

# A Veteran of the Crook and Plaid

## "Aul Hughie" The Fleein' Shepherd

By BARROWSGATE

"Aul Hughie" outside Keithfield Lodge.

Below—At work in the garden he loves so well.

SEVENTY-EIGHT is quite a respectable age to attain, yet nothing remarkable in the way of longevity, but when sixty-eight of these years have been spent in the service of one family, then that is truly remarkable, indeed, so remarkable as to be unique in the annals of long service and what makes it still more outstanding is the fact that the possessor of this wonderful record is still in harness and, to quote his own words, "Nae near ready yet tae lay doon the barra."

Hugh or "Aul Hughie" as the subject of this sketch is affectionately called by his many friends and acquaintances, was born at Thomroan, Tarves, on October 6, 1857, and has spent all his life on the lands of the Earls of Aberdeen.

Some may think that it was nearly impossible for anyone to spend sixty-eight years out of a total of seventy-eight at work. What about school attendance, they may argue, and the leaving age regulations.

was a boy and in those days as he put it "Bairns jist wint tae school or bade awa' as they pleased." Hugh elected tae bide awa' and at the tender age of ten and a few weeks he struck out on his own and took service as loon to the shepherd on the Haddo House estate—and like Laban of old tended his master's flocks on the wood dotted parks and green swards of my Earls of Aberdeen.

A shepherd he remained until a few years ago, when the erstwhile flocks of two to three thousand sheep, which populated the estate policies, had dwindled to as many hundreds and Hugh's services were no longer required in the capacity of shepherd or as he said with simple candour, "The fyoun beasties upo' the grun noo wara worth a man's wark."

Hugh, however, "didna lay doon the barra" when he terminated his association with the sheep, far from it, he just wheeled it to a fresh sphere of activity and continued his labours at his home—Keithfield Lodge—one of the picturesque cottages which flank the various entrances to Haddo House.

There you will find him, busily attending to his duties at the lodge, or hard at work in his garden amongst the flowers and shrubs he loves, and pitting his cunning against that of the furred and feathered invaders of his well ordered domain.

### Seen Many Changes.

During three score years of shepherding, Hugh has seen many changes in the sheep industry and he was responsible for several time, labour and money saving methods now universally adopted by sheep owners in the Nor-East.

By introducing vitriol as the cleansing agent for foot rot instead of the old-fashioned mixture of alum, bluestone and lime, he reduced the cost of treatment from 5s per 100 to 5s per 1000. He also was the first to depart from the old laborious method of hand treatment for foot troubles and, by running the sheep through shallow troughs, greatly facilitated the work besides increasing the efficiency of the cure and reducing the overhead expenses.

Well facts are chieftains that winna ding, and if further proof were needed besides that of his employer and the old veteran's own word, the endorsement by the Northern Agricultural Society and the Highland and Agricultural Society must of a surety dispel further doubt.

There was no compulsory attendance at school or leaving age laws when Hugh

Nowadays dipping sheep is a simple process compared to what it was in the early days of Hugh's service, for then before a start could be made the dip had to be prepared and a tedious job it was. The ingredients used in the old time solution were, soft soap, hellebore, green broom and spirits of tar, and the whole had to be boiled together for hours until the concoction was brewed to the proper degree of strength for the work in hand.

### No Easy Task.

Now, to overlook 2000 to 3000 sheep, scattered as they were over the wide confines of Haddo House was no easy task and once again Hugh took the initiative and was the first shepherd in the north to follow his flocks on a bicycle. Not a bicycle as we know it to-day, but a nerve shattering, soul jarring, ponderous contraption of wood and iron with a front wheel drive, termed aptly enough a "bone shaker." When Hugh first appeared on the roads with his weird and wonderful steed the bairns would run and call their mothers to "rin an' see the fleein' shepherd." Since the days of the old bone shakers Hugh has worn out 14 cycles and buried 14 dogs in the pursuit of his duties. Something of a record, to, I imagine.

An expert on all matters pertaining to his calling and possessing an uncanny knowledge of the "woolly ones," his advice has oft times been eagerly sought by many now well-known figures in the sheep world and their success is due in no small measure to the old veteran's wise counsel and constitutes a lasting tribute to his skill.

Hugh's constant companion for over forty years was a half of a coconut shell, polished to the brilliancy of glass from long use and contact with the interior of his capacious pocket.

It served a two fold purpose, being both drinking vessel and receptacle for his supply of "bogies" and on occasion did duty as dram glass for, "fyyles, ye ken, a buddy wid meet in wi' a chiel wi' a bottle an' it wid hae been ower bad tae hae tae miss a taste for wint o' a gless." Altogether a useful article, but woe betide the unwary one who knew it not and drank from the innocent looking shell in ignorance of its peculiar qualities. The result was surprising for that bogie im-

pregnated coconut imparted a potency to the brew which had immediate and disastrous effects on any system unduly dependent on boiler plate strength.

The old shell is now relegated to the humble position of seed bowl when it is not being used as a receptacle for the lord and master sows his carrots and leeks. "A sair doon come for ane that has made lairds couk an' strong men greet," remarked its owner. In recognition of his long service the old veteran of the crook and the plaid was twice honoured and he is the proud possessor of the Northern Society's silver medal for 25 years' service and the Highland and Agricultural Society's gold medal and certificate for 60 years' continuous employment in the one family, and now there are over eight years to be added to that wonderful record!

No account of the old shepherd would be complete without mentioning the family he has served so long and faithfully, the past and present Earls of Aberdeen.

### Faithful Service.

Their appreciation of their old retainer's service and devotion to their interests and their confidence and trust in him is reflected by the high and honoured place he has always held in their affections and by their many tangible recognitions of his worth. The family at all times have had the greatest solicitude for his welfare and frequently call to enquire for and have a chat with their old friend and admire his beautiful garden.

Hugh's garden must be seen to be properly appreciated and a visit well repays the trouble for the glorious display of flower and foliage and is something to marvel at and remember ever after—a veritable paradise of man's creating—and a fitting setting for the man himself.

Much more could be said about Hugh and his work, his quaint philosophy, shrewd observations and old time recollections, but for the present let us say adieu to our old friend, leaving him in the garden he loves. Happy in the love of those around him, secure in the knowledge of work well done, content with his part in the drama of life, humbly submissive to the power which created all things, and calmly and fearlessly jogging along towards the end of the long, long trail. Yes, there let us leave him, to his peace, his flowers and his walks in memory's garden.