

ALAN REID.



MR. ALAN REID. F.R.S.

POET, MUSICIAN, ANTIQUARY.



THE LOANING—MR REID'S EDINBURGH HOME.

XLVII.

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The subject of our sketch was born in Arbroath just half a century ago, but it is many a year since he found his way to the metropolis, there to settle down and become one of the busiest of professional men. His career is another good instance of the "self-help" order: "From telegraph boy to Edinburgh's premier school music teacher and composer"—not to mention much more to his credit—would suit exactly as heading to a chapter in some of Sir Samuel Smiles' books.

While he was quite an infant, our friend's parents removed to Forfar, and it is with the Royal burgh—of which he has published a worthy history—that his childhood and youth were connected. After the lad had received what was regarded as a fair education at the Burgh School, his father died, and a friend of the family got young Alan a situation as telegraph boy in Montrose. But a taste for constructive work early exhibiting itself, he returned to Forfar when fourteen years old to learn the cabinetmaker's business. Woodwork, however, was not sufficient to satisfy his active mind, and every spare moment was devoted to self-instruction and the construction of working

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models of engines and other mechanical ingenuities. As if these were not enough, he wooed successfully the three sisters divine of music, painting, and poetry—his efforts in the last connection appearing in the local newspapers, greatly to the gratification of the youthful scribbler. Probably the most potent factor in his career was becoming a member of the church choir. In the sphere of music his

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were soon recognised as of such superior order that when quite a youth he was appointed precentor in the Parish Church of Aberlemno, a position he afterwards filled in the Free Church there for a couple of years. The Free Church of Carnoustie next claimed his services, and another couple of years were spent in that thriving seaside resort. Here his devotion to work made an impression upon the community which was felt long after he had left the district. The attractions of Modern Athens—musical, literary, and artistic—proving irresistible, he had the pleasure of receiving a choirmastership in the Barclay Church there.

He was now completely in his element, and his rare qualifications as a choir trainer and teacher of music among children were further recognised by his being appointed teacher under the School Board, a position he has held now, with ever-growing success, for many years. He is exceptionally gifted for the training and management of large masses of children, a typical instance of which was the floral fete in connection with the Coronation last year. One of the most attractive items in the programme was the performance, seven days in succession, of one of his own operettas—"The

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Red, White, and Blue"—in the open at Murrayfield, the children answering to the baton in perfect style. Another illustration of his neat methodical work is the training of two classes of 500 each, juniors and seniors respectively, in connection with St Cuthbert's Co-Operative Association, his plan being to meet both classes in succession on the same night weekly during winter—most exhausting work to any one but the most tactful and good-natured individual going—finishing up in the spring with two grand demonstrations in the Music Hall. The ease and precision with which the great body of singers is manipulated has often been

THE SUBJECT OF ADMIRATION,

not to say wonder; but apparently it is simply second nature with the popular conductor. Training choirs, however, is only part of the musical work in which he has distinguished himself. He is the composer and compiler of quite a long list of school songs, operettas, and works on musical theory. No one has done more for school music than our friend. He has also written several musical lectures, among these the racy librettos so well known in the entertainments given by his friend, Mr Durward Lely. Then, as historian and antiquarian, his busy pen has produced a number of volumes, each one of which is a standard in its respective sphere. These include a history of Inchcolm Abbey; a history of Rosyth Castle; a Guide to Paisley and Surrounding District; "Limekilns, Charlestown, and Broomhall;" "The Bards of Angus and the Mearns," a notable book; and his latest effort, "The Royal Burgh of Forfar," a splendid volume of some 460 pages, consti-

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tuting the first real history ever written of the County Town. But even this goodly array does not complete the list, for there is "Howetoon; Records and Recollections of a Scottish Village"—a series of sketches which met with unanimous approbation by the press. To his other accomplishments has to be added skilful draughtsmanship, and not a few of the foregoing volumes are enhanced with clever illustrations by the author. Finally—just for the moment, however, as it is understood he has a "History of the Scottish Precentor," "The Bards of Fife and Kinross," and probably a number of other irons in the fire—there falls to be noted his couthie book of poems, "Sangs o' the Heatherland," published in 1894, and received into the good graces of the press and public right away. It is a charming little book, between the boards of which are numerous lilt in natural, unaffected vein—love, home, and open air being the principal themes of a collection of poems which are among the best of our minor Scots poetry.

Mr Reid is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, as well as a Fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and an active fellow he is, too, as his published works testify, and as his friends know. As might be inferred, he is in touch with all that is best in the literary and musical world in Auld Reekie—as well as all over the country.

THE LATE PROFESSOR BLACKIE,

with his perfervid love of Scots music, his fondness for children, and his admiration for clever work, held Mr Reid in highest esteem. Probably the most prized volumes in our friend's library are a complete set of the genial

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Professor's works, each liberally inscribed to him. The old Trojan used to find great delight in coming to see Mr Reid at his work, and occasionally he would consent to "sing" his "Jenny Geddes" for the amusement of the children. The word "amusement" has to be taken with some qualification, however, for at the words,

"No, no," she said, and at his head
She flung the four-legged stool!

it was his habit to snatch up a bundle of books and fling them at the children. It was a sight to behold the way in which the children would watch the swift action of the jolly old fellow, then scatter right and left as the books came flying amongst them. No one enjoyed the business better than himself—striking the floor with his stick, and exclaiming, "Good fun! Good fun!" oon amore, before he proceeded with the rest of the song. Some thirty letters of his to Mr Reid are further evidence of the great respect he had for him. But that is natural to everyone who has the pleasure of even a mere passing acquaintanceship; while to those who have studied the man and the admirable work he is doing, and are on intimate terms with him, the feeling is one of pride and gratitude that our country can boast men with such aims and ideals as his, and with such ability and devotion to carry them out.

The following poem is certainly one of Mr Reid's happiest efforts:—

THE HEATHER DINGS THEM A'.

There's rowth o' praise for gaudy blooms
In gairdens far and near,
But isna Scotia's heatherbell
The glory o' the year?

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In hardy grandeur, see it hap
The mountain and the shaw—
'Mang gems that deck fair Nature's face
The heather dings them a'.

The burnie bickers doon the glen,
And saft the sang it sings;
It's a' about the heatherbell,
Wha's partin' kiss it brings.
There's gayer forms and brichter hues,
But this chaste floorie sma'
Will haud its ain whaur they would fail—
The heather dings them a'!

Amang its shade the fairies play,
The birdies lo'e its bield;
And fichtest beasties, sairly press'd,
Find in it's hap a shield.
It's bonnie aye—but, oh, it's grand
Whan hairst time comes awa',
It's royal tints croon our auld hills—
The heather dings them a'!

Ring, bonnie bells, sweet heatherbells,
Ring oot your blithest strain;
An' waft the sang to leal Scotch hearts
In far isles o' the main.
There's mony there that mind ye weel,
Sae bonnie, aye, and braw;
We'll sing your praise owre a' the lave—
The heather dings them a'!