

**MEMOIR OF THE LATE
REV. JOHN BAIRD,
MINISTER OF YETHOLM,
ROXBURGHSHIRE**

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Memoir of the Late Rev. John Baird, Minister of Yetholm, Roxburghshire by W. Baird

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W. BAIRD

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PRESENT STATE OF THE GIPSIES IN YETHOLM.

YETHOLM MANSE, *November 1862.*

THE following Report will remind the friends of the Gipsy cause, in this place, of the great loss which it has sustained in the death of the Rev. John Baird. Everyone here mourns his loss, and reverences his memory, and the writer of these words, who has lately been appointed in the good Providence of God to succeed him as Minister of this Parish, joins in the universal respect, and wishes to follow his footsteps in improving the condition of the Yetholm Gipsies.

Most of them remain what they have always been—hawkers of pottery, baskets, and tin-ware. The evils arising from such an occupation are the chief obstacles to their improvement. They must leave their homes during summer. They must take their children with them, and thus deprive them of the benefits of school. They meet with others of their profession worse than themselves. They contract and strengthen wandering habits, and the social and domestic virtues become restraints rather than sources of happiness.

An improvement, however, has set in, and several of the middle-aged are now steady and trustworthy farm-labourers, while most of the young of both sexes beyond school age are similarly employed. The old, who followed the Gipsy occupation in their youth, and to whom wandering has become a second nature, still leave home in summer for two or three weeks at a time, and for subsistence during the rest of the year depend partly upon the earnings of the younger members of the family, and partly upon any small turn of work which they themselves can find to do. The Police Regulations prohibit them from encamping by the wayside, or in lanes, as formerly (a grievous hardship to those who, from confirmed habits, can follow no other profession); hence their journeys in summer are necessarily shorter than they used to be; and their children, they find, need not be taken from home for only the short circuit in the neighbourhood which they are able to make.

Thus the influence of example, the progress of things, and the laws of the country all tend to keep the Gipsies at home—one of the most important of objects to be gained by those who would improve them; for then they can be visited, induced to attend church, and their children to go to school.

But though more at home now than they perhaps ever were, and the children within reach of excellent instruction, it is found difficult, sometimes impossible, to induce them to attend: the parents, with one or two marked exceptions, being ignorant of its benefits, give no encouragement to their children.

For a considerable time the late Mr. Baird, from funds raised by the liberality of kind friends, was able to give a small weekly allowance of meal to each child who attended school, but through want of means this has been withheld for the last two years; and the result is, that not more

than half the number of the children at home is now found at school, as the following figures will show:—

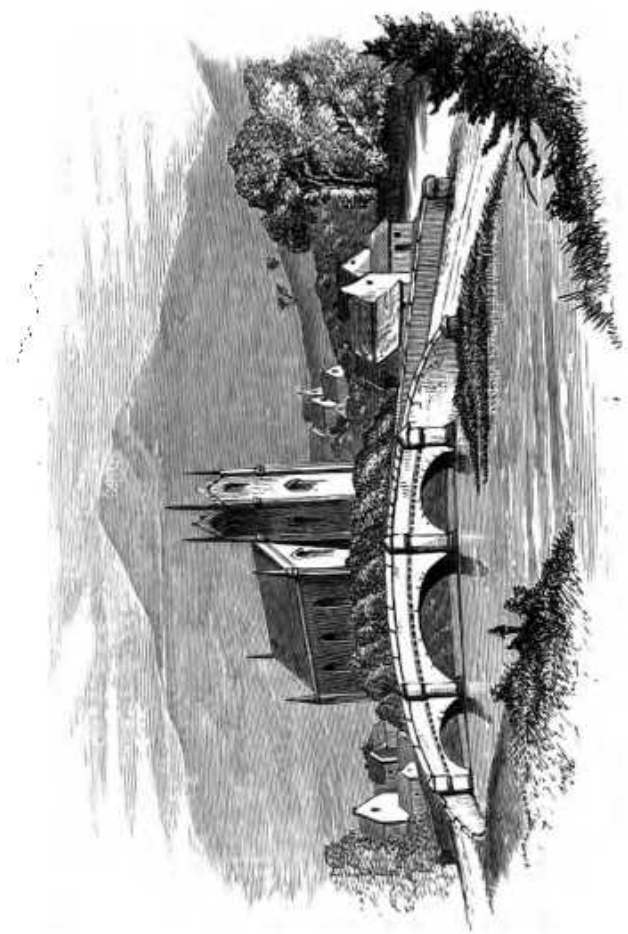
Number of families	16
Total number of members	75
Children at home	29
Attending school	18

Of the spiritual state of the Gipsies much can be said. A religious movement, which began in the villages last year, seemed to quicken the latent seeds of *the truth* which had been sown in their hearts. Very many of them were deeply impressed, and the reality of their impressions was seen by all in their outward conduct. The Bible was read by most of them; religious books were anxiously perused; meetings, public and private, were attended; from every source within reach they sought after the knowledge of Him "whom to know is life eternal." The first-fruits of such a change were seen at our Communion in August last. On that occasion there were admitted to the Lord's Table for the first time, *three* who are grandparents, *four* who are parents, *two* who are young and unmarried; others had been admitted before. At present, they are steady in their attendance at church; private meetings have not ceased among them; and a member of one of their most exemplary families has, within the last few weeks, become a teacher in our Sabbath-school.

Every one who wishes their improvement will rejoice to read such an account as the above, and will see what a bright prospect is opened up, of our Gipsies at length taking their place among the most intelligent and trustworthy of our peasantry. The difficulty is to induce the young to attend school—and there is an excellent one in their villages. Without an inducement held out, they do not attend; with one, as experience has proved, they do. It is proposed, therefore, to revive the system so successfully applied by the late Rev. Mr. Baird, of granting a small weekly allowance of meal, etc., to the parents for the attendance of each child, and this can only be done through the liberality of the generous Christian friends of moral and spiritual progress. Especial calls are made upon them at this time; but, in the present peculiar circumstances of the Gipsies, "to make no sign" would be little less than thwarting the aims of Heaven. A new power has now made itself felt among them—the power of God's love in their heart. Never before has such a weapon for "pulling down the strongholds of Satan" been put into the hands of those attempting their improvement. No such opportunity for good has ever occurred in the whole history of their reformation. With the power of the Gospel within, anything or everything may be done to improve them by the judicious use of means; but that power, if left alone, with no attempt to open and strengthen and expand the mental faculties by education, will become isolated, then encrusted, then crushed with evil. School instruction to the children of such parents, as many of them now are, coupled with that which they are likely to receive at home, will soon, it is fondly hoped, remove the distinction of *Hind* and *Gipsy*, and make both one in character as many of both already are "one in Christ."

ADAM DAVIDSON.

Contributions to the Gipsy Fund will be gratefully received by the Rev. ADAM DAVIDSON, Yetholm Manse, by Kelso.—There is a Money Order Office in Yetholm.



MEMOIR

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAIRD,

MINISTER OF YETHOLM, ROXBURGHSHIRE;

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIS LABOURS IN REFORMING THE
GIPSY POPULATION OF THAT PARISH.

BY

W. Baird
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AUTHOR OF "NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ENTOMOSTRACA,"
"CYCLOPEDIA OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES," ETC.

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REV. JOHN BAIRD.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION.

"Nor shall e'er
The graver tasks of manhood, or th' advice
Of vulgar wisdom, move me to disclaim
Those studies which possessed me in the dawn
Of life, and fixed the colour of my mind
For every future year."

THE Church in Scotland has had of late to lament the loss of many of her eminent ministers. The Free Church has been deprived of the services of her great theologian Dr. William Cunningham, snatched from her in the full vigour of his great intellect, and at the early age of fifty-seven. The Reformed Presbyterian Church has had to deplore, in little beyond the prime of life, the loss of one of her best ministers, the Rev. Dr. Symington,

formerly of Stranraer. The venerable Established Church of Scotland has equally had to bewail the somewhat premature death of several of her clergymen. Amongst these is the subject of our present memoir, the Rev. John Baird, late minister of the parish of Yetholm.

Mr. Baird was the eldest son of the late Rev. James Baird, minister of Swinton in Berwickshire. He was born at the manse of Eccles (of which parish his father was at that time minister) on the 17th February, 1799;* and died at the manse of Yetholm on the 29th November, 1861, in the sixty-third year of his age.

His early education was received at home under his father's own tuition. Upon the illness of this excellent man, which terminated fatally on the 11th February, 1814, his son John was first sent to the grammar-school of Whitsome, and then to that of Kelso. From thence he proceeded to the University of Edinburgh, where, after attending the Humanity and Greek classes, he entered, along with his younger brother Andrew, the Divinity Hall.†

* The Rev. James Baird was successively minister of Legertwood, Eccles, and Swinton, all in Berwickshire.

† For a short notice of the Rev. Andrew Baird, see Appendix A.

While attending his studies there, he was suddenly visited with an attack of hæmoptysis or spitting of blood from his lungs. By the advice of his physician Dr. Abercromby, he tried the effects of a sea voyage, and in the early part of the year 1820 sailed in H.M. sloop of war the *Favourite*, commanded by Captain Robinson. During this trip, which lasted about twelve months, he recovered his health, and had an opportunity of visiting various parts of the world which he would otherwise never have seen. While studying in Edinburgh, he had attended the lectures of Mr. Jameson, the celebrated Professor of Mineralogy and Geology; and to this latter branch of science he paid particular attention. He accordingly did not let slip the opportunities his voyage afforded him of prosecuting the mineralogical and geological inquiries he had commenced in Edinburgh. The result of some of his observations were read before the Plinian Society* of Edinburgh in the year 1823, and have since then been given to the world in the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, vol. vii.; and in the *Memoirs of*

* For an account of the Plinian Natural History Society, see Appendix B.