

THE LAST BAIRD LAIRD OF  
AUCHMEDDEN AND STRICHEN  
THE CASE OF MR. ABINGTON

BY  
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Matching the curious fact that great soldiers frequently have no male issue, or only poor specimens, four of these eight captains of industry had no issue, leaving their property to the other four brothers, who had between them only nine sons and eight daughters. Mr. Abington was particularly lucky as a legatee, for his father, George of Strichen, inherited Stichill, in Roxburgh, from his brother David, who bought it in 1853 for £150,000, and he himself got Auchmedden from his uncle James, a man of great force of character—the last of the eight brothers to die (in 1876)—although, unhappily, Mr. Abington did not inherit the quality which had made James give £500,000 to the Church of Scotland. Before he finished his rake's

deteriorated, as he undoubtedly did, when he gave up having to keep fit for racing—than those writers, most of them journalists, who followed his career as a man-about-town in London, where he was, even in the early 'nineties, almost the last of the Mobicans. They play the Pierce Egan to his career, or, when they moralise, they perform the function of Holcroft in bringing "The Road to Ruin" up to date. Indeed, one peer who knew him well has bluntly described him to me as a "ruffian," and expressed his surprise that I should "waste my time" in piecing his story together. I do it to show the violent and almost incredible contrast between Mr. Abington and the remarkably industrious and enterprising family from whom he sprang: the pit from which he was dug would be an absolutely literal phrase.

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## THE LAST BAIRD LAIRD OF AUCHMEDDEN AND STRICHEN.

### THE CASE OF MR ABINGTON.

GEORGE ALEXANDER BAIRD, better known as "Mr. Abington," the gentleman jockey, laird of Auchmedden, the cradle of the northern Bairds, and of Strichen in Aberdeenshire and of Stichill in Roxburgh, who flickered out his wasted life at New Orleans in March, 1893, at the age of thirty-two, forms a strikingly ironic illustration of the self-defeating contrasts which are constantly to be found in families. He represented, on an exaggerated scale, everything that his family, the millionaire mining Bairds of Gartsherrie, were not. The industry from which they drew their millions: and the land, to which as hereditary farmers they were passionately devoted, and in which they invested large parts of their fortune, made no appeal to him. His tastes, wholly uncontrolled, were all for sport—the Turf, the ring—and riotous living, all conducted on the most spend-thrift scale.

The story of the Gartsherrie Bairds reads like a modern version of Aladdin. It began with Mr. Abington's grandfather, Alexander Baird (1765-1833), a little crofter in Lanark, who married a hard-headed servant lass, Jean Moffat. In 1809, at the age of forty-four, he began to work a coal mine. Helped all the time by his eight sons, he became an ironmaster in 1828, and in the course of a few years the Bairds were turning out 300,000 tons of iron a year, and employing 10,000 men, while the fortunes accumulated by the eight brothers must have run into several millions, of which £2,000,000 were invested in land in nine counties, ranging from Inverness to Dumfries on the west and Berwick on the east.

Matching the curious fact that great soldiers frequently have no male issue, or only poor specimens, four of these eight captains of industry had no issue, leaving their property to the other four brothers, who had between them only nine sons and eight daughters. Mr. Abington was particularly lucky as a legatee, for his father, George of Strichen, inherited Stichill, in Roxburgh, from his brother David, who bought it in 1853 for £150,000, and he himself got Auchmedden from his uncle James, a man of great force of character—the last of the eight brothers to die (in 1876)—although, unhappily, Mr. Abington did not inherit the quality which had made James give £500,000 to the Church of Scotland. Before he finished his rake's

progress, Mr. Abington made some of the Baird millions melt like last year's snow.

Although a great deal has been written from first to last about Mr. Abington, it is scattered through the lighter, and sometimes scandalous, papers of the period, and in gossipy books by racing folk, men-about-town and journalists. Baird figures in no book of reference except Boase's comprehensive "Modern English Biography"—Burke's "Landed Gentry" naturally does not mention his racing name of Mr Abington—and nothing approaching a regular biography has been attempted. One of his neighbours at Kelso, who knew him as a boy, and who watched his short career with appalled "amazement," tells me he would like to write a little book, after the pattern of Nimrod's classic book on the notorious Jack Mytton. Again, a Scotsman in Lancaster, a racing expert, who knew him well, informs me that he has thought of writing a book about him—or "as much about him as can be told."

That is just it. A great deal of it cannot be told, for Baird really belonged in spirit to the eighteenth century, and we have not got eighteenth century conditions. Again, so far as the later part of his career is concerned, some of the people with whom he had associated are still alive. In going over all sources of information about him, both in books and unwritten recollections—for I have simply made a mosaic of them all—I find that the racing men who knew him take a far more lenient view of him—if only because he had not deteriorated, as he undoubtedly did, when he gave up having to keep fit for racing—than those writers, most of them journalists, who followed his career as a man-about-town in London, where he was, even in the early 'nineties, almost the last of the Mohicans. They play the Pierce Egan to his career, or, when they moralise, they perform the function of Holcroft in bringing "The Road to Ruin" up to date. Indeed, one peer who knew him well has bluntly described him to me as a "ruffian," and expressed his surprise that I should "waste my time" in piecing his story together. I do it to show the violent and almost incredible contrast between Mr. Abington and the remarkably industrious and enterprising family from whom he sprang: the pit from which he was dug would be an absolutely literal phrase.

If George Baird of Strichen had not died suddenly at Strichen House in the autumn

of 1870, it is probable that his nine-year-old millionaire heir, George Alexander Baird, might have turned out very differently from what he did, and might probably have founded a real live landed family. At any rate, he might not have become a jockey like Mr Abington, and ended so tragically, or, rather, sordidly, as he did at the early age of thirty-two.

The Gartsherrie Bairds' attempts to found a family in the North failed on three occasions as follows:—

(1) In 1854, Robert Baird, the fifth of the brothers, bought the estate of Auchmedden, the parish in Aberdour, from the Forbeses of Newe and Edinglassie. He did so with the idea of bringing back into the possession of a Gartsherrie Baird an estate which had been held for two hundred and fifty years by one of the old lines of the Bairds, who had footled away their fortune in a way not unknown to landowners. An old fret predicted that there would be an eagle in the crags at Pennan while there was a Baird in Auchmedden. When the estate was sold in 1750 to Lord Aberdeen, the eagles vanished, although Lord Aberdeen's son, Lord Haddo, had married a Baird of Newbyth, sister of the great Sir David. The same Earl of Aberdeen bought Gight, of which another fateful fret, this time about herons, was whispered. Haddo, at anyrate, was killed by a fall from his horse at Gight. To return to Auchmedden, the eagles did not reappear till Robert Baird became the laird, when they flew back, only, however, to vanish again, when the coastguardsmen at Pennan tried to shoot them. Robert Baird did not enjoy the property long, for he died unmarried in August, 1856, at the age of fifty.

(2) Auchmedden then passed to his forceful brother James, who in 1853 had bought the estate of Cambusdoon in Ayr, and who in 1857 acquired Knoydart in Inverness. James also died without issue, in 1876, his will being sworn under £1,190,000.

(3) Auchmedden then went to his nephew, George Alexander Baird, Mr Abington, and he did not even marry.

Besides at Auchmedden, the Bairds had taken root at Strichen, for George Alexander's father, George, bought it from Lord Lovat in 1855, the year after Robert bought Auchmedden. He paid £145,000 for it, which was from £20,000 to £30,000 more than it had been valued a few years before, when it was offered in three lots. The North had been further favoured by them, for Alexander, the third of the eight brothers, bought Urie in 1854, the same year as Robert bought Auchmedden, and they hold it still in the person of Lord Stonehaven, one of the very few members of the family who still own an estate bought by the eight brothers. Curiously enough, Urie had also been frittered away by a sportsman—from whose trustees Baird bought it—Robert Barclay Allardice, the

pedestrian, who was a sort of Mr Abington of his time.

In addition to Strichen, where he found only eight slated houses, George Baird, as noted, had also come in for the estate of Stichill in Roxburgh. In all he owned 17,000 acres, bringing in £20,000 a year. Thus, with two estates to his credit, George Baird decided to settle down and become somebody of the "county" type. So at the mature age of forty-eight he married an Irish gentlewoman, Cecilia, elder daughter of Vice-Admiral Villiers Francis Hatton of Clonard, Wexford, M.P. for his county. I do not know how or where he met her. She was five-and-thirty at the time and had little or no fortune. But she belonged to the Quality, and had known the great Duke of Wellington—a friend of her father—who had written her letters which she used to show proudly to her friends: I wonder what has become of them. She suited Baird, for though his neighbour at Kelso, Sir George Douglas, Bart. of Springfield Park, a great friend of the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll, says it was a "marriage of convenience," yet she fitted the frame, for what the laird of Strichen wanted was a "lady who could take the head of his table with credit and rule his household in the great manner." The marriage ceremony was certainly performed in the "great manner," and duly announced in the "Times": "On the 15th inst. [Nov. 1858], at St George's, Hanover Square, by the Rev. John Rashdall, incumbent of Eaton Chapel [of which St George's was the mother church], George Baird, Esq., of Strichen, to Cecilia, daughter of Vice-Admiral Hatton." Eaton Chapel, which stood on the Sloane Square side of Eaton Square, has been replaced by a block of flats. Mr Rashdall, who became vicar of Dawlish, and died in 1869, was the father of the late Dean Hastings Rashdall, the learned historian of mediæval universities.

In 1860, George Baird became still more important by inheriting the estate of Stichill in Roxburgh from his youngest and unmarried brother David. Stichill had formerly belonged to the Pringles, of whom the late Lady Gordon Cathcart was one.

#### MR ABINGTON'S BIRTH.

Three years after the marriage a son was born to the Bairds, the event taking place on September 30, 1861, at Barry's British Hotel, 70 Queen Street, Edinburgh—the Edinburgh Ladies' College now stands on the site—for their huge house at Stichill, replacing an unpretentious structure, had not yet been built, and it was probably thought that Strichen was too far off; so that the boy was not a Buchan loon in any sense of the phrase. By a curious irony, George Alexander Baird, born in a hotel, ended his strange and sad career in a hotel at New Orleans thirty-two years later, and in between times the word home was unfamiliar in his vocabulary.

The child's arrival gave George Baird the hope of raising a landed family, and he set about building a home for it at Stichill, much as Scott did at Abbotsford, ten miles away. The foundation stone was laid in great style by Susanna, Duchess of Roxburghe, who outlived Mr Abington, for George Baird had been accepted by "the county," which pressed him, without success, to stand as a Conservative; all the Baird brothers were strong Tories, though their grandmother had been a Radical, and George had been defeated for the Falkirk Burghs in 1857. The building, in the Scots baronial style, which took three years to erect, being completed in 1866, cost £34,000, and its size may be guessed from the fact that it contained forty-three bedrooms and had a tower 100 feet high, surveying the Cheviots and the Tweed, while the policies covered 62 acres. When it was completed it was opened with a great house-warming ball, to which everybody who was anybody in the neighbourhood was invited. The end of the house, nearly seventy years later, was less glorious, for it was bought in October, 1930, by Mr George W. King, now in Sidcup, an enterprising Londoner, who, starting life at zero, lived many years at Galashiels, where he was an active member of the Free Kirk congregation, presided over by a charming Aberdeen graduate, the Rev. W. S. Matheson. A house breaker offered £800 for the house, which was bought by Mr King for £2000 and sold by him at a very small profit in June, 1931, to the Leith Holiday Home. The last phase of Stichill House is a sort of ironic symbol of the failure of this branch of the Bairds to establish a family.

#### A MILLIONAIRE AT NINE.

The dream of George Baird vanished, for he was found dead in his bed at Strichen, where he had gone shooting, on August 24, 1870, leaving his only child, then a boy of nine, to the care of his Irish mother and five trustees. They were his nephews, William Baird of Elie and Alexander Baird, jr. of Urie, father of Lord Stonehaven; Alexander Whitelaw of Gartshore House, father of the present chairman of the L.N.E.R., and William Weir, Crookedholm, Ayr, who afterwards bought Kildonan, sons of the testator's sister Janet; and David Wallace, Lochwood House, Lanark, who had married Janet's daughter, Janet, Weir, and who afterwards bought the estate of Glassingall, Perth. The portraits of the trustees—all of them except the laird of Elie, who sported a horse shoe in his tie, had Victorian whiskers—show purposeful looking captains of industry of the life-is-real-life-is-earnest type. But, though they could mine and manipulate King Coal and Iron, they could make nothing of their half-Irish and wholly hobbledehoy young kinsman, as we shall see. He must, indeed, have seemed quite inconceivable to most of them, with his avid sporting tastes—though his uncle

David of Stichill had been a hunting man—and later with his prodigal escapades.

Under a trust settlement, a document of 44 foolscap pages, which was made on January 15, 1870, a few months before his death, George Baird left his widow the use of Strichen House, together with an annuity of £1500 under her marriage contract of November 13, 1858, though on her remarriage she was to get only the £1,500. In case her son predeceased her she was to get £4,000 a year. He left £25,000 for religious, benevolent and charitable purposes, ordered the lands of Cuningholm to be sold, and left the residue in favour of his son, George, on attaining the age of 25. The amount of George's estate was confirmed on October 8, 1870, at £918,457 17s 3d. But £3,000,000 are popularly believed to have come to Mr Abington in one way or another, though, frankly, I do not understand how the figure is arrived at.

In some articles he wrote in 1926 to the "Weekly Scotsman" on old Border life, Sir George Douglas tells us that, though Mrs Baird was "an estimable woman, she was not a conspicuously amiable one," for she had "something of the martinet or disciplinarian," especially as regards her young women guests. She had, however, no skill in the management of children. The result was that from a very early period young George was a handful. Only one of the family, a Hatton relative, made any attempt to control him—I am assured, with a hunting crop. The truth seems to have been that the boy had some of the Baird determination in him, though what had been force in them became selfwill in the boy, who probably was quite well aware that he had inherited nearly a million in hard cash, which accumulated during his minority—a feeling that must have been increased when he also came into the estate of Auchmedden, which he did at the age of twenty-five on the death of his uncle James. Sir George Douglas also tells us that his mother's house parties were mostly made up of "crocks," and young George wanted "some more exhilarating evening's entertainment than an excellent dinner, followed by a quiet rubber or a round game."

#### HIS PASSION FOR HORSE FLESH.

Not unnaturally, he found more amusement in the grooms' room. That was to be another symbol of his career. The boy had certainly something of the unconventionality of his race, for a Kelso correspondent, who knew him well, tells me he would go about looking like a tramp, wearing old clothes and old boots. But he was mad about horses—had not his father built twenty stalls for them at Stichill? Sir George Douglas remembers George as a boy of eight mounted on a skewbald pony and trotting up and down the King's Road, Brighton—where his mother was to die—beside a coachman, who held a leading rein. When he started racing he filled all the twenty stalls, a

fact which the "Sportsman" said on his death the Kelso people "remembered with a sigh." At one time he also kept greyhounds at Stichill.

#### A "ROYT LOON."

For a time George was in the hands of a tutor. Then he was sent to Hawtrey's famous private school at Aldin House, Slough, from which he went to Eton at Michaelmas, 1874, boarding at Carter's, while Merriott was his tutor. Neither establishment tamed George, for he fell out with the authorities, and without asking leave went off, apparently for Christmas, 1875, to his mother's London house at 42 South Street, Park Lane, at the corner of South Audley Street, seven doors from No. 35, where Florence Nightingale was then living, and ultimately died. Negotiations were opened up with the headmaster, who agreed to take him back on condition that he would take a thrashing. But George refused point blank to return under such conditions to the fabulous playing fields, where we used to be told Waterloos were won. I have not been able to discover where he acquired the rest of his education, if, indeed, he ever did acquire much more. Four years after leaving Eton he went to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he was admitted on July 15, 1879, and where he spent six terms till June, 1881.

#### HE TAKES TO THE TURF.

Baird's bent, however, lay not in the region of books, but of bookies, for he took to the Turf, and began riding races while still in his teens. He had displayed a passionate love of horses and riding from boyhood. Alexander Scott in his "Turf Reminiscences of Sixty Years" (1925) tells us that he would have "discussed horses with a dustman." Baird's real racing inspirer was Charles J. Cunningham, a great sportsman who lived near his home at Kelso; Cunningham is dealt with enthusiastically by Mr George Lambton in "Men and Horses I Have Known." Scott tells us that Baird began riding as a mere boy in Scotland, Galloway races and hunters' flat races claiming his attention.

Although I am told Baird never saw Strichen after his early boyhood, it is an interesting fact that his first appearance on a race course, so far as I have discovered, was on the Aberdeen Links on August 27, 1879, and, even more strange, this was the first racecourse I ever saw, for I watched it as a little loonie from the Broad Hill. I still remember the raucous voices of the bookies shouting the odds, especially on a horse they would call "Huberdeburg," by which they really meant Hubert de Burgh, named, of course, though I did not know it at the time, after the inveterate plotter who was outlawed exactly seven hundred years ago, and who married a daughter of Alexander II of Scotland.

The races at Aberdeen had been tried three times, in 1793-99, 1816-23, and 1843-47. Then in 1875, after a lapse of twenty-eight years, they were revived by Mr Alexander Cook (1874-1904), wine merchant in the Upperkirkgate. In passing, let me note that it is curious that no attempt has been made by local chroniclers to deal with the history of racing in Aberdeen. Fortunately, Mr Cook's daughter, Miss Jessie E. Cook, has some of the records, including a copy of the poster advertising the race meeting of 1826.

The meeting at Aberdeen on August 27, 1879, held on a wet, dismal day, was not under Grand National regulations, though the "Journal" of the day said it was "conducted in accordance with the best rules of English racing." It was what is known as a "flapping" meeting. Baird, who was just eighteen, did not ride in the advertised races, for had he done so he would have been disqualified under the Rules for a year. What "Mr Baird of Strichen," as the "Journal" announced, did was to ride a "match" on a horse called Fenvoy against Mr Wilson, a Fife ironmaster, on Holyrood. Baird, who "displayed good horsemanship, came in an easy winner." The "Free Press," which calls the horse "Fonvoy," was more enthusiastic, for it stated that he "won a walking race from start to finish, and showing all the art of a professional jockey, won very cleverly by two lengths." He may have been one of those who dined at the Palace Hotel at the meeting under the chairmanship of Viscount Arbutnott. But I am told he did not go to Strichen when in the north. Indeed, a local legend states that he used to say he believed he had a "peat bog" in Aberdeenshire. He probably did not know it was a highly cultivated area. From Aberdeen he went on to Perth, where on September 26, 1879, in a selling hunters' flat race he finished second on a mare Skirmisher out of Rosalba. He went on to Edinburgh, where he was second with Ladybird on October 7, and next day finished third on Syren. In the 1880 races at Aberdeen he was represented by a six-year-old horse called Kinsman, which, with M'Ewen up, won the Golfers' Cup and the Innkeepers' Hurdle.

#### BAIRD BECOMES "ABINGTON."

The veteran racing authority, a Scot by the way, who writes in the "Sporting Chronicle" of Manchester, under the name of "Mankato," stated in a recent issue of that excellent journal, that as Baird was dependent on his trustees for pocket money, "he managed to tap his mother for further supplies, and, as there seemed to be a desire to check his further racing proclivities, he decided to register under Grand National Hunt rules, using the name of 'Mr Abington,'" apparently from the Lanarkshire village of that name. He rode for the first time under this name on October 20, 1879, at Lincoln, being unplaced on the aforesaid Syren. He registered his

A CORRESPONDENT writes:—Mr. George Alexander Baird did a wee bit of quiet flapping ere he came out in what might be called the top flat of flat-racing, and, perhaps, a little of that was what caused him to touch the "ground floor." The first prominent appearance was at the Edinburgh Meeting, about sixteen years ago, when he was put up on Mr. William Gardner's Ranald, a modest hunter stakes horse, which had beaten Teba, a clever little hunter stakes mare, trained by Steele, of Ayr, who prepared so many useful hunter stake horses for poor Captain "Bay" Middleton. Ranald had always seven pounds the best of Teba, over the two miles, and was backed accordingly; but there were inquiries as to who Mr. Baird was, and could he ride? Well, he did ride Ranald. "Ye need na complain that ye lost yuir money over Ranald," said one Scotchman when "all right" had been shouted in favour of Teba. "Ye had plenty of ridin', mon; he rode him frae tail to head!"

"Ay, mon, and he rode the full course—never missed a square inch of it," said another.

"Oh, d—n your system of riding—like pointers quartering a stubble field for partridges!" was the indignant reply. "I rather have a long lean yard at the winning post than a thousand square yards behind it."

It was on that afternoon, so far as we recollect, that Fred Archer took him in hand, and made a very good horseman of him in the end.

No news of the lost Fullerton up to the time of going to press.

THE remains of the late "Squire" have arrived in England by the *Majestic* from America, under the care of Mr. Teddy Bayly. They were sent on to Sticheil, near Kelso, where they will be interred in the Bairds' family vault. The will, which has been the subject of so much curiosity, will be read by Mr. Theodore Lumley after the funeral. The rumour that the deceased had left a considerable sum of money to a popular actress we believe will prove to be unfounded, as it is rumoured on good authority that Mr. "Abington" has left the whole of his wealth without reserve to his mother. Further, it is said that despite the lavish pulls on the Squire's purse, the estate will still foot up to a stray "million."

It is stated at Glasgow that Mr. G. A. Baird's personalty will be very small, if, indeed, there is any surplus after all the debts have been paid. The estates are heavily charged, and will have to be sold, but it is not expected that they will realise more than enough to cover the mortgage debts. It is understood that the racing and breeding studs will be sold at Newmarket very shortly: When Mr. Baird came of age in 1881 he entered into possession of nearly three-quarters of a million of ready money, his annual income being about £100,000. One of the leading Scotch papers states that "all this princely fortune has been squandered on harlotry, horseracing and prize-fighting."

26.4.95

curious stories of the Turf, which showed that he had some of the Baird shrewdness. He got to hear that the Limekilns at Newmarket belonging to a Mrs. Sharp were for sale. "I can see him now" [1930], he says, "sitting in a chair looking at the man telling him about the Limekilns. 'They can be bought?' he asked reflectively. 'But I wonder what the stewards would say if they knew I was the owner.' Imagine the position! The famous Limekilns owned by a man who had been warned off! Of course, all Newmarket held up its hands in horror at the idea of the Squire being able to prevent anyone from galloping their horses there." Morton does not know what actually took place, but it is certain that within a very short space of time, the Limekilns definitely passed under the control of the Jockey Club. In any case, Morton is convinced that Abington could not have been kept off the Turf for long.

HIS GREAT WINNERS.

The ban on Baird lasted for two years, and when it was removed by the National Hunt, and *ipso facto* by the Jockey Club, he registered his assumed name of Mr Abington, abandoned his cardinal jacket for green, and began to buy horses heavily, including Busybody, bought for him by Tom Cannon the trainer, for £3800 at Lord Falmouth's sale, where he spent £16,000. He won the Two Thousand Guineas and the Oaks with the mare, which at Mr Abington's death fetched 3500 guineas and proved a most remunerative stock getter. In 1884 he himself rode twelve winners, beating Fred Archer himself in one race.

In 1885 he bought at Doncaster for 3100 guineas Merry Hampton, which won him the Derby of 1887—the colt's first race in public. His crony, Sir George Chetwynd, in his "Racing Reminiscences" (1891), tells us that Mr Abington was "highly delighted," at winning his first Derby, and adds that his victory was "highly popular" as no man had spent more money in buying horses or "raced more straightforwardly. I verily believe," he goes on to say, "that he would have given half his fortune to have ridden Merry Hampton." On the other hand, Alexander Scott declares that after winning the Derby Abington said:

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 on Indian race-course  
 14.93  
 (referred to)



colours as a cardinal jacket and Camb blue cap, changing in 1884 to green a plum cap.

In 1881 he became a subscriber to Racing Calendar, and went to live at Ytington Hall, Lichfield, this move proving him the name of "The Squire." any rate, Scotland saw comparatively of him from this time onwards, Strichen nothing whatever, his inte there being looked after by Mr John S who had come from the south and o one of his sons George Baird Sleigh, who took his M.A. in Aberdeen in almost at the same moment Mr Abin was dying at New Orleans. The latte not visit even Stichill during the las years of his life, although he was riding at Edinburgh in September, 1892.

### THE SQUIRE'S TANTRUMS.

I am quite unqualified to deal with Mr Abington's career as a racing man. Those who are interested in racing will find by far the most connected account of it by "Man-kato" in the "Sporting Chronicle" of September 16, 1933, an article, I may say, suggested by my curiosity. But some episodes in his riding career illustrate his temperament. When the coloured cartoon of him by "Lib" (Sig. Perosi), as a jockey in his green jacket and straw-coloured side whiskers, appeared in "Vanity Fair" on October 6, 1888, the writer of the accompanying letterpress described Baird as "a very strong and resolute rider," going on to say: "He has been reproached more than once for treating the other jockeys in a race as if they were hostile cavalry and might be charged with impunity." This tendency appears to have developed at an early stage, for Alexander Scott tells us that Baird fell foul of the stewards at the Ayr meeting, some time before he came of age. The same tendency resulted in his incurring the displeasure of the National Hunt stewards, who warned him off for two years for foul riding at Four Oaks Park, Birmingham, on April 11, 1882, in a race he won by eight lengths on Billy Banks, but he was disqualified for carrying wrong

The second day's sale of the late Mr. Baird's furniture, &c., at 36, Curzon Street, was well attended, and in some cases unexpectedly high prices were obtained. An old English escretoire in mahogany, full of artful little drawers and pigeon-holes, fetched 31 guineas. A dining clock in Chippendale case realised 3 guineas. For an oak lounge, covered in Morocco bound, someone gave 1 guineas. The billiard, pool, and pyramids averaged fifteen shillings apiece, the big black bear holding an electric was knocked down for 12 guineas.

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The ban on Baird lasted for two years, and when it was removed by the National Hunt, and *ipso facto* by the Jockey Club, he registered his assumed name of Mr Abington, abandoned his cardinal jacket for green, and began to buy horses heavily, including Busybody, bought for him by Tom Cannon the trainer, for £8800 at Lord Falmouth's sale, where he spent £16,000. He won the Two Thousand Guineas and the Oaks with the mare, which at Mr Abington's death fetched 3500 guineas and proved a most remunerative stock getter. In 1884 he himself rode twelve winners, beating Fred Archer himself in one race.

In 1885 he bought at Doncaster for 3100 guineas Merry Hampton, which won him the Derby of 1887—the colt's first race in public. His crony, Sir George Chetwynd, in his "Racing Reminiscences" (1891), tells us that Mr Abington was "highly delighted," at winning his first Derby, and adds that his victory was "highly popular" as no man had spent more money in buying horses or "raced more straightforwardly. I verily believe," he goes on to say, "that he would have given half his fortune to have ridden Merry Hampton." On the other hand, Alexander Scott declares that after winning the Derby Abington said:



colours as a cardinal jacket and Cambridge blue cap, changing in 1834 to green and a plum cap.

In 1881 he became a subscriber to the Racing Calendar, and went to live at Whittington Hall, Lichfield, this move probably giving him the name of "The Squire." At any rate, Scotland saw comparatively little of him from this time onwards, and Strichen nothing whatever, his interests there being looked after by Mr John Sleigh, who had come from the south and called one of his sons George Baird Sleigh, a lad who took his M.A. in Aberdeen in 1893, almost at the same moment Mr Abington was dying at New Orleans. The latter did not visit even Stichill during the last ten years of his life, although he was riding at Edinburgh in September, 1892.

### THE SQUIRE'S TANTRUMS.

I am quite unqualified to deal with Mr Abington's career as a racing man. Those who are interested in racing will find by far the most connected account of it by "Mankato" in the "Sporting Chronicle" of September 16, 1933, an article, I may say, suggested by my curiosity. But some episodes in his riding career illustrate his temperament. When the coloured cartoon of him by "Lib" (Sig. Perosi), as a jockey in his green jacket and straw-coloured side whiskers, appeared in "Vanity Fair" on October 6, 1888, the writer of the accompanying letterpress described Baird as "a very strong and resolute rider," going on to say: "He has been reproached more than once for treating the other jockeys in a race as if they were hostile cavalry and might be charged with impunity." This tendency appears to have developed at an early stage, for Alexander Scott tells us that Baird fell foul of the stewards at the Ayr meeting, some time before he came of age. The same tendency resulted in his incurring the displeasure of the National Hunt stewards, who warned him off for two years for foul riding at Four Oaks Park, Birmingham, on April 11, 1882, in a race he won by eight lengths on Billy Banks, but he was disqualified for carrying wrong weights. His foul riding consisted in threatening to plt Lord Harrington over the rails. The late Lord Suffolk and Berkshire, in the "Badminton Magazine" of 1896, tells us that Mr Abington remarked of the occasion: "How could I know that he was a ——— lord? I thought he was a ——— farmer."

Morton, his trainer, who is rather vague about the episode, does not think that Mr Abington should have been warned off. "Rather do I think," he says, "that his wild behaviour generally somewhat incensed the stewards," for "all his escapades were harmless enough if one regarded them in their proper light." As it was, Baird, he thinks, would probably have been pardoned by the stewards if he had apologised, but this he refused.

While still under the ban, he transferred his horses to his crony Ross ("Stiffy")

Smith, a Scotsman like himself, and allowed Smith to run them in his own name. Mr Abington himself went off to France, where he did his bit of racing for twelve months.

He also raced at Aberdeen at the 1882 meeting, although both local dailies called him simply "Abington," as if he were an ordinary jockey. He rode in six of the eight races—with other people's horses—winning the Merchants' Plate, the Golfers' Cup, a pony race, and the Ladies' Cup with James Campbell's Miss Baldwin. He was second in the Patrons' Cup and fourth in the Traders' Cup.

Morton also tells us that Mr Abington's return to the fold was "one of the most curious stories of the Turf," which showed that he had some of the Baird shrewdness. He got to hear that the Limekilns at Newmarket belonging to a Mrs Tharp were for sale. "I can see him now" [1930], he says, "sitting in a chair looking at the man telling him about the Limekilns. 'They can be bought?' he asked reflectively. 'But I wonder what the stewards would say if they knew I was the owner.' Imagine the position! The famous Limekilns owned by a man who had been warned off! Of course, all Newmarket held up its hands in horror at the idea of the Squire being able to prevent anyone from galloping their horses there." Morton does not know what actually took place, but it is certain that within a very short space of time, the Limekilns definitely passed under the control of the Jockey Club. In any case, Morton is convinced that Abington could not have been kept off the Turf for long.

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"I would rather win a selling plate if I could ride the winner"; while Nathaniel Gubbins, writing in 1903, after saying that a worse set of horses had rarely competed in a Derby, remarked that Abington "took no pride in leading in Merry Hampton." But "Mankato," for his part, assures us that it is "certainly not true" that he would rather have won a hunter's flat than a classic winner, for, though he was "desperately keen to ride winners," he was still more keen after 1884, when he was restored to the Turf, to win good classic races under Jockey Club rules.

#### MR ABINGTON AS A RIDER.

All the racing experts—who knew him in the days when he was still keen on racing and riding—are agreed that he was an excellent horseman. True, Lord Suffolk says he "taught himself to ride by power of the purse." Again, "Mankato" states that as "a callow youth he was far from being a good horseman." But he set himself to learn the business thoroughly. Indeed, Lord Suffolk tells us his aim and object were to look like and ride like a jockey among jockeys. Certain it is he was the first amateur who obtained special permission from the stewards to ride among professionals. His "Vanity Fair" commentator says he had not "a particularly elegant seat, and would be better in this respect if he took a lesson in deportment from the jockey Watts," who rode Merry Hampton in the Derby for him, and the priority of whose services was retained with a fee "such as the most popular of Queen's counsel would be proud to secure."

On the other hand Alexander Scott calls him a "superb rider," and says that he was "not only the crack gentleman rider of his day, but the best I have ever seen in my sixty years' connection with the Turf." Indeed, he "suffered nothing by comparison" with great professional jockeys like Archer, Watts, and Tom Cannon. Charles Morton, who trained for him, calls him in "My Sixty Years on the Turf" (1930), "easily" the finest amateur jockey in England, who "always aspired to be a second Archer." Again, Arthur Yates, the trainer and gentleman rider, declared in his autobiography:—"I do not think I ever saw his equal among amateur jockeys. Some of his performances could not have been surpassed by the finest professionals of the day." Then the late Alfred E. T. Watson, as "Hotspur" in the "Daily Telegraph," declared in his obituary of Baird in that paper, that "few amateur horsemen attained a greater amount of proficiency," and he saw no reason to change his opinion when he wrote his autobiography a quarter of a century later, for there he says that Baird, "an excellent judge of a horse," was "so admirable a rider that he often held his own against the very best of the professional jockeys."

According to "Vanity Fair," he underwent "far more fatigue than any profes-

sional jockey," for, as he had a tendency to put on flesh, he was compelled to be very abstemious in his habits, and to resort to "heroic methods for keeping down his riding weight to under ten stones." Mr J. B. Booth in his entertaining book, "'Master' and Men," tells us that at Newmarket at a race time Baird was one of the earliest on the Heath of a morning, and would ride in ten or twelve trials before breakfast.

It has often been said that Mr Abington liked to ride winners anywhere. At one time, says Lord Suffolk, he would have given "almost anything" for the chance of being a winner. According to his trainer, Charles Morton, he would travel hundreds of miles and spend thousands of pounds merely for the honour and glory of getting first past the post. "And, by Jove, didn't he love beating one of the crack professionals! He liked nothing better than the thrill of beating one of the crack professionals! He liked nothing better than the thrill of having £5000 on a horse in a tin pot selling race." This is borne out by Sir George Chetwynd, who in 1886-7 was a partner with Baird in running four horses, and who says that his "greatest pleasure was to ride himself." He goes on to state that Mr Abington is "quite indefatigable in travelling all over England to ride races, and has constantly lost large sums of money by riding horses belonging to other people in selling races, and making the owner a present of the surplus money it has cost him to buy his horse back again." Similarly, Lord Suffolk tells us that some of Baird's selling plate triumphs must have cost him "a small fortune, where part of the bargain was that, in addition to the stable being on to nothing, he was to buy in the winner, an arrangement by which the owner of the second, perfectly cognisant of the terms, was not unwilling to profit largely." Sir George Chetwynd reminds us that after Mr Arthur Coventry gave up riding, Mr Abington in 1891 headed the list of gentleman riders not only in winning mounts, but in ability. His obituarist in "Baily's Magazine," a first-rate authority, stated "there were few professionals who could beat him." In short, he displayed on the Turf the mastery which the Bairds had shown in trade.

#### AN INCALCULABLE MASTER.

Trainers had difficulties with him. From first to last he had a great many, including Tom Cannon, Arthur Yates, Gurry, and Morton. The last tells us that sometimes Baird had more horses than he knew of, and that they were scattered over many stables in England, and were sometimes run under the names of his different trainers. Stevens and then Gurry trained Merry Hampton. Then after a great deal of urging Charles Morton became his trainer at Bedford Lodge, Newmarket, from 1888 to 1892, and found him an exigent and incalculable master. His purchases,

which are fully described by "Mankato," were certainly not all of the best. Thus Gallinule, a persistent blood-vessel breaker, never won a race for Baird, but his stock was so good that he sired seven winning two-year-olds in one season, though Baird did not live to see the feat.

Baird was master of the Newmarket Drag Hounds, succeeding poor Fred Archer, who died in 1836. Curiously enough, like Fred Archer and some other professional jockeys, Baird, when not in the pigskin, "hated any horse that was not as quiet as an old sheep," and the "Pink 'Un," repeated by Mr J. B. Booth in "Master and Men," tells an extraordinary story of his once giving away a horse in the Park when it did not please him in point of manners.

Mr Abington betted heavily and sometimes recklessly, but he won £20,000 in the Cambridgeshire of 1836, which broke the heart of Fred Archer, who rode the Duchess of Montrose's St Mirin, while his winnings during the years 1838-1892 totalled £40,116. After his death his eighty-six horses fetched between them £44,490. I may note that his cousin, Douglas Baird, was also keen on the Turf.

#### BAIRD AND THE PRIZE RING.

Augustus Feverel, in Meredith's phrase, lost his leg and ceased to be an officer of the Guards. By the same token, the Squire lost his interest in the Turf, and ceased to be Mr Abington. He transferred his main enthusiasms from racing to the ring; he exchanged jockeys and trainers for prize fighters; and the general impression of the commentators on his career, especially the racing ones, is that he made a bad deal in this, his second phase.

The obituary notice in "Baily's Magazine" is typical of the general attitude to the subject: "It would have been well if he had confined his attention to horse-flesh, and not squandered the money on people and pursuits hardly desirable." Morton, his trainer, draws the same moral: "All might have gone well with Baird if he had stuck to the Turf. But towards the end of my time with him (1892) he became associated with the prize fighting fraternity." He even stopped going to race meetings. Morton also says that many people "tried their utmost to prevent him from coming a cropper, but alas, he would listen to none of them." George Lambton tells us that Baird, who "was not a bad fellow at heart and good-natured to a fault, made one or two attempts himself to break loose from his prize fighting cronies, but failed." Certain it is his last year or two of life was so racketty that his end in the spring of 1893 did not take onlookers by surprise, for when he ceased to gallop on the race-course he galloped to destruction, creating an extraordinary legend of recklessness which recalls the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century. Indeed, in many

respects Mr Abington was a complete anachronism.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to decide where Baird's racing stage ended and where the prize ring one began. What seems to have happened was that the two merged into one another imperceptibly. At that time fighting men were more connected with the turf than they are to-day, and Baird was much more likely to meet them than he would have been to-day. Indeed, one of his boxing mentors tells us that he received his summons from Baird by telegram at Tattersall's at Warwick, to wait upon the Squire in his London house, which he duly did. Furthermore, Mr Abington, at least to begin with, used these people to keep himself fit. But in addition to that, the "Sportsman" assures us that Baird was "a passionate lover of 'the art' in all its phases, and that one of the most sighed-for pleasures of his life was to see a keen set-to," wherein he transferred the fight for business, which had inspired his ancestors, to the ring. The kind of fighting he preferred was the old-fashioned type of the pugilist, as distinguished from the boxer as we know him: which only showed again that the Squire was an anachronism. The old pugilism practically came to an end in 1839, when his friend Jem Smith drew for the championship with Frank Slavin. Baird's friend, Charley Mitchell (1861-1913) belonged to the older school.

Certainly the recklessness with which he plunged into the ring and the wild life of a man about town in London, were more marked after he got control of his fortune, which he hid on attaining the age of twenty-five in 1836. Till that time he lived in chambers at 5 Pall Mall Place, above a hairdresser. Then, on coming into his money, he took a whole house, in 1837, at 3 John Street, Berkeley Square, which runs at right angles into South Street, where his mother was still living in 1836, and where Florence Nightingale died. No. 3 had been occupied by Horace Flower, who was the brother of Lord Battersea and of Lady Oxford's friend, "Peter" (Lewis) Flower, and who died as the result of a hunting accident in 1835, leaving over £90,000, and making Lord Huntly's brother, Lord Douglas Gordon, one of his trustees.

#### ONGOINGS IN JOHN STREET.

John Street at that time was, and it still remains, a very quiet thoroughfare, and its inhabitants must have been shocked many a time at the ongoing at No. 3—quite a modest house: it has not been altered since his day—where Baird lived riotously till his death, visited by his fighting friends. Ralph Nevill tells us in his "Man of Pleasure" that he used to get together three or four piano organs in his drawing-room, and let the grinders play against each other. I may say that I took a look at his house the very day

(November 4, 1933), when Gordon Richards equalled the 246 wins record of Fred Archer, whom Baird had beaten on occasion.

But though Baird came into his money, and often squandered it, he could also be very careful about it, for his "Vanity Fair" commentator noted in 1888 that, while he had a "number of hangers-on," yet he was "too shrewd to be victimised to any considerable extent, and did not allow the parasite to devour his substance." His trainer, Morton, who took post with him in that very year, corroborates this by saying that Mr Abington did not like losing money "any more than the rest of us"; while J. B. Booth in "Old Pink 'Un Days" says that in certain moods it was "a sheer physical pain to him to have to part with his money."

#### HIS DEBUT AS BACKER.

According to the obituary notice in the "Sportsman," Mr Abington made his debut as a backer of prize fighters in the fight between Edwin ("Nunc") Wallace, of Birmingham, against W. Goode, of Battersea, for the 8 stone 2 lb. championship for £100 a side. This fight, which took place on March 5, 1889, in the Exchange Club, Queen Street, Cheapside, London, created an immense amount of interest, and was reported in the "Sportsman" to the extent of two columns. Eight rounds were fought, when the partisans broke up the ring in great excitement, the timekeeper being "bullied and hustled just like a ball in a Rugby football match." But the decision fell to "Nunc" Wallace (age 22: 5ft. 2in.: 7 stones 11 lbs.), who inflicted "terrible punishment" on Goode (age 27: 5ft. 3in.: 7 stones 10 lbs.). The seconds of Wallace, who escaped with scarcely a scratch, were Jack Baldock, the grandfather of Teddy Baldock of to-day, and Baird's friend, Jem Carney, who, like Wallace, was born (in 1856) in Birmingham. A few days later we find Mr Abington and Lord Huntly's brother, Lord Granville Gordon—what a tale of life he could have told!—among the patrons of a boxing tournament which took place at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, on March 11-16, 1889. From this point onwards Baird backed many fights, and it was in one of these backings that he came by his death.

#### A BOXING MENTOR.

Baird employed Jem Carney, the veteran bareknuckle fighter, who is still very much alive, to keep him fit. Carney, who tells us he was installed in the Tavistock Hotel, Covent Garden, went round to Baird's house at eight o'clock every morning. "We used to take a turn in the Park," Carney told "Empire News" readers in 1929, "returning to the house, and after a good rub down, don gymnasium togs and have three hot rounds with the gloves—and, let me tell you, when it came to using the muffers, the Squire was nobody's fool." Carney also tells us that when

Baird took Sir Frederick Johnstone's place at Windsor, he turned the harness room into a gym. On the other hand, Mr J. B. Booth, in "Old Pink 'Un Days," says that Baird's "one great vanity was his belief in his tremendous hitting power, and that heaven had designed him to be champion of England, a belief that cost him tens of thousands of pounds."

One of the fights he was connected with was that between Jem Smith and Frank Slavin, which took place on December 23, 1889, at a chateau near Bruges, tenanted by a retired captain of the Cameron Highlanders. This encounter, which is described by Mr Booth in "'Master' and Men," cost Mr Abington his membership of the Pelican Club, which he had joined on its formation in March, 1887. The committee of the club summoned him on January 7, 1890, when he denied that he had led roughs in favour of Smith. The committee, however, declared that he used abusive language to Slavin. On January 29 Lord Queensberry, who drew up the famous rules for boxing, moved, and Lord Lonsdale seconded, that he be ejected, and this was carried unanimously. On February 3 the club decided that "the conduct of Mr Baird at the ring side on the occasion of the Smith and Slavin fight was, in the opinion of the committee, unbecoming a gentleman and a member of the Pelican Club": so he was called on to resign. Next day he wrote a letter, quoted by Mr Booth, to John Corlett, editor of the "Pink 'Un":—"Knowing that I am perfectly innocent of the grave charge against me, I am sure I may rely on you to assist me with reference to the attempt to expel me from the Pelican Club." In the same letter he states that he had received sympathy from Robert Martin of "Ballyhooley" fame. A week or two later, Baird raised an action in the Chancery Court before Mr Justice Stirling, a native of Aberdeen, asking that the club, of which Cecil Raleigh, the dramatist, was secretary, should be restrained from expelling him. His case was presented by Sir Charles Russell and Sir Horace Davey, but the judge decided on March 7 against Baird in a learned judgment reported at great length in the "Sportsman," to which Baird was always a matter of prime interest. The case was then carried to the Court of Appeal on April 23, but was not proceeded with, for Baird stated through counsel that he did not wish to continue his membership.

After he was expelled from the club he took over his old friend, Sir George Chetwynd's house, 36 Curzon Street, apparently, as Ralph Nevill suggests, with the idea of making a club of it. The house, I may say, is almost opposite Lord Crewe's spacious mansion, and almost next door to Sunderland House, which was built for the present Duke of Marlborough. The story, as told by Nevill, is that Baird happened to be dining one night with Chetwynd, and made an offer for the house, lock, stock, and barrel, and as it was accepted, he installed

himself right away, and was astonished next day to find himself in a strange bed.

#### BAIRD'S LIFE IN LONDON.

The escapades engaged in, or attributed to, Baird, are simply legion, forming something like the story of Benson, the "Jubilee Plunger," whom Baird knew. Some of them, indeed, almost seem to indicate that on occasion "the Squire," as he came more and more to be called, was not all there.

When in London he painted the town red. His favourite hawff was the famous Romano's, in the Strand, where he indulged in all kinds of horse play. The "Man of the World" states that people, who tolerated having their hats bashed in by him, or being drenched with whisky and soda, had "no difficulty in touching him for a good round sum." Mr Booth tells us in "Master and Men" that at the Squire's house strange characters were generally to be found "comfortably domiciled. The expense of maintaining these delectable guests and providing them with pocket money used to cost the host, so he boasted, over £1500 a week. His devices to make money fly were numerous and ingenious, a typical one being to open several dozen of the finest champagne, drink, with his companions, one glass out of each bottle, and throw the rest away." As an example of his extravagance, Baird, we are told by Ralph Nevill, used to have a bill for fresh fruit, of which he was very fond, running into £2000 a year.

Jem Carney, in his autobiographical sketches in the "Empire News," tells us that one of the Squire's favourite places for entertaining his friends was the Blue Post, not far from his solicitors' office in the west end, a house long famous for its marrow bones. After dinner he would take his party to the Empire or the Alhambra, going on after the show to the Criterion or the Café Royal. And then, "with just enough liquor under his belt to make him adventurous," he would have a "look round the East End," or visit Covent Garden in the early hours of the morning. Sometimes, Carney goes on to say, he went round the Seven Dials, "where you didn't want any wings sprouting on your shoulder blades at three o'clock in the morning. I was no chicken," adds Carney, "and could stand as much as the next fellow, but the Squire's idea of fun, and mine, did not always go together, and many a time I have trotted off home to get away from the Squire's idea of what a little excitement should be."

It was just the same when he went out of London. Thus Carney tells us that when Mr Abington was hunting at Ascot he commissioned him to get up a prize fight in a barn in the early hours of the morning, for which two Birmingham pugilists were imported, and gave a "terrific slam." An attempt was also made to get up a cock fight.

Summing him up, Carney describes the

Squire as "the most eccentric, wild, yet big-hearted Scotsman" he ever met. "I should think," he adds, "that the Squire was the funniest mixture of a man that ever lived. One moment he would do something that was enough to get him hanged, and the next he would do something that would make his name be ever blessed by someone or other. Those who saw only the wild side of this gentleman," he goes on to say, "could never imagine the hours he sat with me for this and that, and I never found him far wrong." Ralph Nevill mentions as an example of his good-heartedness that when the wife of one of his friends, Captain X., came to ask help for her husband, who was very ill in France, Baird sent over a doctor and saved the patient's life.

#### HIS LADY FRIENDS.

Baird also had a "romantic" side, and many stories are told of his lady friends. Thus Ralph Nevill, who span out the gossip about Baird through several of his rattled-up books, tells us that Baird once made a dead set at the wife of a well-known sporting man, and asked her to elope with him. It was arranged that she should get £100,000, which she duly did—and shared it with her spouse, never seeing Baird again. Another piece of gossip tells us that he gave £100,000—the figures seem far too large even for a millionaire, to be even approximately true—to a lady, borrowing it at 10 per cent. from a moneylender. Notwithstanding, she jilted him. That "hurt the Squire to the quick," and Morton tells us that he got back on her by sending her a dead cat as a Christmas box.

His expenditure is certainly exaggerated by the "Kelso Chronicle"—which gave an amazingly frank account of him, for a local paper, on the occasion of his death—for it stated that "one fashionable beauty who placed herself under his protection was eventually rewarded with a broken jaw. She, however, took compensation in her way and surgical aid with £50,000 with which she had despoiled her drunken protector." This is an exaggerated account of the affair, which was the talk of London. I have reason to believe the lady, who was not so severely damaged as suggested, was mollified with £30,000. A friend of mine tells me he saw its entry in her pass book.

#### MAKING MRS LANGTRY "MR JERSEY."

One of his great friends was Mrs Langtry, of whom Dame Kendal recently wrote, "I wonder where in God's great universe she is." Morton says Baird was "desperately fond" of her. You will, however, look in vain for any mention of him by name in the lady's adroit autobiography, "The Days I Knew." She merely speaks of him as "an eccentric young bachelor with vast estates in Scotland, a large racing stud, a racing stable, and more money than he knew what to do with."

One day towards the close of 1891, while

lunching at her house, Baird offered her "abruptly" his two-year-old chestnut colt, Milford. The offer was at first hastily refused, till one of the guests with racing predilections urged her to accept the colt. But the horse continued to be housed in the donor's stables, and she forgot all about it till Weatherby, the publishers of the Racing Calendar, wrote requesting her to register her colours, which she did. This was her start in racing, which she took up as "Mr Jersey." Milford was very successful, and on the day it won the Royal Two Year Old Plate, she refused £10,000 for it, Mr Abington also gave Mrs Langtry her famous yacht, the White Lady. He was also interested, I believe, in some of her theatrical ventures. Mrs Langtry lived at this time in Pont Street. It is not without its irony that at the other end of the street his uncle, James Baird, had helped to build St Columba's Church with a handsome donation.

### 1890, MR ABINGTON'S LURID YEAR.

It was another theatrical lady who introduced Mr Abington to the most exciting year of his life, 1890, for within one month he made appearances in the Divorce Court as a co-respondent, in the Court of Chancery as a plaintiff, and in the Police Court as witness in a lurid assault case. In fact, the actual hearing of the cases was simultaneous. His appearance in the Divorce Court on February 27 was as co-respondent in the divorce suit brought by Francis Darbishire, the actor, claiming £10,000, against his wife, Agnes Hewitt, actress, who had made a hit at the Olympic Theatre, London, in "The Pointsman," by R. C. Carton and Cecil Raleigh, the latter of whom, as noted, was secretary of the Pelican Club, which Baird was fighting at the very moment of the action.

Having got into financial difficulties at the Olympic, Miss Hewitt went on tour with her husband in Violet Melnotte's company in Manville Fen and J. H. Darnley's farce, "The Barrister," which visited Aberdeen a few weeks later without her, and was to cause resort to several barristers. They played at Liverpool during the race week, opening March 25, 1889. Mr Abington was at the meeting, having two horses in the Grand National, Bellona, which came in fourth, and Roquefort, which was sixth with his friend Mr E. P. Wilson "up." The race was won by Frigate, followed by Why Not, ridden by Mr C. J. Cunningham, who had really introduced Mr Abington to the Turf. Miss Hewitt, who had met Baird three or four years before at a theatrical ball in the Eyre Arms, St John's Wood, London, before she married Darbishire, and who may, as a first-rate swimmer, have appealed to his sporting instincts, renewed her acquaintance with him in a box at the great race on March 29. She apparently came to London with him on the following Sunday, after the week's engagement was over. She stayed with Mr Abington, both at John

Street and at his racing place, Bedford Lodge, Newmarket. In the divorce case Abington, who was represented by Sir Charles Russell and Mr Inderwick, said that he did not know she was married, as she had been in 1837, in which he was supported by his London housekeeper, Maggie Leask. But he was judged guilty, and had to pay £500 damages. A little later she married the son of a famous Scots minister.

Six days after the divorce case Mr Abington's name figured much more sensationally in the newspapers, for a fierce fight took place in his house in John Street at two o'clock on the morning of March 5. On March 6, the day before Mr Justice Stirling delivered judgment in the Pelican Club case, Baird's crony, Mitchell, was charged with assaulting Arthur Cockburn, a professional backer, described as "gentleman," and William Joseph Goode, a prizefighter known as "Chesterfield" Goode—quite different from the featherweight, W. Goode, who figured in the first fight backed by Baird in 1839. Cockburn had a contused eye, and Goode's head had been so badly battered that he had to be taken to St George's Hospital. The inhabitants of John Street must certainly have been roused out of their sleep at two o'clock that March morning, when the street resounded with cries of "Police!" for a scene had been enacted recalling in some respects the lurid episode dramatised by the late John Lawson in the melodrama, "Humanity," which used to be played by him in Aberdeen. The case occupied the magistrate at four sittings, at the last of which, on April 2, Mitchell was charged only with assaulting Goode.

So much loose, and sometimes exaggerated, writing has been expended on Mr Abington that I quote the report of his own evidence at the last sitting of the court as given in the "Times," which reported it at great length, though it cannot be called a sensational journal. Far more vivid details were printed in the "Sportsman," which also interviewed Cockburn. The account of the affair by George Alexander Baird, as the "Times" in its accurate way called him, stated:—

"On the morning in question he invited (Charles Henry) Hannam (commission agent, Bradford) and (Samuel) Hodgson (bookmaker, Bradford) to his house. Cockburn and Goode came there uninvited and forced their way in past the servant (Maggie Leask). He quarrelled with Cockburn and some blows were exchanged. To avoid a bother, and for quietness sake, he went to his bedroom and retired to rest. Mitchell came to his room and asked him if he wanted Cockburn to come to the room. Witness said, No. He then heard a scuffle. Cockburn came into the room, took up the poker and tongs and jumped on to the bed. Cockburn tried to put the poker into his eye. They both fell off the bed. When the witness got out of the room he saw both Goode and Mitchell on the first land-

ing. Mitchell complained that Goode was a coward because he had struck him twice unawares. The witness went to the bottom of the stairs and saw Goode come out of the dining room with a poker in his hand. Goode struck at Mitchell twice with the poker, Mitchell avoided the first blow, but the second one hit Mitchell on the arm, causing the poker to bend. Mitchell did not have the poker in his hand. There was not the slightest doubt that Goode first picked up the poker. During the whole evening Mitchell had acted as peacemaker. After Mitchell received the poker, he took the poker from Goode and threw it to the ground. Mitchell then gave Goode a punch. Cockburn and Goode left the house. Goode had the poker in his possession, and the witness's housekeeper informed him that Goode broke it by knocking it against some railings in the street. He should say that Goode received the wound on the head [which necessitated his removal to St George's Hospital] by coming in contact with some projection when he was falling down the stairs. The witness had known Cockburn for some years, but only as an acquaintance in racing matters.

"Maggie Leask, the housekeeper, said that on the morning in question Mr Baird ordered Cockburn and Goode not to be admitted. Goode and Cockburn forced their way in, and Goode caught Mr Baird by the collar of the coat. They went into the diningroom, and Cockburn was very outrageous and took off his coat and went for Mr Baird, Mitchell separated them, and Goode incited Mr Baird to box. Cockburn's nose was bleeding, and Mitchell, seeing that there was likely to be a row, asked Mr Baird to go to his room, and he did so. Cockburn followed Mr Baird, and the witness tried to prevent him from doing so. Cockburn then struck her on the breast, and she called out . . ."

A police-inspector had previously declared in evidence that when the police were called Mitchell, who was fully corroborated by several witnesses, said:—"We were all very drunk." The presiding magistrate, Mr Hannay, said he had come to the conclusion that it would be useless to send the case for trial, as no jury would convict; so Mitchell, for whom his father-in-law, "Pony" Moore of the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, had stood bail for £500, was discharged. It was also announced that Goode had accepted compensation.

#### A FALL AT LEICESTER.

All this racketty life was certainly not good for a jockey, and yet Mr Abington had twenty-three wins on thirty mounts in 1890, and as noted, Sir George Chetwynd, writing in 1891, stated that he headed the list of winning gentlemen riders. He came in second, but was disqualified, on Lord Gerard's Bransdale in the High Peak Plate at Leicester on April 2, 1892—at which meeting his cousin, Mr E. W. Baird, had a horse running—although the "Leicester Post," in reporting the race, declared that

the horse should have won "with ordinary jockeyship." Just after passing the post. Mr Abington fell off, and was badly shaken. He also rode in the Edinburgh meeting at the end of September, 1892. Baird won the Edinburgh Gold Cup with Alice, and was second on Norval in the All Aged Selling Plate, and he was third in another case with Remote, entered in the name of Mr E. P. Wilson, but believed to be Abington's own property.

I think his last appearance as a jockey was at the Liverpool meeting of November, 1892, when he rode in three races. His own horse, Lady Rosbery, came in third in the Liverpool Autumn Cup—Watts up.

#### MR ABINGTON'S LAST ADVENTURE.

It was, however, the ring and not the racecourse which closed the lurid career of Mr Abington at New Orleans, a year almost to a day after his spill at Leicester. He went to America to arrange the world's championship fight of his friend Charley Mitchell, whom he backed to the extent of £3000 and £2000 a side against Corbett. Some of the gossips suggest that the Squire came to like the limelight. He certainly got enough of it when he left London for Liverpool on February 7, 1893. The "Sportsman," which "went all out" on their departure, tells us an enormous crowd went to Euston to see the party off. "When the saloon carriage was unlocked, the officials made a futile attempt to keep the crowd back, but the sightseers would not be denied, overpowering a gang of porters who were reinforced by a posse of the railway company's constables. They rushed pell-mell down the platform." Mitchell's father-in-law, "Pony" Moore, brought the Moore and Burgess band from the St James's Hall, and it played "The song that reached my heart"—sung by a tenor named Stewart—while "Rule Britannia" and "Auld Lang Syne"—probably for Baird's special benefit—followed. The Moore family turned out in force, including "Pony's" wife and his daughters—Victoria, who was married to Mitchell; Bella, the widow of Fred Vokes, of the famous Vokes family; and Annie, who married the charming coon singer, Eugene Stratton, who held up Mitchell's fair-haired little boy to the saloon window as the train steamed out. Among others present were, as the reporters used to say, Arthur Cockburn and Jem Carney. Baird took with him as secretary his hotelier friend, E. W. Baily, whose brother-in-law, Sir Harry Preston, tells us in his book, "Memories," that he was equally fond of "cock fighting, badger baiting, rat killing, rowing, boxing, and billiards." Baird's valet, William Monk, also travelled with him.

Ten stops were made en route, and at each halt little crowds appeared to get a peep at the redoubtable Charley. After staying the night at the Alexandra Hotel, the party sailed on February 9 on the



Cunarder Majestic. Seven weeks later the same vessel brought the Squire back to Liverpool—dead.

One wonders if Baird had any premonition, for on the very day he left London he added a codicil to his curious will, to which I shall duly refer. Notwithstanding that he had been riding through the previous racing season, he was apparently not in the best of health. That it should have been "undermined," as Hotspur stated, is not to be wondered at, after his racketty life. His friend Mitchell stated that Baird had intestinal trouble, and had suffered from asthma for years.

On the voyage out Baird felt so ill that, according to a statement made by Ralph Nevill to a friend of mine, he offered the captain £50,000 to turn back, which was, of course, impossible, as the vessel was carrying mails. The story may not be true, but it is worth recording as an index to the extraordinary saga which has risen round the Squire. The party landed at New York—after some little legal difficulty over Mitchell—on February 16.

Before the Mitchell-Corbett fight could come off, Abington attended the fight between Jem Hall, the Australian, and Bob Fitzsimmons, the Cornishman, who was exactly the same age as Mitchell and Abington, in the Crescent City Athletic Club, New Orleans, on March 8, 1893. The building was packed with 12,000 people, to see Hall knocked out in the fourth round.

#### THE END OF MR ABINGTON.

According to the "Times Democrat" of New Orleans, Baird had, "by indiscretion," caught a bad cold on the voyage out, and aggravated it by his "extraordinary imprudence" at the fight. He acted as one of the seconds of Hall, and wore nothing over his chest but a light undershirt that left his neck fully exposed to a wintry wind which whistled through the amphitheatre. The other seconds of the two men were similarly attired, but nearly all of them had some exercise in the matter of rubbing down the men. On the other hand, the Squire, whose position was rather that of an auxiliary second than anything else, did nothing except hand over the necessary articles. Besides which, he had to stand in the draughts from the cold weather outside, and the little breezes made when Jack M'Auliffe and Charley Mitchell were fanning Hall. The cold, indeed, was so intense that the reporters sat heavily muffled, and the spectators shivered.

As soon as the fight was over, says the "Times Democrat," the Squire and his friends "commenced a round of dissipation." Reuter's correspondent — whose message, by the way, was not used by the London "Times"—tells us that the entire party started for a "lark," and a general tour to various places of amusement. Even here Baird was unsuitably clothed, for he had taken off his heavy clothing.

The result was that he had to be put to bed in the St Charles Hotel, which was the best in the town. His temperature rapidly rose to 104 and then to 106, and he was soon found to be suffering from pneumonia, which made him delirious. Two doctors warned Mitchell about Baird's condition, but he told one of them to "jolly him up," and he would soon be well. But the unhappy Squire got worse instead of better, becoming so delirious that, as Reuter's man said, he had constantly to be watched lest he should do himself injury. Two other doctors, Elliott and Miles, were called in, for Baird's relatives had got into touch with the British consul.

Fitzsimmons, the successful fighter, called twice a day, and Baird was looked after by his secretary and valet. Mitchell went off to New York, via Buffalo, to arrange for the voyage home in the Majestic on March 22. As a matter of fact, the vessel brought home Baird's body, for the Squire died at eight o'clock on the morning of Saturday, March 13, leaving this world, as he had entered it, in a hotel.

When the news reached this country the papers were full of it, for Reuter had sent a long telegram, which the "Times" did not print, nor did it biograph him. There were column obituaries in the "Standard" and the "Telegraph," and two columns in the "Sportsman." Naturally, the Kelso weeklies dealt with him at length, the Kelso "Chronicle" being extremely outspoken, while the "Kelso Mail" permitted itself to say that "his want of moral courage, combined with a lack of early training, and the acquisition of enormous wealth, made him what he was. Too early to become 'lord of himself and heritage of woe,' caring for little beyond riding and boxing, not associating much with men of his own class in life, he too soon fell into the hands of sycophants and rogues."

That note was struck only in a few London papers, though London had rung with scandal about him for years, and had seen a great deal more of him than Kelso. The "Man of the World" declared that he had had "a most dissolute career, and suffered his brute passions to dominate his whole life. His best epitaph," it added, "will be, 'It's the pace that kills.'" Again, "Baily's Magazine," staid though it was, said he was "surrounded by hangers-on and parasites from the first; and, liking to be king of the jovial company, he sought that company, we fear, among his inferiors. Many were the scandalous rumours as to how the poor, weak, easy-going man was plundered." It ended up by speaking of his short career as "the pitiful story of a wasted life."

The same sort of comment had been passed by several writers who have subsequently referred to him in their autobiographies. But Alfred E. T. Watson, in his life story, spoke of him as "particularly quiet and modest," though he once fell out with him, and Arthur Yates always saw

“the best side of his nature, which was at bottom very gentle and pleasant.” Yates also speaks of him “conversing in his quiet way with his head slightly cocked on one side.” The “Times Democrat” of New Orleans described him as narrow chested, though he also had broad shoulders, and certainly the “Vanity Fair” cartoon of him does not give the impression of a well-set-up man. He was not to be compared to Archer, on whom he modelled his style.

#### MR ABINGTON'S GRAVE.

While all the newspapers were commenting on Mr Abington and telling just as much as they dared, the body, which had been embalmed—and, according to the American custom of the time, clothed in evening dress—was being brought home on the Majestic, which landed at Liverpool on March 29—the only fact about his death which the “Times” permitted its stately self to make, and that only in three lines. Poor Baird was buried in a polished pine coffin beside his father in Stichill churchyard on Saturday, April 1. The funeral was semi-private. His friend, Charley Mitchell, who sent a wreath, stood on the outskirts of the kirkyard during the interment, and created great interest among the inhabitants of Kelso. Sir George Douglas speaks of him as being “by a long way the best of all poor George’s fighting associates.” Baird’s secretary and valet also travelled north, but do not appear to have put in an appearance. Among many wreaths there was one from Strichen: another from New York representing a pillar of flowers surmounted by a dove. Sir George Chetwynd also sent a wreath. The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. George Gunn (1851-1900), the parish minister and historian of Stichill, who spoke from the text in Philippians: “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death.”

There were eight pall bearers, including his cousins, Mr J. G. A. Baird, M.P., of Muirkirk; Mr William Baird of Elie, and Mr E. W. D. Baird. Baird’s mother did not travel north from Brighton, where she lived and died. Hundreds of people visited the graveyard next day, which was Sunday, for never had such an array of wreaths been seen. Baird is commemorated with a stone bearing the text from Hebrews: “He liveth to make intercession for them.” The texts on his father’s memorial are: “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (I Timothy, vi, 7), and “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job, i, 21).

#### HIS STRANGE WILL.

Baird, then at 9 York Terrace, Regent’s Park, made his will at Lumleys’ office on November 14, 1891, and added a codicil on November 30, 1891, and a second codicil on February 7, 1893, when his address was 36 Curzon Street—Sir George Chetwynd’s

house. He first designed the money to be held in trust for his mother, and then after her decease for the children of his first cousins on attaining their majority. In the codicil of November 30, witnessed by his valet Monk, he changed this to “the children of my first cousins as shall be alive at the decease of the survivor of my mother and myself.” Under the main will the children would have taken a vested interest in their shares of the estate, and been, therefore, competent to dispose of these shares by will or otherwise immediately on Baird’s own death. By the codicil, however, he provided that the bequest should fall only to such parties as should be alive “at the decease of the survivor of my mother and myself.” According to the codicil, vesting of the shares would take place, and the legatees be competent to dispose of them only on the death of Baird’s mother as well as himself. In other words, vesting would be postponed until the death of both. Baird’s mother survived him, and then vesting was postponed until her death. What the reason of this change may have been, of course, one can only surmise, but that is the legal effect of it.

His executors were Walter Temple, barrister, and Walter Lumley, his solicitor. The latter’s brother, Theodore Lumley, his commissioner, read the will to the family at Stichill House after the funeral. Their nephew is Mr Adrian Lumley, of the Torry Fishery Research Station. Notwithstanding his extravagances, Baird’s will was proved at £846,051 12s 11d, though that, too, might have gone if he had lived longer. There were, I believe, seventy portioners, and, as he knew few or none of them personally, Mr Abington, as Sir George Douglas remarks, had an original if somewhat distorted sense of humour, a comment doubly true, if, as has been stated, Baird wired to Mrs Langtry on leaving England: “Made my will yesterday: have left everything to you.” Sir George Douglas also states that when his mother heard of his death she remarked that she would have £30,000 a year. She did not survive him long, for she died of influenza at Brighton, where Baird as a boy had ridden his skewbald pony, on March 5, 1895, at the age of seventy-three, her stone at Stichill being inscribed with the hope—“May she rest in peace.” Her son’s career must have brought anything but peace for the poor lady.

After Baird’s death, the management of the estates, including Strichen, was carried on by his trustees, Walter Lumley and Walter Temple, and with the former’s brother, Theodore Lumley, as commissioner, a position which he had held in Baird’s lifetime, in succession to Sir William Laird, Glasgow. This arrangement continued until the youngest child of Mr Abington’s first cousins reached the age of twenty-one, when, after an attempt to sell the lands, the management was transferred to the Midland Bank Trustee Department. In November, 1925, after

having been held by the Bairds for seventy years. Strichen was sold, along with Auchmedden, the original Aberdeenshire cradle of the Bairds, to a London speculator, the late Mr E. C. Fairweather (died 1932), London, who sold the farms separately, and later on broke up the Pitfour estate in the same way. Thus not only was no house of Baird founded in the case of Mr Abington's branch of the great Gartsherrie group, but Strichen ceased as a unified estate, and is now the geographical name for several separately owned farms. In this way the desire of the Gartsherrie Bairds to find a footing in the shire with which they had long been associated was finally defeated.

#### HIS UNCLE'S DOUBT.

I cannot help wondering whether his uncle, James Baird, from whom he inherited Auchmedden, did not feel uneasy about Mr Abington. At anyrate, James gave expression to this sentiment in a grateful tribute to his masterful mother, printed in the rare history of the Bairds of Gartsherrie, which was privately printed in Glasgow in 1875, when Mr Abington was fourteen years old. James stated that, thanks largely to his hard-headed mother, Jean Moffat, the whole family became imbued "with the best principles and trained in the practice of industry and economy." He then went on to cite a "modern philosopher's" version of the familiar "clogs-to-clogs" axiom. "Indigence and obscurity are the parents of industry and economy: these of riches and

honour; these of pride and luxury; these sensuality and idleness; these of indigence and obscurity: such are the revolutions of life."

James Baird went on to say that the children of his father, Alexander Baird, were "certainly born in 'indigence and obscurity': and never did a family practise with more earnestness and energy the virtues of 'industry and economy.'" The reward of these virtues—namely, 'riches and honour'—has seldom, perhaps, been more bountifully vouchsafed by a kind Providence than in their case. None of them condescended to the vices of 'pride and luxury.'" Then he goes on to add—rather uneasily, one feels: "Whether future generations of the family will complete the round of the philosopher's axiom remains to be seen; but that some of them may do so is far from improbable." Was James thinking of young George? Or was he comparing the boy's Irish mother with his own managing, be-matched mother, Jean Moffat, the strong-faced old lady who died ten years before Mr Abington was born? Even as an old woman, she looked as if she would have been quite capable of applying her stick to him, and might have been able to thrash some sense into him.

Luckily, James Baird, a powerful old fellow, did not live to see his fears confirmed, for he died in 1876, when, by a bitter irony, his estate of Auchmedden fell into the hands of the boy who had ended his career at Eton ignominiously just six months before his uncle passed away.