

**Rev. WM. HERDMAN,
RATTRAY.**



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**PARISH MINISTER OF THE
OLD SCHOOL.**

XLI.

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Since the days of John Ross, minister of Blair, who flourished at the beginning of the 17th century, probably no name among clerics has caught the popular fancy of Blairgowrie district so completely as that of "Old Herdie," as he was frequently called, the subject of the present sketch. The two men differed from each other greatly in mental and physical characteristics, in tastes and pursuits, but each stands out in his own sphere as a man of distinct individuality, whatever more, and there is nothing so refreshing as that quality. John Ross is remembered best as the minister who, having failed by ordinary methods to get his people to turn out to church, displayed the wisdom of the serpent, whatever about the innocence of the dove, in arranging that markets should be held at the Kirkgate every Sunday at the close of the afternoon service. The result justified the innovation, and church attendance went up by leaps and bounds. The young fellows, however, developed an irreligious taste for shinty between the services, and exhortation proving of no use, this man of resource sallied out one day, stuck his staff in the ground, threw his coat upon it, and thus addressed it—

Stand ye there,
As minister of Blair,
While I, John Ross,
Get a game at the ba'!

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies:

The young men were highly elated at the conversion of their minister, but when he began to whack away at their shins instead of the ba', and managed to lame half the Sabbath desecrators before they had realised that his aims were not quite the same as theirs, they were glad to get out of the way as fast as they could and promise to behave better in future. The humour of that situation must have tickled the fancy of the genial minister of Rattray many a time, being entirely to his own mind, although he never found it necessary to use such drastic methods with his devoted parishioners. He was a son of the manse. His father, the Rev. Wm. Herdman, laboured from 1813 till 1838 in Rattray, where William, junior, was born in 1820. Herdman, the father, was a man of distinct gifts and character, and the family turned out of

MORE THAN ORDINARY ABILITY,

for, in addition to William, who was minister of Rattray from 1844 till 1878, there was James, who became D.D., and settled down in Melrose; Robert, the well-known portrait and genre painter, born in 1829, elected A.R.S.A. in 1858 and R.S.A. in 1863, dying in 1888; and Andrew, who was minister at Pictou, Nova Scotia, for many years, and came to Rattray as his brother William's successor in 1879, finishing his own course in 1894, after 15 years' work in his native parish. William Herdman, senior, died in 1838, and the probability is that had any one of the family been ready for the charge he would have got it at once. Rev. Francis Gillies, however, was appointed minister the year following, and, "coming out" at the Disruption in 1843, left the way clear for young William Herdman, who came straight from St Andrews University in

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1844, when only 23 years of age, to enter upon his inheritance. The Rev. Mr M'Kinlay, who had obtained the presentation on Mr Gillies' secession, met with so little encouragement from the people that he withdrew. The present pastor, the Rev. John Hunter, B.D., happens to have been ordained exactly fifty years, less a day, after Mr Herdman's ordination. Memory pictures this popular minister in his prime as a man under the medium height, of rather slight build, with high forehead, long Grecian nose, and bright eyes, hair carefully parted in the middle, full moustache and beard. As a preacher he was nothing remarkable, his style being somewhat fidgety. He had odd habits of twitching up his gown, folding his arms across his breast (with the gown clutched in his hands), pushing back his hair in an excited way with both hands, fumbling with the loose leaves of his sermon as if he had lost his place, &c., and delivered everything in a rather hard, sharp tone of voice—altogether a rather disappointing performance, so far as externals were concerned. The matter, however, was always excellent. Rev. D. S. Rae, of Kinloch, and Herdman were great friends, and used to exchange pulpits frequently. The minister of Kinloch was noted for his musical voice and grand delivery; one of his precentors used to declare he many a time felt quite ashamed to stand up and sing after hearing Mr Rae read the psalm. Among Rattray folk it was a common saying that if Mr Herdman would only write the sermons and Mr Rae read them they would get

PREACHING OF THE FIRST ORDER.

The Rattray minister's literary ability was shown also in numerous contributions to local

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history—antiquarian, botanical, geological, ecclesiastical, &c., in all which he took deep interest, and was regarded as an authority. Then he had a regular passion for music, was always humming away to himself at some tune as he went about, much as the late Professor Blackie—and with voice just as “timmer.” He persisted in singing “tenor” from the pulpit on Sundays, with results more striking than agreeable, except to the singer. Not infrequently, when every one else in the church had finished, the minister was heard at it as full of “go” as ever. He even tried his hand at musical composition, and made a tune which he christened “Quiet Waters,” and to which he used to sing “The Lord’s My Shepherd.” But it is as pastor of his people, as an open-hearted, witty, optimistic, and sincere lover of his fellowmen that he is best remembered. He was one of the cheeriest and sunniest of mortals; a man not of many moods, but of one only, the keynote of which was Pippa’s morning song:—

God’s in His heaven,
All’s right with the world!

His sympathy with suffering and distress was heartfelt, and it mattered not whether the sufferer were of his own folk or of no kirk or creed whatever; every man he met was his “brither-man,” and commanded his willing service. As might be supposed, he was the best of company at social functions; say, for preference, at a soiree or the meeting after a bonspiel on the Stormont Loch, Rattray Club victorious. On such occasions he simply bubbled over with humour, and would keep the company

Racked with the pleasurable pangs of laughter just as long as he could. It was the same on the street; he could not pass any one he knew with-

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out some pleasant remark; if time permitted, there was a halt and a short "crack" full of witty comments on men and things. But although innumerable stories regarding "Old Herdie" are afloat, they are mere ghosts of no substance or body; or perchance, mere skeletons without flesh and blood. The spirit of the man was more than the thing said many a time. Touching the familiar, albeit affectionate and respectful enough term, "Old Herdie"—the gentleman most concerned resented its use most emphatically, and one day chose for text, "For I was an Herdman" (Amos vii. 14), and proceeded to

LAY DOWN THE LAW

in no dubious terms regarding the use and abuse of his own surname. Which outspokenness was characteristic of Rattray ministers; for the story goes that Rev. Mr Gillies used to be bothered greatly by the millers of the Milton, who occupied seats in the "loft," going to sleep as regularly as the sermon began. One day some of them aggravated the offence by starting to snore, which the old minister could not stand. He stopped short, and, turning in the direction of the culprits, thus addressed them:—"Vow, you millers o' the Milton, I gie ye due warnin' that gin ye dinna gie owre sleepin' an' snorin' durin' divine service I'll baith name and surname ye there whaur ye sit!" A certain gathering in Blairgowrie at which our friend appeared is a green memory to every one who was present and is alive to recall it. He had just arrived from Clunie drenched to the skin, but proceeded at once with his speech, which he prefaced by remarking that, however it turned out, it would not be a dry one, and after a half-hour's running

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comments on everything, finished by declaring he had not spoken on a single subject he had intended at the outset. The Rev. Mr M'Crie, of the South Free Church, was a frequent butt of his wit. At another function, where both were present, Herdman maintained that Mr M'Crie, having announced his preference for golf to curling (the Rattray minister was a keen curler), he might be a good man, but was certainly not an ice man for all that. One day both were on Stormont Loch, and, some boys starting off sliding, M'Crie, followed by Herdman, were tempted to join in—the latter shouting out to the amused spectators—“Behold the minister of the South Free become a backslider!” Another brother of the cloth—noted for his parsimony—having minutely explained how to “do” Edinburgh on the most economical lines during the Assembly, our friend showed his gratitude by declaring that he was well up in “saving knowledge.” An amusing illustration of his unconventional style was given at a Kinclaven funeral. Herdman was asked to offer up prayer, but must have prayed with his eyes open, for, during the prayer, Rae of Kinloch joined the company, and immediately after the “Amen,” the Rattray minister called over to him, “Well, Rae, did you get that clockin' hen?”—the explanation of which was that that gentleman had been at Rattray manse some days before in search of that useful animal. One of his folk having to be called upon on account of taking a drop too much, the tactful pastor was a long time coming to the point, and referred to many excellent people who had made slips occasionally, &c., &c. The watchful culprit was not slow to take advantage of his opportunities, and chimed in with a sigh—“Deed, ay; there

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was Dauvid, noo; he was a great sinner, a verra great sinner in his day, an' I'm jist as like him as can be, Mr Herdman, for I've a

GRAND NACK O' REPENTIN'!"

An Alyth minister, having had the misfortune to be taken to Murthly Asylum, our friend visited him, and was greeted by his old neighbour with the astonished query—"Good heavens, Herdie! are you here too?" His goodness of heart was without bounds, and, needless to say, was abused badly on occasions. One day he was accosted by a man whose child had died, and who did not have a coat in which to appear at the funeral. "Come away to the manse," replied the good-hearted pastor. "I'll give you the one I have on," which he did; and the greedy fellow, not satisfied, asked for a pair of boots. "No, no!" exclaimed the minister, examining the man's pedal coverings; "your boots are as good as my own—just give them a black!" Entering the church one week-day, just after the beadle had been having a quiet "draw" at his pipe, the minister sniffed for a little. "I feel an odour," said he. "I feel an odour—but not of sanctity." Talking of tobacco reminds one that he wrote a set of verses in imitation of Ralph Erskine's well-known poem "Thus Think and Smoke Tobacco," but in praise of curling. Here they are:—

CURLING SPIRITUALISED.

As hard and rough might be thy heart
As, but for lapidary's art,
Was once this Stone,
Now polished grown;
Thus think, and play at Curling.

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A heart for action needs a hand,
Or best resolves are at a stand;
 This Handle, so,
 Makes the Stone go;
Thus think, and play at Curling.

Like Ice—as slippery and as cold,
This world is, if your quest be gold;
 Without Heaven's Grip
 You downward slip;
Thus think, and play at Curling.

Like Rink kept clean by sweep of Broom
(So that your play may have clear room),
 Let life be kept—
 Away vice swept;
Thus think, and play at Curling.

If you would lie beside the Tee,
Cautious and straight your course must be;
 This glacial strife
 Resembles life;
Thus think, and play at Curling.

This man, greatly beloved of the people, passed suddenly away on the 6th December 1878, but "Old Herdie's" memory will be cherished for generations yet.