, of Grantown, was the best player of reel music in Strathspey in his time. Like Neil Gow, he had two sons nearly equal to their father in handling the bow. There were also two brothers, William and John Grant, locally known as the two "Glennies," having been born in Glenarder, in the parish of Knockando. The eldest brother was accomplished in classic music, but both were famous players of Strathspeys. John I can well remember as a teacher of dancing. He was wont to stand fiddle in hand, playing it while his pupils went through the evolutions of a quadrille or country dance. If they failed in correctly going through the figure, he was wont to go through it for their edification, playing his violin the while, with a nimbleness and grace that astonished his pupils. Both brothers were noted for their graceful figures. So was Mr. Charles Grant. He was perhaps as fine a specimen of a Highland gentleman as could have been found in Strathspey, and the writer has dedicated to his memory the following lines:—

My heart is sad. Alas! no more  
 He'll meet me at the schoolhouse door;  
 Nor e'er again will we explore  
     His garden sweet,  
 Where we were wont in days of yore  
     At eve to meet.

That schoolhouse garden, neat and trim,  
 Was paradise to me and him;  
 There till the red moon showed her rim,  
     And stars appear,  
 We watched the circling hills grow dim,  
     In converse dear.

There on his dear-loved garden seat,  
 His manly form, so spruce and neat,  
 With beaming face he would repeat,  
     And fluent tongue,  
 Details of many a hardy feat  
     When he was young.

Quick his celtic blood would rise,  
 And fiery feeling filled his eyes,  
 When he played "oor ain Strathspeys"  
     With magic hand,  
 The soul of melody would rise  
     At his command.

His matchless skill in celtic strains  
 Made the blood dance within our veins,  
 Till we forgot life's ills and pains  
     In rapturous trance;  
 We thought the worldling's empty gains  
     Not worth a dance.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF A SPEYSIDE PARISH.

His nimble hand now stiffened lies,  
That dressed by art such matchless flies :  
They made the silver salmon rise  
    To certain death ;  
No more, alas ! he'll scan the skies,  
    Nor don his graith.

By flowing Spey no more he'll stand,  
Nor weild again his matchless wand,  
That made the curling line expand  
    Like a living thing—  
That by the power of his hand  
    Was made to spring.

With earth and earthly sports he's done,  
At dawn no more he'll hail the sun ;  
He'll don no more his bag and gun,  
    To tread the hill ;  
His lengthened thread of life is spun,  
    And he lies still.

Kind hands have laid him to his rest  
Amidst the scenes he loved the best,  
Where waves the pine, his ancient crest,  
    For ever green ;  
Lie lightly, earth, upon his breast—  
    Most kind, I ween.