

**Mrs BAXTER-MITCHELL,
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



Mrs B. Mitchell.

**A GENTLEWOMAN
OF THE
OLD SCHOOL.**

IV.

MRS BAXTER-MITCHELL, BLAIRGOWRIE.

To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die.—CAMPBELL.

Mrs Baxter-Mitchell, of Ashbank, Blairgowrie, was a very attractive personality. It was like a whiff from an old-fashioned garden, with its wallflower and spearmint, its mignonette, thyme, and carnations, to come into her presence. Her wit, vivacity, genial human sympathies, and unconventionality of manner somehow always suggested the ideal Scots gentlewoman of a hundred years ago. She was born at Inverness in 1823. Her father, Campbell Gardner, was a supervisor of Excise in Edinburgh, where his brother was for many years City Chamberlain. Her mother was the beautiful Miss Dick of Tullymet, in whose honour Niel Gow composed his "Braes of Tullymet." The marriage was a romantic one; incidentally, it took place at midnight! It was characteristic of the young lady to jump the Keith on the Ericht ("Donald Cargill's Leap") on one occasion—the only instance, it is believed, of

A LADY ACCOMPLISHING THE FEAT.

Miss Dick's oldest sister was married to Peter M'Intosh, who started the "Muckle Mill"—the first on the Ericht; her brother, Colonel Robert Dick, was the youngest officer of that rank in the

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

British Army at the time, and led the 42d at Waterloo, where he had his horse shot under him. He was made General Sir Robert after the battle, and finished his course at Sabraon. Our friend was educated at Inverness Academy, came to Blairgowrie in 1841, and was married to John Baxter in 1844 when 21 years of age, taking up home at Ashbank, near Blairgowrie, where her husband had built a mill for flax and tow in 1836. She became a widow in 1869; married James Mitchell in 1886; found herself widowed once more in 1891; and resigned life herself on the 30th August 1895 when 72 years of age. Mrs Baxter — she hardly ever got anything else even after her second marriage— was notable for an irresistible, bright, sunshiny manner, a nimble and perfectly spontaneous wit, and a gift of mimicry that could keep everyone in fits of laughter as long as she chose. She had received a liberal education, could talk French fluently, was a great reader, and had a splendid memory. It would be an easy matter to fill a fair-sized volume with the “good things” that could be told of her, and she often spoke of writing a book of reminiscences herself, which would have been rare reading; but *fata obstant*, and

A FEW RANDOM ANECDOTES

must suffice. At a dinner party a discussion arose between Professor Stuart Blackie and another Professor regarding the name of a book, which the former held was called “Satan’s Invisible World Revealed,” and the latter thought it was “Satan’s Invisible World Displayed.” “I beg your pardon, gentlemen,” interposed our friend, “but you are both wrong. The name of the book is ‘Satan’s Invisible World *Discovered*,’” which was correct. One day she gave a grand garden

Mrs Baxter=Mitchell, Blairgowrie.

party at Ashbank, and met her guests half-way down the avenue. "You are quite 'Diana of the Ephesians' to-day," remarked one of her guests—that name having been applied to Mrs Baxter sometimes. "Oh," replied she, in a whisper, "walk a little farther on and you'll discover the Queen of Sheba in all her glory!"—alluding to a highly-dressed lady from Edinburgh who used to astonish the natives with her magnificent toilets. A lady friend from Dundee who had taken a house for the season in the neighbourhood, complained she was paying "£20 a month, and yet," exclaimed she, "look at that carpet—every bit of it mended!" "Yes," said Mrs Baxter, sympathetically, "that's what I call a darned shame." One of the

MOST AMUSING PRANKS

she ever played was some fourteen months after her marriage, when a gentleman, an old admirer, called upon her, and asked the astonishing question how many children she had. The young wife answered quite demurely, "Three." "Dear me," exclaimed he, "I should like to see them." "So you shall," was the reply. Accordingly, skipping out of the room, she returned with her only child, a boy of about four months, who had just been put in short clothes, and he was duly admired. "What about the others?" asked the visitor. "All in good time, *mon ami!*" Leaving the room again, in a twinkling she had her infant out of his clothes, hair divided down the middle, pelisse and hat on: *voilà!* her little girl going out with the maid. More admiration from the visitor. Then, out again and another quick change into long robes, cap, and shawl, and there was the baby just awakened and crying lustily! It was only when

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

he found himself the laughing-stock of the district that the poor fellow realised how he had been hoaxed. Mr Baxter himself was frequently the victim of her jokes. One day she dressed herself in an old-fashioned gown and hood of her grandmother's, and, representing an old lady from Meigle—her husband's birthplace—got her maid to announce that "Mrs Mattin" was in the drawing-room. Mr Baxter came in, expressed his delight at meeting her, asked about every one in Meigle, invited her to dinner, and went out to get her some refreshments. Off went the hood and veil, down came the curls, and the old lady of eighty was

THE MISCHIEVOUS YOUNG WIFE

once more. Mr Baxter's astonishment when he returned and found the transformation may be imagined. Our heroine could never let a chance pass of playing off some of her frolics. While on a visit one day to her old aunt M'Intosh, that lady, who was more familiar with Gaelic than English, asked her to read a letter which her daughter-in-law had received that day. Her dutiful but lively niece proceeded to do so in her own way—the writer asking all about the old lady's health, hoping that "she was as young and good-looking as ever," &c., &c. — so that the good old soul was perfectly charmed, and got her daughter-in-law later on to read the letter "once, once again"—only to discover that not even her name was mentioned in it from beginning to end! She had a perfect knack at paying compliments. Meeting a highly-dressed young man coming sailing down Allan Street, she exclaimed—"Dear me, George, is that you? I declare I thought it was the Marquis of Tullibardine!" "That's one young man at least

Mrs Baxter-Mitchell, Blairgowrie.

happy for a day," she confided afterwards. Making a call upon a young lady who had just been married for a second time, but whom she had never met, a rather plain-looking lady—except for her eyes—received her. "Are you Mrs C——?" "Certainly not," was the somewhat indignant response. "Well," remarked the suave visitor, "all I have to say is that if she has as fine eyes as yours there's no wonder she has married her second husband!" which made a young lady, this time, happy for a day. An amusing incident took place once in a Paris hotel. She was giving orders to the waiter, in French, of course, when, in her usual tricky manner, she interjected the Gaelic word "gresort!" ("quick!"). It was funny to see that thoroughbred French waiter shoot out astonished eyes and

ANSWER HER BACK IN GAELIC!

It turned out he came from Pitlochry, within whistling distance of her mother's birthplace! Mrs Baxter was a beautiful dancer; her old master—one of the great Napoleon's refugees in Inverness—used to lament she had not been trained for the opera. Nothing pleased her better on a summer evening than to get her grandchildren out on the lawn and give them a dancing lesson. Never a strolling fiddler or band of musicians but came to know they could always rely upon a hearty welcome at Ashbank. During the fifty-one years she was there it is doubtful if she ever sent a single beggar away empty-handed; she could not pass one on the road without a cheery word and smile, whatever more. One of her favourite couplets was—

The heart that is soonest alive to the flowers
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns,

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

and nothing could describe her own nature better. And two things she never jested about—death and religion—“two solemn realities.”

A couple of days before her death this wonderful old lady danced the steps of a Highland reel at a party in her own house. Life went out as suddenly as an electric light, with hardly a flicker, and the chambers of some lives at least have never been properly lit since.