

# JOKOSERIA

BY  
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WHEN Alec Smart does something phenomenal in the school-yard at recess—such as knocking out four marbles at oneshot—the cynic at the ring-side greets him with a reserved applause which ends in "I'll bet you can't do that again!" And Alec, pushing back his cap and bracing himself for a supreme effort, hunkers down and—misses! Such is the fate ordinarily of lads of larger growth who play at literature. When the critics have duly acknowledged a triumph, the praise seems to proceed on the assumption that the book is a finality for that man and in that line. And if the author, flushed with success and anxious to convince the world that masterpieces are entirely natural with him, ventures upon a sequel, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he shoots wide of the mark. The exception proves the rule, and the name of the exceptional lad who is responsible for this vein of thought at the moment is "Ian Maclaren." When it was announced that the creator of Drumtochty was preparing an additional series of sketches—



and, as it was prudently added, a final series—we all felt somewhat disturbed. *The Brier Bush* was such a clean, pretty, incomparable four-shot! We trembled apprehensively when he hunkered down—

albeit in no spirit of self-conceit, for "Ian Maclaren" is a genuinely modest man and undertook his second task only because there was much pressure brought to bear upon him to that end—but he did it! *The Days of Auld Lang Syne* is, if possible, better than *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, and it leaves the impression with us that this "lad o' pairts" could go on producing these superb things indefinitely. But he did not live for years in Drumtochty for nothing—he knows when to quit beautifully and gracefully.

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"Ian Maclaren" has had high praise from the highest quarters, and no words of mine could add any distinction to his laurel wreath. I will, therefore, attempt nothing in the way of a review of his latest book beyond thanking God and John Watson for it, and the glorious

antiseptic work it will do in the literary world. There is a better chance for critical renown if I succeed in finding a blemish in the work, for I will, perhaps, be the only reviewer who has been keen enough to detect one! And I really think I *can* point out an error of art which the author has fallen into more than once in the course of these sketches. My discovery is at least greater in its way than that of the eminent *savant* who startled the world on the subject of a heretofore unknown Greek accent—and enjoyed his triumph and distinction until