

**WILLIAM MACLAREN,
PITTENDREICH :**



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**VETERAN
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XXXVI.

WILLIAM MACLAREN, PITTENDREICH.



Reason's whole pleasure, all the joys of sense,
Lie in three words—health, peace, and competence.—POPE.

“Pittendreich” is a name fairly familiar to readers of “Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush.” To many it is nothing more than a name. After reading the article on “Ian Maclaren,” however, it is hardly necessary to say that it stands for an individual and a farm, both of which are held in special remembrance by the teller of tales. Pittendreich the farm is on the Lethendy estate, fully three miles to the south-west of Blairgowrie, and extends to some 200 acres, which lie beautifully to the sun on the northern slopes of the Lower Stormont—just about where, according to some historians, Galgacus drew up the Caledonians to face the invading Romans under Agricola over 1800 years ago. Gothens, Cranley, and the historic Tower of Lethendy are near neighbours, and the broken horizon to the west is closed in by the purple hills about Birnam and Dunkeld; to the east are the Sidlaws, with glimpses of the Ochils and the Lomonds; and to the south lie the Haughs of Delvine and the woods of Murthly, with the fair expanse of the Lower Stormont, through which the lordly Tay wanders in leisurely fashion from Dunkeld to Perth, stretching east and west in the vale below. From this sunlit braeface the

Blairgowrie and Strathmore Worthies :

Maclarens, father and son, have looked out upon the strath for

OVER A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS,

and the present tenant of Pittendreich is the oldest farmer, active and alert, not only in the Stormont, but over a much wider area. He was born on the farm in 1820, and is thus in his 83d year. His father, John Maclaren, wrought there before he married, came to be tenant of the place, and died on it at the advanced age of 92 years, a new lease having been made out in his son William's name a few years before his demise. There were four sons and four daughters in the family, nearly every one of whom has been connected with farming. David had a lease of Mill of Inverarity and Kinpurnie farms; John farmed Leckaway, south of Forfar, and is now retired in Rattray; Thomas had Seggieden, Grange of Kincaldrum, and Pert; and William is at Pittendreich. Two of the daughters married farmers. Of education very little was going in our old friend's young days, but what there was he got. There was a school on the estate, but the teacher had such a poor grip upon his scholars that the house was ultimately used for threshing corn in. Better results were obtained from Meikleour School, but, the fact is, he was required on the fields at an early age, and when quite a boy had his own "pair" in hand. He has very vivid recollections of the long hours, the hard work, and the backward methods of his youth.

IN THOSE DAYS

nearly all the grain and potatoes were driven to Perth three times a week, for which they had to start off as early as two or three in the morning, with a "bowl o' brose" for breakfast. The

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potatoes were mostly put on board ships at the Friarton, where the vessels would be lying three-deep at times. The carts usually returned laden with dung; there were no "artificial" then. Hours were just as many as the farmer could get out of his hands; wages ran, for halflin, £8 to £10; best man, £12. They are more than three times that now, best men getting as high as £40. Pittendreich recalls the "rinderpest" days with great zest, although he suffered considerable loss by the plague. Breeders and cattle-raisers generally lost heavily, and something like panic seized upon certain districts, every one trying to get rid of his stock before it should be condemned. On one occasion Pittendreich sent on a consignment to Edinburgh, and went to Glasgow with another himself. When he arrived at the mart he was met by his own beasts from Edinburgh, where they had failed to find a purchaser. Prices that day went "plunk" to zero. The late Mr Spalding, Balconnel, who had Pondfauld then, lost 51 out of 52 cattle. Pittendreich tried pig-feeding as an experiment, but they were not a success. In his early days there were some nine or ten little pendicles on the farm, and every tenant was connected with the flax-growing and weaving business. This was

AN IMPORTANT INDUSTRY,

details of which are interesting, and the methods employed, in some respects at any rate, hardly capable of improvement. Amongst these may be mentioned the admirable arrangement by which it was possible for the farmers to have at hand whenever required bands of experienced workers, male and female, who, as soon as "hairst" and "tatty-liftin'" were over and winter fairly set in again, resumed their indoor employment, and

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thus kept the year merry all through with healthy and varied endeavour, satisfactory alike to both employer and employed. Masons and other outdoor workers were usually weavers also, and filled in the winter nights profitably at their looms. Hand-weaving can hardly be expected to take the position again it once held in country life, but with cheap electric power—the generator for which runs unheeded past our very doors—it is regrettable that efforts are not made to encourage other arts and industries—in wood, in iron, in textiles, &c.—during the winter months. But, dealing with the flax business: First of all, the seed was sown broadcast in the spring, and as the plant was very exhausting to the soil, the amount of land allowed under cultivation was strictly limited in the lease. The crop was generally a little earlier than the others, and as soon as it was ready the parish minister stepped in and claimed his “tenth,” which he pulled for himself. In passing, it may be mentioned that he was entitled to every tenth lamb also, but apparently both these privileges existed in Lethendy parish only. There is

A GOOD STORY

regarding the farmer of Spoutwell, who arranged that all his lambs should be dropped on Scroggiehill, which, while on the same estate, was in another parish. Down came the minister (Mr Rae) upon him when he discovered the fine promising lot of lambs at Spoutwell; but the wily farmer “kent the law” too well, and had very good sport at the minister’s expense. Every cottage had its one or more wheels; in Pittendreich there were three, and their whirr was pleasant music of an evening when everybody had gathered “in aboot.” Every woman and girl

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was "stented" (fixed down) to a certain quantity a day as minimum. The spun flax was taken to weavers in the district and sold right out. By these it was woven for the most part into white cloth for sheeting, &c; some of the coarser linen was made into sacking. The sacks, it may be mentioned, were all 6 bushels in those days; they are all 4 bushels now. The father of the late John Liston, Hallhole, was the first to introduce the novelty. In America they are usually 2 bushels. The Maclarens have always been noted for their splendid farming. Pittendreich is not able to trace any relationship between his father and the other John Maclaren of Drumlochry (grandfather of "Ian Maclaren"), although they were great friends; but Drumlochry showed the energy, thrift, and enterprise he was capable of when he settled down on the edge of the

MUIR OF GORMACK

and engaged to turn it to more profitable work than the mere growing of whin and heather. It is generally understood that the proprietor gave him as much as he took in from the muir for nothing for a number of years, and after that at nominal rent. Our old friend has the same grit in him. When he got the farm all the roads were a "general wade," the fields all shapes and sizes, with trees scattered all over the place. He accordingly set to and formed the roads, trenched and drained the ground, squared the fields—throwing two or three into one—fenced them, increased the acreage from 150 to 200, and otherwise brought the farm up to the model condition it now boasts. The late John Panton, known all over the East of Scotland as a model farmer, always professed himself a great admirer of Pittendreich's methods, and, as men-

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tioned in a former article, the standing order to his grieve at Gothens, which adjoins, was to "keep up with Pittendreich." He has seen the "teeth heuk," the "smooth heuk," the scythe, the reaper, and the binder supplant each other in turn. He remembers how, when bone-dust—the first "artificial"—was introduced some 68 years ago, an old wife declared she would never eat another turnip after she saw the stuff used. Guano came next, but we have no record of what the old wife said then. The farm was one of the very first on which the innovations were put on trial.

THE FIRST SWEDISH TURNIP

Pittendreich ever saw was on the land of one Duncan, at Cargill, the date being about the same as for the introduction of the new manures. Pittendreich is not a breeder of cattle, but a crop-raiser and feeder. In the former capacity more particularly he is a leading member of the Strathmont and Strathmore Agricultural Society. In 1890 he took prizes for the heaviest crop of turnips and best work all over, which was a record. He always carries off a prize for his turnips. As regards feeding, the farm is splendidly adapted for the purpose, and the matter of 200 head of heavy cattle are the average output for the year. Our esteemed friend is a great believer in the unobtrusive ways of sweet "health and quiet breathing," which are the ways of nature herself. Beyond his farm and its affairs, the kirk (Lethendy U.F., of which he is a substantial "pillar"), and a keen interest in politics (he is a staunch Liberal) he has no particular concern. Nine years ago the county honoured itself by making him a J.P.