

**JOHN C. SPINDLER,
DUNDEE AND
BLAIRGOWRIE.**



JOHN SPINDLER.

MUSICIAN.

XXVIII.

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Mirth that after no repenting draws.—MILTON.

In some respects John Spindler's personality was the most fascinating with which it has ever been the writer's privilege to become acquainted. His sparkling wit and caustic humour, his originality and versatility as a conversationalist generally, would have made him a first favourite almost anywhere, quite apart from his exceptional gifts as a musician; but when all this concentrated mental force, this fascicle of surcharged nerves and faculties, was found connected with one of the most fragile bodies that ever had to do duty as the earthly tenement of a poor imprisoned spirit, it was a combination rare enough to impress everyone with astonishment, more or less, according to temperament. To the writer, who knew him only as a confirmed invalid, he was always the most perfect instance of the triumph of mind over body he ever knew. Rheumatism had made him a "bundle of nerves," causing intense suffering at times, yet he

MUST HAVE HIS LITTLE JOKE

at his own expense, declaring that he had as much electricity about him as would have enabled him to light the gas merely by touching

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the pipe with his finger. His lower limbs were rendered useless by his trouble; he joked about the difficulty of getting his legs stretched. He had a very severe illness even for him—it was premonitory to the one which carried him off—during which he sank so low that his end was expected every minute, and his relatives and friends had been assembled around his bedside. The extraordinary vitality of the man enabled him to recover, however; and one day the writer went along to see him in his convalescence. He was as lively as ever, and gave a wonderful account of his sensations when the crisis of his illness was reached. He became unconscious, and felt as if he was falling down a deep pit—down, down, down, sunshine and day and sky and all sense of surroundings melting gradually away, and only one bright little star left shining in the infinite heights above him. Suddenly there was a flash, and he opened his eyes to find the sorrowful faces of his friends looking down upon him, and these were the first words he uttered—“What are you all standing there for? One would think you were at a funeral!” Dealing with the origin and training of our friend, we learn that he was born in Dundee in 1846—where his father had come from Edinburgh some years before and settled down to what was to be

A LONG AND HONOURABLE CAREER

as a teacher of music. Johnny, the boy, attended the High School, where he was known as the “fighting one” by one set of his fellow-scholars, and as the “boy who could speak like a book” by another. “Jim” Whytock and he were about the same age, and inseparable companions. Many an adventure they had together. They were very partial to walking tours, when they could get away, and more

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than one out-of-the-way village—in Fife particularly—was honoured as the scene of their lively but harmless escapades. After leaving the High School, John, who was musical from top to toe, resolved to follow his father's profession, and started off studying and teaching at the same time. He was a great worker, and used to begin practice as early as 6 a.m., and was busy at one thing and another up till a late hour at night. About this time the new German method of training the hand for the piano began to be greatly discussed in Dundee, and the young and energetic "professor," perceiving the value of the system, and the importance of obtaining tuition at headquarters, determined to go to Germany. Accordingly, although even then making a very fair living, considering his youth, by his work, he threw it up, and became a student at Stuttgart. It goes without saying that he was not long there before he was a

FAVOURITE WITH EVERYONE

—not excepting the Professors. One of these, when the bright young fellow—he was not out of his teens then—was in his second year, singled him out for the unusual distinction of appointing him teacher of a number of English pupils; while another tried hard to get him to settle down in Stuttgart altogether. He had other plans, however. One of these Professors got a lesson himself from his pupil. He had an annoying habit of coming in late to his pupil, having been always, apparently, purchasing apples, at which he kept munching away during the precious hour. John saw a lovely prize apple—as red as a peony, and as big as a turnip. This he purchased, and put in a

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conspicuous position on the piano. It caught the Professor's eye at once.

"You young rascal of a Scotchman, what do you mean by that?" asked he as he annexed the apple.

"Oh," replied the innocent youth, he thought the master liked apples, and so he need not spend any time buying one that day.

The Professor smiled, and disposed of the fruit as per usual, but took the hint, and always gave him a full hour thereafter. It was while in Germany that such flattering things were said about his literary gifts—particularly for description—that he was greatly of a mind to flout music and bestow his attentions upon the sister art. Home ties and duties, however, kept him to his first love. He returned to Dundee, and in a short time had a good clientele. Fourteen years of incessant toil, in the very same house where his father had taught for 40 years before him, may be blamed for the breakdown of his nervous system which followed.

"Oh, dear me, Mr Spindler," exclaimed a gentleman on meeting him on the street, "do you know I have been suffering very badly with noises in my ears." Said the tired manufacturer of young pianists—

"I do sympathise with you, my dear fellow. I have to suffer noises in my ears for seven hours a day ten months in the year."

A DIFFICULT SUBJECT.

But no matter his own health, his great happiness was in doing his best to contribute to that of others. He used to pride himself upon his success in that line; there was almost a professional touch in it. The worse the subject to be operated upon the greater the effort and skill

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he would put forth to secure the inevitable triumph which followed. One day during the holidays he was among some friends out from Dundee. As usual, he was the life of the gathering, but one stiff old Free Church minister resisted all efforts to make him thaw. He was like an iceberg, everybody else glowing and beaming in the sunshine of our friend's geniality but the austere cleric. To him, therefore, special attention was directed by the man who was bent upon making him happy in spite of himself, and by and by he had the satisfaction of exciting a smile. This was encouraging; he redoubled his efforts, and was ultimately rewarded with a genuine laugh, after which the enemy became demoralised, and joined in as hilariously as any one present. At supper the old gentleman said grace, and thanked God "for the good things provided at this festive season, but very specially for the enjoyable merriment and cheerful entertainment given by our young friend." On hearing which "our young friend" gave the shins of one of his intimates such

A KICK BELOW THE TABLE

as nearly caused an explosion, which would have been very prejudicial to his newly "acquired merit." When his health fell away all Dundee seemed to rally around the brilliant young musician, whose career was thus blighted so suddenly, and public esteem found expression in the tangible form of a memorable concert in the Kinnaird Hall, organised by the leading musicians of the district. It was shortly after this that Mr Spindler, accompanied by his devoted sister, the artist, whose pictures of Perthshire, Forfarshire, and Fifeshire scenery are known throughout the three counties and much

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farther afield, took up residence in Blairgowrie, and there remained till his death. His old friends, such as the late Mr Whytock, jeweller, and the late Mr W. Reid, of the "Dundee Advertiser," as well as others, brightened his life by their correspondence and occasional visits—the latter memorable days as much to the visitors as to the invalid. The sadly premature death of Mr Reid in December 1889 was a blow from which he never really recovered, and which he did not survive more than a few weeks. Seven weary years he was subject to the most excruciating sufferings. "Borne with Christian patience!"; see you put that down!" he said one day with a grim smile after a dreadful spasm. It was a resolute fight to the finish between him and death; and when at last he failed to come up to time on that night in January 1890, the "hard-favoured tyrant" himself must surely have smiled down with admiration upon such a valiant foe.