

Donald Beith. By Patrick Murray, Esq., W.S.

(Read December 17, 1894.)

Donald Beith was the son of Mr Gilbert Beith, farmer, Lochgilphead, and was born there on the 25th of November 1815. When he was quite a small boy, his father, who was a highly educated man, detected in a strolling player, called Dunlop, who came to Lochgilphead, an excellent classical scholar. He learned that he was the son of a clergyman in the north of Ireland, and a graduate of Dublin University. The old man took a great interest in him, and urged him to give up his wild, wandering life, promising that if he stayed in Lochgilphead and opened a school, he should have Donald for his first pupil. This was done with very happy results, and Donald and his teacher became devoted friends, and in the later years of Dunlop's life, when things were low with him, Donald Beith was his chief support, and no one knows how much he did for his old teacher. After being educated in Lochgilphead by Dunlop, he served in a legal office in Campbeltown for some years, and then came to Edinburgh, and was indentured to the law under Messrs James Greig & Charles Morton, W.S., Edinburgh. When he left that firm's employment he went for some time into the office of Messrs Gibson-Craig, Dalziel, & Brodie, W.S., and, about the year 1848, he entered into partnership with Mr Andrew Murray, W.S., under the firm of Murray & Beith. In the year 1850 he was admitted a member of the Society of Solicitors before the Supreme Courts of Scotland, and in 1862 of the Society of Writers to the Signet. Upon the death of Mr Andrew Murray in 1869, Mr Beith was appointed to succeed him in the office of agent for the Woods and Forests in Scotland, an office which he held till his death, and he was also agent for a number of other Government departments in Scotland, including the Treasury, the War Department, the Harbour Department of the Board of Trade, the Board of Works, the Education Department, the Prison Commissioners for Scotland, &c. His business was, after the death of Mr

Murray, carried on by himself and the other partners of the firm of Murray, Beith, & Murray, W.S. In connection with the inquiries he had to make for the different Government departments for which he acted, Mr Beith acquired a wide knowledge of all subjects affecting antiquarian legal matters in Scotland, and was especially versed in the law of Teinds, Salmon-fishings, and the different tenures of land in Scotland. He always took a keen interest in politics, although latterly his official connection with Government debarred him from active participation in political affairs. In the earlier years of his professional career he was a liberal of an advanced type, and did good work for his party when, as agent for Mr Charles Cowan, he was helpful in defeating Macaulay as the representative of the city of Edinburgh. At a later date he acted as agent for Sir Alexander Gibson Maitland, when the latter defeated Lord Dalkeith in a contest for the seat for the County of Midlothian. Though holding many progressive liberal views, Mr Beith had little sympathy with the Home Rule movement, and stood firm with the Liberal Unionists for the maintenance of the Union. A staunch Free Churchman, he was an elder in Free St George's Church, and no member or office-bearer in that communion was more thorough and devoted in the practice of his principles.

His strength of character was great, and it was founded on a strong and simple belief in the truths of the Bible. He judged himself severely, but no man was more lenient in his judgment of others. Charitable to a degree, he was ever ready to lend a helping hand in the furtherance of philanthropic or religious schemes, more especially those connected with the Free Church, but all his kindness and charity were of the most unostentatious nature.

He had a great charm of manner and power of attracting others, and the affection which he bestowed on his friends bore a fruitful harvest in the numbers who really mourned his death. He delighted in hospitality, and in having his friends about him at home. His zeal for his clients was remarkable, and he was untiring in the work which he did for them. His whole interests were centred in his business and his clients, and he rarely took a holiday or spared himself in any way. On the last day (at the age of nearly 79) on which he attended his office, he wrote letters with his own

hand, and then, without telling any one, walked home to undergo the operation from the effects of which he succumbed ten days later. He died upon the 9th of October 1894, and he may literally be said to have died in harness,—a good man, whose chief characteristics were strong faith in the Christian verities, great simplicity of character and unselfishness, extreme warm-heartedness and charity, indomitable pluck, and an undeviating devotion to whatever he conceived to be his duty.

In 1870 he married the widow of his late partner, Mr Murray, and is survived by her. He left no family.