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THE PROVOST OF SELKIRK

Passing of a Distinguished Souter

Interesting Career ; and Splendid Public Services.

Selkirk has suffered a heavy loss by the death of Provost Thomas Ballantyne. By his passing she has lost one of her most notable sons, and one of the ablest and most dignified in the long line of her Chief Magistrates. He was the only Provost of the Royal Burgh, in modern times, who had died while holding office. Indeed, he passed away while in civic harness and while serving the welfare of the citizens. He was attending a meeting in Viewfield Nursing Home—in which he was deeply interested—on Friday when he took ill; and he died within those walls, where Andrew Lang first saw the light, on Saturday at one o'clock. The news of his sudden illness cast a gloom over the Burgh; and it was deepened when the word went forth that he had fallen on sleep.

It is about a year ago since the Provost underwent an operation in a nursing home in Edinburgh. Gladly the citizens welcomed him back to the helm of administration again; and he was greeted on his public appearances with a warmth which indicated the pleasure of all at his recovery. On Thursday evening he was present at the meeting of the Selkirkshire Education Committee in Galashiels, and spoke with regard to the safety of young scholars in Selkirk, and the celebration of the King's Silver Jubilee. Up to the last his services were being devoted to the interests of the town and county so near to his heart.

THE YOUNG VIOLINIST.

Provost Ballantyne had a most interesting career and is numbered among the adventurous-hearted Souters who have been pioneers and Empire frontiersmen. He was the second son of the late Mr James Ballantyne, joiner. As a lad he displayed musical gifts, and took up the study of the violin under the late Bailie Reekie, J. B. Selkirk, the poet was interested in this lad o' pairs, and on his advice he went to Edinburgh, where he studied under the noted violinist, Dambman. Then south to London where he studied at the Academy of Music for three years and won a bronze medal and a gold-mounted bow.

STIRRING CAREER IN AFRICA.

In 1893 he sailed for South Africa. He went to Bloemfontien, and was attracted to Johannesburg, which was the centre of the gold and diamond boom. He was in Johannesburg before the railway was made. There, and at Pretoria he taught the violin. He studied hard and passed out as a Chartered Accountant through London.

Acting upon the dictum of Rhodes to "go north, young man," he trekked into Rhodesia, which was opening up. In Bulawayo he became the secretary of a diamond mining company and later was appointed manager of the Tati Syndicate in the country of King Khama. An Englishman,

which he rendered to Selkirk and he citizens. He was associated with practically every organisation and institution in the Burgh. Viewfield Nursing Home, in which he passed away, is, in truth, a memorial to his endeavours for the communal welfare. As Chairman of the Selkirk Hospital Association, he took the leading part in the taking over of the Home by the town. He was very keenly interested in the success of that institution which has been described often as "a boon and a blessing" to Selkirk and district. He also took a deep interest in the work of the Nursing Association, and in other movements for those beset by misfortune. There seemed no end to his interests and activities; and he contributed a great deal by service and generosity. His love of music was reflected in his association with the Operatic Society, of which he was the President. Once a year, he renewed his companionship with his violin. At the "Greetin' Supper" of the Town Council, at which he was host, he delighted with his playing of favourite melodies, revealing that his fingers had not lost their cunning touch upon the trembling strings.

He was a life-long member of the Lawson Memorial Church. Even when abroad, he still retained his sittings. He was particularly interested in the musical side of the service. Over a year ago he was invited to become an elder, but owing to his many other duties he could not see his way to accept.

WITH THE EXILES.

The Provost knew from experience the feelings of the "exiles." He sought to link them closer with their native town, and to assure them a memorably happy time when they returned. As the President of the Colonial Society, he took a special interest in all who came from afar to the Common Riding, and entertained them at Dandswall. He was the first honorary president of the Edinburgh and Lothians Souters' Society, and was a welcome guest at their functions.

AYE A SOUTER !

"Yince a Souter, aye a Souter." That motto on the golden banner of the Colonial Society, was his proud motto too. He was very proud of Selkirk, and of her beauty and splendid history. How happy he was at the Common Riding. He revelled in the spirit of the night afore the morn; and on the great morning, when he rode the Marches. It is difficult to realise that never again will that stalwart figure, with the fine face and handsome head, appear on the draped balcony to give the flag into the charge of the Standard-Bearer.

His interest in the famous festival did not end at the casting of the colours. He was a Steward at the races and games. Each year he presented the coveted Burleyman's Switch for the race at the Toll as well

to "go north, young man," he trekked into Rhodesia, which was opening up. In Bulawayo he became the secretary of a diamond mining company and later was appointed manager of the Tati Syndicate in the country of King Khama. An Englishman, named Francis, in return for services rendered to that potentate, received land about 100 miles by 30 miles in extent. The principal town was called Francistown. The Provost had the supervision of gold mines on that land and also thousands of cattle. He was very successful.

JAMESON RAID AND BOER WAR.

During his thirty years in South Africa, he had many thrilling adventures. He was there at the time of the Jameson Raid in which he was associated as a member of one of the mounted companies. He was enlisted and campaigned as an officer in a mounted regiment in the Boer War.

HOME TO SELKIRK.

The Provost had the true Souter's love of his native Burgh on the brae. During those years of "exile" he kept in close touch with the home folk. Many times he returned to Ettrickside and when he said goodbye to Africa and came back to this country some thirteen years ago, he hied home to Selkirk. He purchased the mansion house of Dandswall, where his sister, Miss Ballantyne, and he resided.

PROVOST OF ROYAL BURGH.

It was his intention then to settle down and take life leisurely in country pursuits and sport; but he responded willingly to the invitation to devote his abilities to the service of Selkirk. In 1926 he was unanimously elected Provost, and had held that office ever since with distinction. From the outset, he displayed a dignity, tact and rare administrative ability which contributed to the weal and the honour of his native town. He was an excellent chairman, combining firmness with fairness. He would have been an asset, and would have graced the chair in a larger senate, and he won the trust and regard of all the members of the Council as well as of the community, and of the Borders. During his Provostship, many important improvements were carried out in the town, including housing schemes and the new Sewage Purification Scheme.

SERVICES TO THE COUNTY.

The Provost was Vice-Convener of

balcony to give the flag into the charge of the Standard-Bearer.

His interest in the famous festival did not end at the casting of the colours. He was a Steward at the races and games. Each year he presented the coveted Burleyman's Switch for the race at the Toll, as well as subscribing handsomely to the race funds.

When thinking of him and the Common Riding, one also recalls that sunny hour in the Market Place at the Scott Centenary, when four distinguished Borderers licked the birse and became Burgesses of the Royal Burgh.

The Provost was taking a leading part in the preparations for the celebration of the Charter Quater-Centenary, and the Ettrick Shepherd's centenary. He was enthusiastic about the Pageant to be held in the Haining; but his life-curtain has been rung down ere the raising of the curtain on that great stage in the Forest.

ITALY AND BLACKFACES.

SCOTTISH WOOL GROWERS AND PROHIBITION.

In Italy the situation was equivalent to a complete prohibition of the import of blackface wool. This was stated by Mr W. Cassels Jack, Cramalt and Robiesland, who presided at the ninth annual general meeting of the Scottish Wool Growers (Ltd.). It was agreed to pay a dividend of 5 per cent. on the share capital.

Moving approval of the report and accounts, which showed a gross income of £11,206, compared with £9878 in the previous year, the Chairman referred to the exceptional conditions in the market, owing to the innumerable restrictions imposed by Governments in the various consuming countries. Towards the end of the year the restrictions in Germany had been removed to a certain extent, which had the immediate effect of improving the prices, but in Italy the situation from October was equivalent to a complete prohibition of the import of blackface wool. Consumption in the home market had also been somewhat restricted.

INCREASE IN SALES.

The sales turnover during the year had increased by 15½ per cent., and the membership