

Bailie LOW,

BLAIRGOWRIE.



Ex Bailie Low.

MERCHANT OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

XLVI.

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In last article Mr Davie was our theme: in this it seems only fitting that our friend, Bailie Low, who departed life on Feb. 19, 1903, should be introduced to the reader. Both men had much in common—particularly in their strong attachment to their native place, and constant interest in local affairs, men and things, past and present; also in their leaning towards the bizarre and humorous in character, and in their well-stored memories of fact and fiction from the quaint days of yore. In Mr Davie's case, however, there was superadded the gift of the pen, which the Bailie—he never got anything else—neither possessed nor had any desire to possess. He was born at the Muirton of Ardblair, near Blairgowrie, in 1828—his father, Joseph Low, having been also a native of the same old-fashioned clachan, and breathing his last in the same bield he was born in. His grandfather came from the Dunkeld district. Young Thomas received his schooling at Blairgowrie; served his time as tailor with the late Mr Slater; and by and by started business in a humble way about 54 years ago. He was thus

THE OLDEST SHOPKEEPER

in the town, and left no one behind him with the same record. Mr James Ogilvy, brewer,

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comes nearest. He took great interest in public affairs, served nine years on Police Commission and Town Council, in which body, as well as on the old Baronial Town Council, he held the dignity of Bailie. He was also many years a valued member of the old Parochial Board and the Parish Council, as well as of the Water Commission. In the work connected with each of these bodies he put the very best that honest, ungrudging endeavour was capable of. His kindly disposition found congenial occupation also in furthering the interests of the Cottage Home—an institution for aged poor people which he had much to do in getting set agoing.

To know this genial old man intimately was to live over and over again the days of "Old Blair" without the necessity of putting on so many careful years as he had. Not scatheless altogether from his own share of life's worries, they had dealt lightly on the whole with his buoyant nature, and up to the very last touch of outward things he had the spirit of a boy. His tastes were of the simplest kind; the open air, a turn down the riverside or through the Muir of Blair, round the golf course, or through Carsie Woods was exactly to his mind; in company with a congenial companion or two, the pleasure was enhanced; but he always found the

BEST OF GOOD COMPANY

in himself when occasion arose. He was very fond of draughts playing at one period, during the dark nights, but dreaded winter at all times. One of his favourite speculations was aeronautics—regarding which Andree, Maxim, and all the rest of them were "a' wrang, an' a'thigether a' wrang"—and he was wont to declare that when that "balloon" of his was

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perfected—in imagination it always was—he would take up his winter quarters regularly in the centre of Africa or other congenial climate. Another hobby of his took a mechanical turn. He effected several improvements on the sewing machine, but never patented them. He had a great notion to improve the common shirt and trouser buttons—to devise some simple means which would enable their being affixed without sewing, without injuring the material, and give a good “shank,” &c. He used to carry about a varied dozen or so of his “own make,” and was always ready to demonstrate their superiority against all-comers. His acquaintances exhibited commendable faith in the invention by wearing the efforts of his skill occasionally. Of all the weaknesses he was ready to confess to, chief, perhaps, was to lie basking under a summer sun on a muir

AMONG THE HEATHER,

watching the clouds sail past, as lazy as himself; counting the calls of the distant cuckoo with as much relish as the King in his chamber over his money; or recalling in his own quiet, pawky style the days of auld langsyne. That reference to the cuckoo recalls many things about our friend. One June day three of us lay on a certain hillside luxuriating among the bell heather. During the day a cuckoo had been calling at intervals from a copse near the foot of the hill, but no special notice of it had been taken, although its persuasive notes completed the ideal character of the time and place. Two of us were stretched at full length amongst the fragrant bloom, the Bailie sitting upright, bareheaded, beaming, and blissful; not a word had been spoken for some minutes, when by one of those fortuitous concurrences we hear of so frequently—without the slightest premedi-

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tation or arrangement whatever, at the very first note, the Bailie started to

COUNT THE CALLS

as they reached us. "Cuckoo!" — "One!" "Cuckoo!" — "Two!" "Cuckoo!" — "Three!" "Cuckoo!" — "Four!" "Cuckoo!" — "Five!" — our friend's head at each count wagging in the most solemn manner imaginable, for all the world like a Chinaman in a tea-shop window—up to "Cuckoo!" — "Eighteen!" when the situation proved too much for the rest of the party, and a violent explosion of uncontrollable laughter broke in upon the duet. When we recovered the cuckoo was still at it. The following year at the same spot the same party spent a pleasant day: not a note of the "sacred bird" had been heard, however, and on coming away the fact was just being remarked upon when, all at once, came the familiar call, and never dogs stood firmer to "point" than the three friends, with ears a-cock, counting the number of calls. These reached the record, twenty-one—three more than the previous year's—without a break; and after the last one a simultaneous shout was set up that made the hills ring again. Well, well;

I could lie down in the summer grass
Content, and in the round of my foud arm
Enclose enough dominion, and all day
Do tender descant, owning one by one
Floweret and flower.

Thus says the poet, and thus the mood of some of us. The Bailie was not only one of the most good-natured of men—his imperturbability was almost irritating at times—but one of the most humorous. Although he was

NEVER KNOWN TO LAUGH,

his smile and suppressed chuckle were a thou-

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sand-fold more expressive and infectious than any laughter. Then he had so much to tell. He could recall as many as sixteen looms going at the Muirton, where he was born. He could remember when St Ringan's Well trickled through the Wellmeadow. He used to relate how he was awakened at the dead of night during the Crimean War by the sound of a horseman at full gallop through the streets—Tennyson refers to the incident—and remarking next morning it was probably a courier speeding on his way to the Queen at Balmoral—as it turned out was the case—with the news of the fall of Sebastopol. He recalled with great gusto having

MET THE LATE QUEEN

and Prince Albert at a lonely part of the Bridge of Cally road while they were en route for Balmoral and getting a special salute all to himself. He could describe, like Mr Davie, the old Fair o' Blair to perfection, the enormous range of "sweetie" stands, &c., right up from the Wellmeadow to Brown Street and further west; the droves of cattle up the Boatbrae and Gasbrae and in the centre of the Wellmeadow; the busy whisky tents; the cheap-jacks; the conjurers; the half-crowns-in-the-purse-man; the street musicians; above all, the humanity everywhere—the real live, hearty honest men and women, lads and lasses; noisy, unconventional, but thoroughly good to see, and pleasant to recall in after years. He

COULD NAME ALL THE ALTERATIONS

which had taken place in Allan Street and the Wellmeadow, out the Perth Road, and indeed anywhere; could tick off the tenants—generations of them in some instances—in the

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numerous shops about the town; and was a veritable vocable and gossipy "Who's Who" for all the old "characters" of the district. With all, never in his comments upon men and things, present or past, was heard the ill-natured word, the innuendo, the back-stroke. Let charity prevail was his unspoken motto, and the philosophy of his life was to move in quiet ways, performing the duties of life to the best of his ability without fuss or ostentation, and leaving others to find their guide of action where he found his—in their own consciences.