

IMPRESSIONS OF SELKIRK AND THE COMMON-RIDING.

It is not without some misgivings that I write some impressions of Selkirk and the Common-Riding, for the memory of events that happened in boyhood days are wont to be blurred in later life. On visiting the old "Forest Capital" and trying to revive the scenes of my infancy, I am forcibly reminded that the years are fast ebbing away. It is now fifty-seven years in May since my father and mother left the old Border burgh to emigrate to what was then "the backwoods" of Canada. The town was at that time without a railway, and I can well remember the bleak, rainy May morning when we took the coach to Galashiels to get the train for Glasgow. Though I returned to Selkirk twenty-three years ago, my stay at that time was too short to locate definitely my surroundings, for one day was spent up the Lochs with my cousin, the late Mr Andrew Henderson, and the other day left me little time to visit many persons and places which I would like to have seen. I well recollect my impressions, however, when on that occasion I reached the Railway Station. "This is surely," said I to myself, "not Selkirk. That certainly is not the Haugh, where my mother bleached on the whin bushes the clothes that we youngsters used to carry down the Lang Dykes from the Townhead, and that is not the Dam where we waded in the water when it was low, guddling eels on a Saturday afternoon, when we had a half-holiday at school, or on some other day, when with other truants, I took French leave." But when I looked to the hill and saw the Haining Woods and the "Forest Queen" proudly perched on the heights above, I began to suspect that my misgivings might be wrong, and when I reached the Market Square and saw Sir Walter still standing as in days of yore, I then fully was convinced that I was in Selkirk.

Fifty-seven years ago the Common-Riding was a tame affair compared with what it is now. So far as I remember, it lasted only one day then. On the night before, the Burley was called, and "the bussing" of the old Flodden Field flag was done either in the Council House or the home of the custodian of the flag. At half-past four on the Common-Riding morn the fife and drum woke the sleepers, and after a hurried cup of tea or something stronger (for temperance was not the rule of those days), at the sound of the second drum, a few horsemen rode down the water much the same course as at present, but there were no races at the Toll so far as I recollect. At ten "the brave" Douglas cast the colours in due and ancient form, not on an elevated platform, but on the ground in the Market Square, while the afternoon was devoted to races. Such in brief is the recollection of a lad of nine years. Now this is vastly changed. "The night before the morn" was a revelation to me. I am not exaggerating when I say that I never spent two hours more pleasantly than in Victoria Hall on Thursday night. The singing of "Oor Ain Folk" made me feel that I was once more among my ain folk in Selkirk, for the singer was my cousin's daughter, while I realised as I never did before that to fully appreciate the "Flowers o' the Forest" it had to be sung among people where the sad memories it awakens still linger. The echoes of "Home, Sweet Home" carried my mind to Canada, where many a Border Souter dwells, loyally doing his duty to the land of his adoption, but still retaining in his heart strong affection for the hills and burns of the auld Scottish Border. The oration was suitable to the occasion, and in every way sustained the reputation of the speaker as a finished orator. If the Rev. Mr Steven is not a Souter, I think it would be in order that he should be made a member of the guild in due and ancient form. Perhaps the most pleasant part of the occasion on Thurs-

day evening was "the bussing" of the Colonial Colours by Miss Hislop, and the presentation of the flag to Mr Hislop. Though now a native of Canada, Mr Hislop and family, like myself, look upon Selkirk with deepest affection.

Selkirk has vastly improved since I was a boy. The streets are better paved, the houses better built, and what especially struck me was the neatness of the garden plots. Pessimists tell us that the world is going to the dogs. Don't believe them. The people now are vastly better housed, better clad, better fed, and better in morals and manners than they were fifty years ago. When I looked on the faces of the audience in Victoria Hall, I remarked that I never saw a more orderly, intelligent, or respectable-looking class of people in all my travels. What I especially noted was that I scarcely saw a man touched with liquor in the vast assembly on Friday: fifty years ago you could count them by the score.

The pleasant recollections of the whole visit I have had in Selkirk, the unexceptional kindness, and the unstinted hospitality I have everywhere experienced, will always make the Common-Riding of 1912 a green spot in my memory.

JOHN HENDERSON.