

THE LATE REV. DR. JOASS, OF GOLSPIE

HIS SCIENTIFIC WORK.

The following paper has been contributed by Dr. Alex. Ross, Inverness, to the Transactions of the Scientific Society and Field Club:—

The Rev. Dr. James Joass was born at Tain in the year 1829, and was the eldest son of Mr. John Joass, who for a long time was a guard on the mail coach which ran between Inverness and Aberdeen, and afterwards between Inverness and Dalwhinnie on the Perth Road. He was a native of Banffshire, and was a much respected man, and, I may observe, as a Government servant he was in a position of more importance in the esteem of the travelling public than now in the days of steam and railways. My father, who was an old school-fellow of Mr. Joass, and many travellers made it a point to arrange their journeys, that they might beguile the tedium of the way by his companionship and conversation on scientific subjects. It follows that Mr. Joass was a well-read and highly cultivated man, mathematics being his hobby; and Hugh Miller in his "Rambles of a Geologist" says, regarding Mr. Joass, "he is one of the perhaps most remarkable mail guards in Europe. I have at least never heard of another who, like him, amuses his leisure on the top of the mail coach with Newton's 'Principia,' and understands it," etc. Miller goes on with an amusing comparison between himself and a mail guard. He says "Mr. Joass takes his 'Principia' to his coach top. I take pockets full of fossils, etc."

Dr. James Joass was thus by heredity a man of science, and inherited an instinctive desire for knowledge. From his earliest year he was a student, quiet and unassuming, and early showed a bent for careful observation and a talent for finding and examining all sort of odds and ends of legendary or scientific interest. He was constantly picking up fossils, minerals, or some antiquarian object of interest, characteristically saying, "What is it? what do you think of it?" he himself finding no end of ingenious explanations. As a lad he had great musical and artistic tendencies, and was an admirable draughtsman, and his sketches of animals were imitable and much appreciated and coveted by his school-fellows. He was at the age of 12 or 13 an expert draughtsman, and he wrote the ornamental illuminated address by the Royal Academy boys to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her visit to Ardvreikie in the early 'Forties. It was well done, and much admired and noticed in the newspapers at the time. A few years ago, passing through Golspie, I called on him, and, in course of conversation, alluded to the matter, and asked him if I was correct in saying he was the writer of the address, as I found he had gained the prize for illuminated writing in 1843. He simply said, "I don't recollect, it may be so; I have done several such." This was the man through life; he wrought for others, and gave away his talent and knowledge to be acted on and realised by others.

As I have said, Dr. Joass was a musician and a violinist of no mean order, playing with great expression and feeling, especially Highland music, of which his long life in

Stafford House. The figures are full length and excellent portraits, which were readily identified by those who knew the originals. The dog is also a portrait which never failed to be identified. The Duke and Duchess of Albany, the engineer, are shown in characteristic attitudes, and also Kenneth Murray of Geanies. When I visited him at Edington and examined some ancient gravestones there, he was thick in a controversy about the age of the Reptilian Sandstones of Elgin, and the finding of Reptilian remains somewhere between Lossiemouth and Banchory. His finds threw much light on vexed questions of the succession of the sandstones in Morayshire, and correspondence with the Rev. Dr. Gordon, Birnie, Stables, Cawdor; Sir Roderick Murchison, Sir Archibald Geikie, Professors Judd and Traquair, and others was full of valuable information, of which an interesting account was given by Mr. Wallace last year. It is a pity that no detailed account of Dr. Joass's contributions are now available, though they are frequently referred to in papers contributed, by the gentlemen just named, to various scientific societies with which they were associated, and his work acknowledged.

To give you some idea, I take the liberty of introducing specimens of some of his letters to myself, in which he propounds interesting and puzzling questions, such as to the mode of construction of the Round Towers and early manufacture, and I give the letters as illustrating the trend of his investigation and the practical turn of his mind. I have not kept copies of my replies, but I fear they were not quite so abstruse and informative as he desired. They are as follows:—

January 21st, 1876.

My dear sir,—I sent by train 2.50 p.m. to-day 3 Bookies containing the latest printed Brochure. You can return them when they have served your purpose, and I shall be glad to hear if they are likely to be of use to you. Meantime may I ask your professional opinion as to the following:—The Brochure innermost in Glenelg is built upon a foundation of sloping rock. Its ground plan is therefore an ellipse, since it is a section of a cone oblique to the base. What I want you to tell me is how did the Picts know that on such a sloping foundation they would have to begin with an ellipse in order to get a circular superstructure.

I shall be also greatly obliged if you can tell me whether Dr. Pusey, who wanted to build a Lady Chapel in Durham Cathedral, did build one, and if he did, whether or not he put it in the west instead of the canonical east, out of deference to the prejudice of his predecessor, St. Outhbert, who disliked ladies, and whose bones lay in the east end.—Yours sincerely,

(Signed) JAMES JOASS.

(To be Continued.)

THINK IT OVER
AND YOU'LL ADMIT
NICE FOOT
IS AN IDE
FOR YO
VISIT