

**Sketch of the early history of the medical profession in Edinburgh : being an address delivered at a conversazione in the hall of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, on 22d January 1864 / by John Gairdner, M.D.**

**Contributors**

Gairdner, John, 1790-1876.  
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.  
University of Glasgow. Library

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London NW1 2BE UK  
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E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
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SKETCH  
OF  
THE EARLY HISTORY  
OF THE  
MEDICAL PROFESSION IN EDINBURGH.

BEING  
AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT A CONVERSAZIONE IN THE HALL OF  
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF EDINBURGH, ON  
22D JANUARY 1864.

BY  
JOHN GAIRDNER, M.D.,  
FELLOW, AND FORMERLY PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

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## S K E T C H.

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“What seest thou more  
In the dark backward and abysm of time?”  
—*Tempest*, Act i. Scene 2.

ABOUT four years ago, on an occasion similar to the present, I undertook, at the request of the authorities of this College, to give you some account of its past history. In preparing the necessary materials for this purpose, I every now and then stumbled on curious and interesting matters which I could not then take time to investigate, but which, like tempting veins of sparkling ore, seemed strongly to invite me to the laborious operation of the pick-axe. Since that time, when leisure permitted and opportunities presented themselves, I have made various explorations, with results of very various degrees of importance; a large proportion of those results, though not devoid of interest, being quite unfitted for the purpose of my present address. In presenting you with a selection of those which appear to me most worthy of your attention, I can scarcely hope to give the kind of interest to my subject which belonged to the more connected narrative of my former address. But I shall do what I can to reward you for your trouble in coming to listen to me; and I am not without hope that I may be successful in eliciting from others some of those hidden treasures of antiquarian information which are no doubt stored up in many unexplored recesses.

You will please to observe that my subject is the early history of the *medical profession* in Edinburgh—not, as formerly, the history of our College. Yet it will certainly be in some degree supplementary to what I have already given you, because the history of the College has always, and especially in early times, been to a great extent that of the profession in this city, and also because its records will form the most prolific source of my information.



There can be no doubt that our profession must have had a large share in the stirring events by which, in the centuries through which it has lived, the history of our country has been distinguished. The manners, morals, religion, modes of thinking, and form of government of Scotland have all been greatly changed. We have, as a nation, been well schooled by adversity, that "stern, rugged nurse" of the virtues, which, alternating with fitful gleams of prosperity, like sunbeams struggling through the clouds of a tempestuous morning, has deeply, perhaps indelibly, impressed our national character. The relation which our busy profession bore to those mighty changes, and *their* influence in promoting and retarding *its* progress, are subjects of which you will probably desire to know more than I or any one living can tell you. I am only able to afford you a few glimpses, such as I should scarcely have ventured to offer you, but for that kind indulgence of which I have already had such flattering experience.

I have to acknowledge, as on the former occasion, the valuable aid which I have received from various quarters; and more especially from Mr W. Fraser and Mr Joseph Robertson of Edinburgh, and from the Rev. Mr Brewer and my youngest son James, both of London,—all of whom are professionally acquainted with the history of those times of which I shall have to speak. The various public records, and the public libraries in this city, have also been opened to me with that liberality and courtesy which are uniformly extended by their custodiers to those who are engaged in literary or historical investigations.

I have told you that the surgical part of our profession had its cradle here, as in London and elsewhere, among the tradesmen of the city, was associated with the barbers, and was intrusted with a monopoly necessary to men whom the government could not protect, and who were therefore obliged to co-operate for the vital purpose of self-defence in a lawless age. If this state of things, historically considered, appear to you degrading to us, I greatly differ from you. Ancient institutions resemble ancient families. Some of these, rejoicing that their

"blood

Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood,"

are proud of an origin which connects their family history with deeds of rapacity and of savage violence. Some owe their laurels



to the favour, perhaps to the vices of the powerful; while some, altogether unaided by power, have fought their own way to the position which they hold, by the steady pursuit of objects beneficial to mankind. We cannot be responsible for what happened before we first crept upon the surface of our planet, and therefore there can be no just ground, in these different modes of origin, either for self-congratulation or for self-abasement; yet, as a mere matter of taste, I would rather that the Lyon King-at-arms had emblazoned a razor on our shield, than that he had decorated it with that bend sinister with which many glorify themselves, as establishing their descent from some licentious king and from his paramour, both probably alike contemptible.

The fact that the practitioners of the healing art in all its forms, and at every period, had but small favour and little patronage from the great ones of the earth, has been useful to us in many senses. In darker days, the lawyer was made the instrument of the grossest extortion, and was not suffered, either as a judge or as a pleader, to be guided by any fixed principles of justice. The theologian, under various pretences, was made the slave of consistories, of parliaments, and of foreign ecclesiastical authorities, and was deprived of his right to employ the powers of his own mind on his own subjects, or at least to speak with freedom his own real thoughts. Both law and theology thus suffered by the miserable thralldom to which they were subjected. It has been quite otherwise with medicine, and with *its* professors, who have almost always enjoyed the high privilege "*et sentire quæ velint, et quæ sentiunt dicere.*" We have had many schools and many sects; but happily for us—happily, too, for those who do us the honour to consult us—we have ever been totally unacquainted with any such thing as a jurisdiction over our professional convictions. We encounter medical errors of opinion all the more confidently, because no human power selects for us the argumentative panoply in which we go forth to the battle. Had our medical orthodoxies and heterodoxies been fitted for engines of power in the hands of statesmen and of priests, we should have been just what the other learned professions were. But even the bluff King Henry VIII., the veriest pope in theology, and, in his own conceit, very learned in physic also,<sup>1</sup> did not lop off the heads of physicians or surgeons for differing from his infallibility on the subjects of their profession.

<sup>1</sup> The prescription-book of Dr Butts, his physician, in which many of the prescriptions bear to have been "*devised by the King's Majesty,*" is still extant in MS. in the British Museum.—MS. Sloane, 1047.



The humble origin, therefore, of the Surgeons, amidst the handicraftsmen of a city, was not without its attendant advantages. The more humble it was, the greater was the merit of those who rose above it. I heartily admire the spirit of the successful blacksmith, who, on being twitted by a man of rank with his humble origin, told the aristocrat that if *his* origin had been similar, he would have been a blacksmith still. Like him, I feel an honest pride in our having risen in public estimation by efforts to be more and more useful.

Some weeks after the publication of my former address, a clergyman possessed of the *gusto* of an antiquary did me the honour to peruse it, and informed me, that when he studied at Oxford, half a dozen years before, those barbers who dealt with the University men were required to be matriculated members of that ancient University; and that, once in each year, the senior proctor invited them to supper, and, in return for the courtesy, was presented by them with a certain number of pairs of kid gloves. Some of the Colleges of the University—Corpus Christi was mentioned as one—had, under their statutes, a *tonsor* as a regular official. I have since had a communication from a distinguished member of that University, from which it appears that recent legislation has, very much to his regret, altogether done away with these curious traces of the past. Perhaps those who are better acquainted with the history of the older universities of this and of other countries might be able to state many similar usages among them. The barbers' emblems, the ribbon and the pole—the former for tying the arm, the latter to be grasped by the patient during the operation of bleeding—are still displayed in almost every part of Europe, and bear testimony to the universality of the ancient connexion of the barbers with the surgeons, and to the necessity of tracing it to some widely diffused cause which has now ceased to operate. And I have been indebted to the historical researches of my son James for what I conceive to be the true explanation of the phenomenon in question. The monks, as all the world knows, required to have their heads regularly shaved; but it is not by any means so well known that they required to be bled at stated periods. "*Minutus est*" was the form of words descriptive of one who had undergone the operation, the meaning being that he had been *minutus sanguine*—*i. e.*, deprived of blood. I find that in the monastery of St Victoire at Paris there was an order which prescribed such minution to be practised five times in the year, and which was in these terms:—"Prima



est Septembri; secunda est ante adventum; tertia est ante quadragesimam; quarta post Pascha; quinta post Pentecosta."<sup>1</sup> The monks, therefore, required to have about them those who could perform both of these operations skilfully; and as they occupied most of the high and lucrative offices, both in the state and in all the professions, they could afford to reward those whose services were necessary to them.

Habits once established in society often survive their causes—an interesting illustration of which will be found in the fact that the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, an institution which took its origin thirty-nine years later than the Protestant Reformation, in a city eminently Protestant, contained barber-surgeons from the first. They probably became obsolete there, as here, by the early institution of *single* barbers, who were not permitted to interfere with surgery, and by the voluntary desertion by the surgeons of the inferior occupation, as the higher became more scientific and more important. The only trace of the old connexion in Edinburgh is the payment of a small annual sum to the society of barbers by the surgeons. It is a trace which, on account of old associations, I should be sorry to see done away with.

Edinburgh, the city of John Knox, was pre-eminently the headquarters of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland, and therefore the relations of an old Edinburgh incorporation to that great religious and political movement are naturally a matter of some curiosity. On this subject, the first thing which occurs to me is the fact that our ancestors of this College were all regularly sworn, at their entry as members, to "continue in the profession of Christ's blessed evangell as the same is publicly preached within this realm." These words were clearly intended to exclude Roman-catholics from a profession which, in its essential nature, owns no distinction of creed. How far they *did* exclude them is a different matter. There is certainly quite sufficient evidence of the attachment of the mass of our early predecessors to the Reformed Kirk, of which some of them were elders. As one proof of the fact, I may mention a beautiful and very catholic form of prayer, which has probably been in use among us from the very earliest days of Protestantism, and quite certainly from 1581, the date of the commencement of our oldest minute-book. A traditionary belief, which is probably well-founded, has prevailed among us, that it is the composition of

<sup>1</sup> Ducange's Glossarium mediæ et infimæ Latinitatis, sub voce *Minuere*.



John Knox himself. In 1593, a prayer was introduced into the town-council, which contains some of the same forms of expression. Our own form is still read at the beginning of all our meetings. It is probable that even the Fellows of the College, to whom it is thus made familiar, may wish to make themselves acquainted with the original edition of it, as it appears in the first page of the book I have alluded to. It is as follows:—

“O eternal God, and our loving and mercifull Father in Christ Jesus, seeing we are convennit heir to treat uponn these things that concernis our calling, we beseik thee, O Lord, to be mercifull to us, and giff us grace to proceed thereintill without malice, grudge, or partialitie;—sua that the things we may do may tend to the glorie of God, the weill of our vocation, and confort of every member of the samen; throw Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour; Amen.”

I have told you, in my published address of 1860, that by our earliest charter, dated the 1st July 1505, we were bound to “uphald ane altar in the College Kirk of Sanct Geill in the honour of God and Sanct Mongow our patrone.” This was, of course, ill suited to the taste of our zealous Protestants fifty-five years after; and, accordingly, I find that in the allusions made to that charter in the minutes of the entry of new members, and also in the indentures of apprentices, the words “except idolatrie” are generally inserted, in order to qualify its obligations.

Perhaps some of you, who have not looked curiously into the history of the time, may be surprised to be told that these early Protestant and Presbyterian predecessors of ours were far from being so exact as we ourselves are in observing the first day of the week. But it is the indubitable fact that they not unfrequently held meetings of various kinds on that day,—meetings for the admission of new members, for the election of office-bearers, for the collection of money, for calling to account disobedient and refractory members, for making laws,—in short, for business of the most secular description imaginable. For nearly a century after the Reformation, such meetings occurred every now and then, the last of them, so far as I know, being on 6th March 1653.<sup>1</sup> But you

<sup>1</sup> The days of the week are not named in the minutes, but I have ascertained that the meetings of the dates subjoined were all of them Sunday meetings; others may possibly have escaped me, though I think they cannot be many:—30th June 1588, 26th September 1591, 17th September 1615, 13th September



must not suppose that we were in this respect better or worse than our neighbours in those times. Sunday markets were held in the end of the sixteenth century, and were abolished only in 1592; and though public worship was regularly observed, no constraint was then put on individuals or on public bodies in regard to their modes of observing the day. It is difficult for us to imagine the state of opinion on this subject which then existed. The Sunday of the early reformers, selected as it was by the leading men among them for private entertainments;<sup>1</sup> for marriage-feasts, with dancing, fireworks, and various kinds of merry-making;<sup>2</sup> and for public entertainments, such as the festival in honour of the friends of Queen Mary, on 31st August 1561, after her arrival from France,<sup>3</sup> and the festival in honour of the Danish friends of King James and his queen, on 24th May 1590, after their arrival from Denmark,<sup>4</sup>—the entertainers, in both cases, being the magistrates of this city,—was indeed a very different thing from the Sunday of a century later, which, rigidly enforced by serious penalties, left nothing to the consciences of individuals. And those opposite phases of the day were almost alike dissimilar to the day of rest with which we are ourselves

1629, 4th June 1637, 13th September 1640, 22d September 1644, 13th September 1646, 5th October 1651, 6th March 1653. Of these meetings the earliest was for the admission of a member; the second is that of which I have given an account in the text (p. 12); six of the others were for electing office-bearers; one was for calling to account a barber for some illegal doings; and one, the last of all, is expressly called in the minutes, “ane money meating.”

<sup>1</sup> *Inventaires de la Roynie Descosse*, printed for the Bannatyne Club in 1863, preface, p. lxxix. This volume is just contributed to the Bannatyne Club by Lord Dalhousie. I have been greatly indebted to the preface, which is from the accomplished pen of my friend Mr Robertson. From the references he has given in the same page, it appears that Knox travelled, wrote letters, and entertained noblemen and ambassadors on Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> Same book, preface, pp. lxxvii. and lxxviii. The allusion is to the marriage-feast of Murray, the Queen's brother, then Earl of Mar, in 1562. The marriage was in St Giles' Church, where Knox preached the sermon, and from whence the cortége proceeded to the banquet at Holyrood Palace.

<sup>3</sup> Same book, preface, p. xxxvii. note 1. It was held in the old archiepiscopal palace, which still exists at the corner of the Cowgate and of Blackfriars' Wynd, east side. See also Town-council Records, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th August 1561, in vol. iv. pp. 14, 15; and *Diurnal of Occurrents*, pp. 66, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Town-council Records, 21st May 1590. It was held in the “lugeing” of “Thomas Aitchesoune, master of the cunzie house [the Mint], at Todrike's wynd fute.” This tenement is also still in existence, and is a very little to the east of the other, in the Cowgate. Ample provision was made for the hilarity of the occasion, as the minute proves. The minute has been correctly copied by Chambers,—*Traditions of Edinburgh*, p. 100.



familiar, in which statutory enforcements, being no longer in favour, have been nearly superseded, and seem likely to be superseded altogether, by that sense of its great advantages and privileges which is almost universal among us.

Of the transition, in the course of a century, from extreme hilarity to extreme asceticism, and from extreme freedom to extreme coercion, there are a few traces to be found in the minutes of the Surgeons. In the reign of the first Charles, they were agitated by debates about what is quaintly called in the minutes "barbarizing on the sabbath-day." At that time the highest men among the surgeons were barbers by right, and a few of the oldest among them may still have been such in fact, though the barber trade had been then in a great measure transferred to the single barbers, not members of the body, but subject to its authority. In 1630, a refractory sabbatarian member, who had "compleint to the kirk and counsell" against the barbers for practising their trade "upon the sabbath-day," was publicly reminded that such tell-tale courses were "contrair to his aith of admissioun." He was nevertheless so audacious as to tell the assembled incorporation that "quha wald, quha wald not, he suld have their libertie restrainit." But he was explicitly told in reply that the barbers of whom he complained had done only what was lawful for them to do, and he was suspended from his privileges "aye and quhill he confes his falt," which he did, and was forgiven.<sup>1</sup>

Five years later, the opinion of the Surgeons was so far changed, that an act was passed by them, on the 27th October 1635, against "barbarizing on sabbath." The practice is characterized as being "absurd and unlawful, contrary to God's Word, and deboishing of servands." A fine was imposed of "fifty-aucht shillings, *toties quoties*." But it is curious that, while thus schooling the barbers, we continued our Sunday meetings, of which I find at least half-a-dozen of a later date than this act. It seems clear to me that such meetings were not then thought to be wrong, for they occurred at a period of great religious zeal and excitement,—the period of the abortive attempt to enforce the liturgy, of the signature of the Covenant, and of the memorable assemblies of Glasgow and Westminster;—and it is obvious that, if our Sunday meetings, which continued till the time of the firm establishment of Cromwell's power, had been thought to be profane, as they certainly would

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Surgeons, 26th June 1630. His name was James Brown. He again made a complaint against the Surgeons to the Town Council on 26th June 1639, and was again pulled up for it, and obliged to apologize.



at a later period in the same century, there would not have been wanting rough warnings from such people as Jenny Geddes, the Tron Kirk green-wife, who, on Sunday 23d of July 1637, corrected the theological errors of Archbishop Laud, and of Charles the First, with such heroic intrepidity and with such remarkable success.

You may perhaps feel some interest in the fact that, on the 25th of August 1638, the Surgeons of Edinburgh signed the Covenant, and "ordained their haill prenteisses and servands to subscriye the same als weill as themselfis, and that there sall be in no tyme cumming any freeman admittit, either chirurgion or barbour, nor any buike prenteisses or servands, but sic as shall subscriye the Covenant."

In one word, private judgment was a thing not understood or not admitted by our ancestors. But let us not be in hot haste to condemn them. *Our* most excellent sovereign has as little of the wish as of the power to force on us an unpalatable religion, and to compel us to take up an attitude of self-defence against spiritual aggression. If, after the lapse of much more than two instructive centuries, we discover, on self-examination, that we are in the number of those who do not fully confide in the power of truth and of our own arguments, with a fair field and no favour, to do successful battle against error, and who still rely on penalties, monopolies, disqualifications, and coercive clauses in old acts of the Scotch parliament, to keep us from going wrong in such matters as those to which the Covenant related, let us, in that case, be silent censors, not of our forefathers, but of our own noble and infallible selves.

The reformation of 1560 was far from being a mere change of religious *opinion*. It consigned Scotland to the guidance of leaders who were earnestly bent on effecting a very necessary improvement in religious *conduct*. The Scotch branch of the Roman-catholic Church, far removed from its ecclesiastical authorities, and therefore less controlled by them, was to a great extent subservient to the purposes of our privileged orders; and its high places were filled by minions of men in authority, to an extent not known in the same Church abroad, and by bastards of royal and noble families, which was in direct contravention of the well-known laws of that Church. Historians, accordingly, are all agreed as to the brutal violence and gross licentiousness of the earlier part of that century. The habits of a people could not be suddenly changed; and there are



to be found in our records proofs of the exceeding difficulty of the task; increased, in the case of the Surgeons, by some things in their position and occupation which it may be worth while to explain to you. In those days, we had neither hospitals nor medical schools; and as apprenticeship was the sole means of medical instruction, it was thought necessary that the apprentice should live in family with his master. The correctness of his deportment was on this account a matter of no small importance, and therefore all things connected with apprenticeship were subjects of very strict legislation. It was part of the system both of this and of most other corporations in Scotland, that the sons and the sons-in-law of members were admissible by mere examination, without apprenticeship, and at a low rate of entry-money, which was not the case with strangers. A strong inducement was thus held out to the apprentices to be attentive to the daughters of their masters; and our records show that not a few of them attained to our Fellowship through this very agreeable channel. But as the rose has its thorns, and as the brightest sunshine may be followed by occasional clouds, so the golden opportunities of intimacy with the young ladies in which the young gentlemen rejoiced were not a little calculated, under certain circumstances, to bring them into unpleasant collisions with their masters. It would appear that sometimes accidents had occurred of a kind not even yet unknown to the *perfidum ingenium* of Scotland, though now happily very unusual among the women of the educated classes.

Our predecessors determined to put a check on these irregularities, and assembled for this purpose on one of those Sunday occasions of which I have told you. The meeting was held on 26th September 1591. The conditions of admission to the body were brought under consideration, and it was enacted, that in future the sons-in-law of members should have no privileges above other intrants in right of their wives, in the case of the latter having been guilty of levity prior to their marriage. The statute is not expressed in quite such drawing-room language as that which I have employed; for our ancestors had an important duty to perform to themselves, to their families, and to the cause of public morals. The evil they had to put down was a serious one, and it was necessary that their legislation should be clear and intelligible. The law itself therefore, and the allusions to it in some of the earlier minutes of entries of sons-in-law, are expressed in terms which remind one of the simplicity and directness of the patriarchal times. I give them



all credit for employing the powers they possessed for a purpose so useful and so necessary.

Let me give you another specimen of the lawlessness of those times.

It sometimes happens that a few pregnant words committed to writing at the moment will give us a more perfect photograph of a former state of things than whole pages of laborious and learned disquisition. Such a photograph I lately managed to disinter from our minutes, of a somewhat later but still very ancient period, as if from a Scotch Herculaneum; and that with no small difficulty, for the character was very antiquated, and the handwriting very badly executed. It appears that the Surgeons' apprentices had become insufferably turbulent and unmanageable. There was but one possible remedy, that of threatening them with the forfeiture of their privileges, and *that* remedy it was the object of the minute of the 7th May 1612 to apply. It is in the following words:—

“Whilk day the Decone and brethrene under subscryvand beand convenit in the Decone's house, and respecting and considering the insolencie of thair servands and prenteisses, how thay ar sa gevin to licentiousness that thay will not be correctit, sa that not only in evil speeches but als be way of deid thay will misserve thair maisteris and wilfullie gainstand thair will and correction, therefore it is statut and ordanit that nane of thair prenteisses or servands, prnt or to cum, sall use or weir ony dager, quhinzard, or knyff except ane knyff to cut thair meit, wanting the point. Under the paine of tinsell of thair freedom and liberties of the said craft, and all utheris privileges and liberties that thai may enjoy throw thair maisters. And that nane of the saids prenteisses or servands mis-call nor invaid thair maisteris or mastresses in tyme cuming under the paine forsaid.”

The careless clerk who penned this minute had little notion that it would be fished up after more than two centuries and a half, to make us acquainted with some of the evils of his day, and with some of those agencies by means of which they have been since eradicated.

War, which is one of the worst of human calamities, has at least the merit of being a great teacher of surgery. During the eighty years which preceded the civil war of 1640, Scotland was involved in no wars, though there were doubtless plenty of hard knocks going in the High Street which required the occasional appliances of surgery. But the Thirty Years' War on the Continent tempted a



number of the surgeons of this place to join the standard of Gustavus Adolphus, and of his daughter after him. Alexander Penicuik and James Borthwick were two of these. They were intimate friends, and both were men of good families and of good fortunes. Of Borthwick I told you some things on the former occasion, and I must now introduce you to his friend, who became a member of the Surgeons some years before him, in 1640. He was the representative of a family which had possessed the estate of Penicuik for a period clearly traceable to the very earliest part of the sixteenth century,<sup>1</sup> and which may have been in possession of it still earlier. He acquired the estate of Romanno, in the county of Peebles, through his mother, whose name was Murray, and who belonged to the family of Philiphaugh, in the adjoining county of Selkirk. He disposed of his family estate of Penicuik in 1647, and bought that of Newhall, on the southern borders of Mid-Lothian, in 1646. He died at Romanno at the age of 90, leaving both his estates to his son, who is known to the world as a poet, a physician, and a naturalist. He was himself also reputed to be a poet, though he has left no literary proof of the fact. He was surgeon to Banner, Queen Christina's general in the Swedish war, and was afterwards surgeon-general to the auxiliary Scotch army in England. His estate of Newhall became afterwards historically memorable as the scene of the celebrated pastoral of our Scottish Theocritus, Allan Ramsay.

The cases of Penicuik and Borthwick are examples of a fact of which I could easily produce abundant evidence, that in the midst of the general poverty of the times, the Surgeons were not *relatively* poor. On the contrary, I have good reason to believe that both in wealth, and rank, and enterprise, they held as high, perhaps even a higher, place among the men of their own times, than the medical men of the present day among the men of the present generation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He or his father (but probably himself at an early age) is entered four times, viz., to his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather, as the heir of "Pennycuke."—*Inquisitiones Generales*, Nos. 493, 494, 495, 496. The four entries bear the same date, Sept. 21, 1610, and the four ancestors all bore the same name, John Pennycuke, *de eodem*. Much of my information as to Penicuik is derived from the edition of his son's works, printed at Leith in 1815. In the minutes of the Surgeons he is sometimes called "Newhall." The estate of Newhall went to his granddaughter, and to her husband Mr Oliphant, who sold it in 1703 to Sir D. Forbes, uncle of Duncan Forbes of Culloden.

<sup>2</sup> From the records of Inquisitions regarding the possession of property in Scotland and other sources of information, I can prove that, of the first 150



It is also certain that our municipal incorporations in Scotland, in former times, held a far more important relation than they now do to our national interests. Constituted for mutual security, in an unsettled country, they were very great instruments of civilisation and of progress, and almost the only avenues to the acquisition of wealth. In them useful reforms originated; in them such men as John Knox, the intrepid assertors of human rights, found the necessary sympathy and support; nor was it till the final extinction of the last hopes of the Stuarts, and the consequent establishment of a firm government, with impartial administration of the laws, and a general feeling of security, that many of those functions which they once performed so usefully to our profession were felt to be no longer necessary.

It would require a much better artist than I am to present you with a correct portrait of the Edinburgh physician of the early part of the sixteenth century. I find from Lindsay of Pitscottie's *Chronicles of Scotland*<sup>1</sup> that "King James the Feird was weill learned in the airt of medicine, and was ane singular guid chirurgiane; and their was none of that profession, if they had any dangerous cure in hand, but would have craved his adwyse."

From this it appears that James had physicians about him,—an inference which is confirmed by a passage in a poem by Dunbar, addressed to the same king, in which the following words occur:—

"Sir, ye have mony servitours,  
And officers of divers cures;  
Kirkmen, courtmen, craftsmen fine,  
Doctors in Jure and Medicine."

The early dawn, therefore, of medicine and of surgery in Edinburgh was rosy-fingered to this extent, that it "began to peep" before the admiring eyes of our citizens at the royal palace of Holyrood. The doctors must have received their honours abroad, for I can discover no clear evidence that degrees in medicine were then

members of the Incorporation of Surgeons, nearly twenty were possessed of landed property. A great many more held property in houses, chiefly in Edinburgh; six at least were nearly allied by blood or marriage to the families of the nobility; three were members of the Parliament; and six were surgeons to the Scotch kings. As to enterprise, the facts stated in the text, taking into account the difficulties they had to struggle against from the civil disturbances of the seventeenth century, are highly to their honour.

<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh edition, 1814, p. 249.



conferred in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> and, if any there were, they must have been exceedingly few indeed. It was, perhaps, not amiss that they consulted their very accomplished king in their difficulties; for though, like his brother-in-law, King Henry of England, he came to his knowledge of medicine by some royal road, which, like the right divine to govern wrong, is now obsolete, yet I am by no means sure that *his* medical advice was not better than theirs. For the physician of those early days paid little attention to the phenomena of disease in comparison with what he bestowed on the dicta of the Greek authorities. In his own conception, he was the priest of Apollo, who interpreted to the vulgar those ancient Delphic oracles regarding the ills that flesh is heir to. He may be said, almost without a metaphor, to have been among the number of those who

“think to climb Parnassus  
By dint o’ Greek.”

Besides all this, he was given to superstition, to astrology, and to divination; while it is quite possible that the king might be more practical in his methods. In the case of that most afflicting disorder, the toothach, he proceeded in a very practical way, without consulting either Hippocrates or Avicenna, or any other authority, Greek or Arabian; for, in the lists of the expenditure of the lord high treasurer, of date February 9, 1511–12, there is an entry of a

<sup>1</sup> The University of Aberdeen had professors of medicine from 1505, who were probably graduates of some university. The third of these, Gilbert Skene (1556), does not seem to have been abroad, and therefore probably was a graduate of Aberdeen. He published a tract, “De peste” (1568), afterwards went to Edinburgh (1575), and was appointed doctor of medicine to the king (16th June 1581)—[See Kennedy’s *Annals of Aberdeen*, vol. ii. pp. 368, 403, 435; also Orem’s *Description of Old Aberdeen in the Years 1724–25*, p. 272; *Fasti Aberdonenses* (published by the Spalding Club), p. 274; and *Tracts by Gilbert Skene* (published by the Bannatyne Club), preface, pp. vii. to x.]. But it does not appear to me that there was any considerable number of Aberdeen graduates in the sixteenth century, or even in the seventeenth. Of Glasgow University the same thing may be said. On 6th November 1712, there is a minute to the effect that “the faculty, considering that the professions of law and medicine have of a long time been neglected, and that the royal visitation in the year 1664 did find that the said professions ought to be revived,” agreed that they should be revived. Accordingly, Dr John Johnstoun was made professor of medicine (1st June 1714); and, some years after (29th September 1720), a Mr Andrew Grahame was made doctor in absence—[See the *Institutes of the University of Glasgow*, vol. ii., printed by the Maitland Club]. In St Andrews, the celebrated Dr John Arbuthnott appears to be the first doctor in physic created (11th September 1696). He was subjected to a trial before a board of physicians. From the tenor of the minute, it appears that the con-



payment in the following terms:—"Item to ane fallow, because the king pullit furth his twtcht, xiiii s."<sup>1</sup> I presume that the sum paid was for his majesty's professional education, which was therefore conducted on sound, practical, common-sense principles.

There are many indications that our Scotch physicians were in little repute among us for more than a century after James IV. Foreign physicians were generally preferred. John Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, a man allied by blood to the royal family of Scotland, engaged in his service in 1547 a young French physician, whose name was Casanate; and, five years later, his health being still very bad, brought from Italy, at the suggestion

ferring of medical degrees was then a new thing, and no more were conferred for six years after. Up to the reign of George II., the doctors created there do not average more than one annually. During his reign they average three, and they were much more numerous afterwards. In Edinburgh University, the first M.D. was David Cockburn, A.M., who graduated on 14th May 1705. There were fifteen graduates in Medicine prior to 1726, the date of the creation of a medical faculty in the University. In some cases the degree was conferred *ad eundem*, in some by recommendation, and in absence, but in the greater number by examinations, which were conducted by the Royal College of Physicians—[See Dalzell's History of the University, vol. ii. pp. 293, 308, 312, 319, 325, 326, 327, 329, and 330; also, "Report on the Examination of Medical Practitioners, etc., printed by the Royal College of Physicians," 1833, pp. 82-88.] The earliest doctors in Medicine who entered the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow were two who were admitted in January 1645. The first doctor in Medicine who entered the Incorporation of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Christopher Irvine, was admitted 28th December 1658. He is first termed *Mr.*—a prefix which, in those times, indicated that he was Master of Arts, and which is invariably applied to him till 16th February 1669, when he is first called Doctor. But he had got his doctor's degree from some university long before, for his name appears in the published "Catalogue of Graduates in Arts, etc." of the University of Edinburgh, as having taken the degree of A.M. on 15th April 1645, and he is there designated "*Medicinæ Doctor.*" It is probable that the doctorate was in less esteem with the surgeons than the mastership in Arts; and that the attempt of the doctors in the year before he entered [see p. 20], may have caused them to give a preference to the title of M.A. over M.D. Dr James Nisbet was the only other doctor who entered with the Surgeons in the seventeenth century, but there were several graduates in Arts. [For the information and references contained in this note,—as to Aberdeen, I am indebted to Professor Struthers; as to Glasgow, to Professor Weir, and to Dr Weir, Secretary to the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons; and as to St Andrews, by much the oldest of our universities, to Dr Oswald H. Bell, Professor of Medicine there. There was some little inaccuracy as to Christopher Irvine in the edition of this note which appeared in the Edinburgh Medical Journal for February 1864. This I have now corrected.]

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, vol. i. p. 124. Equal to 1s. 2d. sterling money.



of Casanate, the celebrated Cardan, whose name is now better known in algebra than in medicine, but who seems to have effected his cure.<sup>1</sup> Few Scotchmen could then have afforded the expense; but Hamilton was wealthy, and was also, politically, the most powerful man in Scotland. During the few weeks of his stay among us, Cardan was consulted by many distinguished Scotchmen. His ideas on Hamilton's case, on physiology, on dreams, on nativities, and on horoscopes, are subjects to which, curious and interesting as they are, I can here only allude. I find that, about the same time (20th March 1547), a letter was addressed by the Scotch regent to Edward VI. of England, requesting letters of safe-conduct in favour of Archibald Betoun (not improbably a relative of the cardinal, who had been murdered the year before), to enable him to travel through England to France, "for counsel and help of medicinars."<sup>2</sup> Queen Mary Stuart had a French physician, according to what appears to have been the usage of the day among those who could afford one.<sup>3</sup> There is extant a letter from a M. Cognain, dated 23d April 1586, and addressed to M. De Courcelles, French ambassador to Scotland, in which the writer congratulates him on the recovery of his health, and sends him some rhubarb, some senna, and some aloes, with directions how to mix them.<sup>4</sup>

As time rolled on, the enterprising spirit of our countrymen impelled them to seek those opportunities of instruction, and those academical distinctions, which the schools of the Continent afforded, in order that they might no longer be superseded by foreigners. Accordingly, I find that, in the reign of James VI., both the physicians and the surgeons of the court were natives of Scotland.<sup>5</sup> But the poverty of Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the want of strength in the government to protect the

<sup>1</sup> Morley's Life of Jerome Cardan.

<sup>2</sup> Thorpe's Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Froude's History of England, vol. viii. p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> Thorpe, etc., p. 515. See Mr Robertson's preface to the Inventaires, etc., already quoted, p. lxiii. note 3, where the reader will find much more information as to the low state of the profession in Scotland, the opinion formed of it by the younger Scaliger, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Skeyne was appointed in 1581 to be his physician, and lived in Niddry Street. Gilbert Primrois, and, at later dates, James Hervey, John Naysmith, and Archibald Hay, were his surgeons. See Minutes of the Surgeons at the dates of entry of the last three of these members; also, as to Nasmyth, the narrative given by King James of the Gowrie Conspiracy of 1600, in Peacock's Perth and its Annals and Archives,—Perth, 1849,—p. 213, and the "Inquisitiones speciales" regarding property in Scotland; for the county of Edinburgh, No. 347.



subject, were formidable impediments to the progress of the healing art. It may be easily conceived how very inadequate was its remuneration, when it is considered that King James was often at a loss for money to carry on what he very characteristically called his "king-craft." *Our* craft requires learning, leisure, and an expensive training. The advantages of a medical school could not be had at home; and though such things existed abroad, they were in a very unsatisfactory condition. Sylvius, the professor of anatomy at Paris prior to the middle of the sixteenth century, who has left his name impressed, as all medical men know, on a part of the cerebral structure, was well acquainted with human anatomy as far as then known, but is said to have taught anatomy from the dissection of the inferior animals.<sup>1</sup> All were alike ignorant, till long after, of the course of the circulating fluid, the knowledge of which was so vitally necessary to scientific progress.

The self-conceit of the physicians of those days took a dangerous direction, for they thought themselves the proper persons to govern the untitled members of the profession, and were therefore more likely to be acceptable to the Richelieus abroad, and to the Jameses and Charleses at home, who thought the "order observed in foreign nations in the like cases" to be "*convenient* and comely,"<sup>2</sup> than to the surgeons of Edinburgh, who had no particular reverence for their sacerdotal character. The abuses in the granting of degrees added to the quarrel. A physician of the old school, writing in 1658,<sup>3</sup> tells us that ignorant men, who knew nothing of Hippocrates or of Galen, were admitted to degrees on the mere strength of their facility in speaking Latin,—that degrees were sold, and that, from these causes, those of the Universities of France and of Italy were little valued. He adds, that in London, Bordeaux, and Montpellier, degrees were not accepted without re-examination, and that the most learned physicians submitted willingly to this as a necessary check on a gross abuse.

In the year of James the Sixth's visit to Scotland (1617), a few physicians then resident in Edinburgh endeavoured to persuade him to erect a College of Physicians. The scheme was brought forward in 1621, and was unsuccessful. A second attempt was made in

<sup>1</sup> Morley's *Life of Cardan*, vol. ii. p. 100. The same practice prevailed in the University of Aberdeen when Dr W. Gordon was professor there—*i. e.*, prior to 1636—[See Chambers' *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 96].

<sup>2</sup> "Report on the Examination of Medical Practitioners, etc.," 1833,—Printed by the Royal College of Physicians, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobus Primerosius; "*De Vulgi erroribus in Medicina.*"



1633, when Charles I. came to Scotland, and was also defeated. In the former project *seven* physicians, and in the latter *nine*, were to have constituted a college, with power to fill up all gaps in their own number, and to regulate all the medical, surgical, and pharmaceutical interests of Scotland. The obvious absurdity of those projects was probably the principal cause of their failure. A private letter of 1633, communicated to me by Mr Fraser, gives an account of proceedings in the Scotch Parliament in the following terms:—"The phisicians craivit to have a College erectit, and that none wer approvin without their approbatioun, and no stranger to give phisik without their approbatioun; efter long dispuitt, refusit to be ane article." A similar project in Cromwell's time was described in my address of 1860; but I was not then aware of the depths of degradation which the Surgeons escaped by its failure in 1657. It appears that besides their hostility, it roused that of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, of the universities, and more particularly of the University of Aberdeen; and that a conference was held by its projectors at Dundee, with some representatives of that northern seminary. At this meeting various matters deeply affecting the Surgeons were very harmoniously arranged *in their absence*. It was the determination of those high contracting parties that the Surgeons should in future be limited to cutaneous and external diseases, "so long as these remained simply such, and did not recur;" if they did recur, "the assistance of one of the College or their licentiates" was to be called for; they were to "have liberty to cure *lues venerea*," but not "to put hand to women in dangerous labours of childbed, nor use instruments for the drawing forth of births, without the advice of the physicians aforesaid, except in absolute necessity of time and place where physicians cannot be had." The surgeons were to be allowed, in certain cases, to practise venesection; and, "in cases of necessity, where the distance of place will not admit the present help of a physician," it was to be "leisome" to them "to administer a clyster till a physician may be had."<sup>1</sup> It is not wonderful that, to use the words of a contemporary private letter, the surgeons made "a buzzing and a stour;" for they were "not wood," they were "not stones, but men,"<sup>2</sup> and the project was for them nothing short of annihilation as a body, and subjection, as individuals, to

<sup>1</sup> "Report on the Examination of Medical Practitioners," already quoted, pp. 18, 19. The structure of the sentence seems to imply that if the "present help of a physician" could be had, this office was not to have been "leisome" to the surgeon.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Cæsar.



the caprices of a pragmatic and irresponsible despotism. We, the graduates of modern times, have learned to be less vain of our doctor's cap, as well as of our Greek,—with which latter, I grieve to say, there are among us some who dispense altogether, and who contrive to do with such a modicum of Latin as would have horrified King James and the doctors of his and of Cromwell's day.

It is agreeable to turn from those degrading conspiracies to the event of a quarter of a century later, the establishment of our Royal College of Physicians on far more rational principles. Sir Robert Sibbald, its principal founder, had profited by the errors and failures of the preceding attempts.<sup>1</sup> But it was not to be expected, after what I have told you, that his object could be effected without raising jealousies in certain quarters.

Graduates, both in Arts and in Medicine, had, in the interval, begun to enrol themselves in the ranks of the Surgeons. One of these was Dr Christopher Irvine, who, being an author, which few then were, is perhaps worthy of a brief notice. This gentleman tells us that he was turned out of “a plentiful patrimony in Ireland by the troubles in that kingdom,” and also “out of the College [University] of Edinburgh, by the Covenant,” and that he was imprisoned, and obliged for his subsistence to teach grammar. By the favour of James the Seventh, he was compensated for these losses, by the office of historiographer for Scotland, and also by that of first physician to his Majesty. In 1656, he published his “*Medicina Magnetica* ;” a very different thing from what its title would suggest to us. It is dedicated to General Monk, and contains one hundred aphorisms, not one of which can possibly be admitted, twelve conclusions equally inadmissible, and a hopeful application of both of these to his method of cure by what he calls “magical physic.” His sense of the value of his own labours is thus expressed in an address to the reader,<sup>2</sup> “If thou be candid, I am glad to serve thee, and am confident in these books thou shalt find things both rare and delectable. But if thy nature or principle make thee froward, injoy thyself, and provide such kick-shaws as

<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert, writing of the attempt of 1657, ascribes it to Dr George Purves, whom he characterizes as a man of great parts, and of much boldness and vivacity of spirit; and who was of a “pragmatic temper, and did not spare charges for to accomplish the design.” See “Report on the Examination of Medical Practitioners,” p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> P. 96.



will fit thy pallet, for Christy hath served up this dish only for his own fancy and his friends' recreation." He sought immortality by two other *mortal* publications, not medical, which establish his claim to a considerable amount of scholarship, with no small share of eccentricity.<sup>1</sup> He was very jealous of the erection of the Royal College of Physicians, and applied to the Privy Council, setting forth his education, his degrees, his army commissions, and his services, as reasons why they should not suffer him "to be stated under the partial humours or affronts of the new College, composed of men altogether his juniors (save Dr Hay) in the studies of philosophie and practice of physick." This was granted by the Council, and was afterwards confirmed, in 1685, by an Act of the Scotch Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Christopher, who, in the title page of one of his publications designates himself "*abs Bon Bosco*," was the proprietor of the estate of *Bonshaw*. It was probably not without good reason that he was superseded in his offices by the government of King William, for the restoration government had many favourites whose zeal in its service was their chief merit, and I believe Christopher to have been one of this description.

There is a minute of the Surgeons on 7th April 1688, some months before the Revolution, which, as it shows the working in this city of the intrigues of James the Seventh, may be worthy of a short mention. That most unprincipled and heartless monarch, whose boots and thumbikins had been applied to the agonized limbs of Scotch Presbyterians in his own royal presence only nine years before, having failed in his attempts to combine the Churches of England and Rome against the Presbyterians, was now desirous to procure the assistance of the Presbyterians against the Church of England; and for this purpose had proclaimed, only three days before, and that in direct opposition to Acts of the Parliament, his resolution to tolerate by his Royal prerogative the worship of Roman-catholics and of Presbyterians, and of all others. In these

<sup>1</sup> "*Bellum Grammaticale*," which is a sort of a drama in Latin, ineffectively humorous, the subject of it being the Principles of Grammar; Edinburgh 1652. It is dedicated to Dr George Sibbald, uncle to Sir Robert Sibbald the founder of the Royal College of Physicians. Also "*Historiæ Scoticæ nomenclatura Latino-vernacula*," which is devoted to the explanation of Scotch names of persons and places, and which is dedicated to the Duke of York, afterwards James VII.; Edinburgh, 1682. He had two sons, one of whom, James, was a surgeon in Dumfries; the other, Christopher, is designated of Castle Irving in Ireland, and was, therefore, probably the elder.

<sup>2</sup> See the Acts of the Parliament of that date.



circumstances, Robert Cheislie and Robert Halyburton, merchants in Edinburgh, applied to the Surgeons in behalf of the "Colledge and Tron Kirk parishes," for the use of "the old house belonging to the said calling that is now ruinous," which, "if the samyn were rebuilt," might serve them as a place of worship. In the petition it is amusing to read that "the Kingis most excellent Majesty, by his several declarations and proclamations, has been graciously pleased to allow unto them full libertie to meet and serve God in their own way," with much more to the same effect. It was well for Mr Cheislie and his friend that recent facts, and especially the boots and thumbikins of Holyrood, and the doings of King James' particular friend, Judge Jeffreys, at the Bloody Assize, though forgotten by them, were remembered by many both in Scotland and in England.

Those who have read my account of the history of this College may remember Alexander Menteith, a member of ours, distinguished as a teacher of anatomy as early as 1694, and of chemistry as early as 1697,<sup>1</sup> the leading surgeon, moreover, of his day, and who may justly be regarded as distinguished among those who prepared, if they did not actually lay, the foundations of our medical school. A few things which I have since discovered regarding him will no doubt be acceptable to you. I may remind you that he was deprived of his offices—those of chairman of the Surgeons, Town-councillor, and Convener of the Trades—by a strong act of the Government, which I then assigned my reasons for suspecting to have arisen from his being too keen a partisan of the Stuarts to be safe for King William. In confirmation of this theory of mine, I find that he was son of James Menteith<sup>2</sup> of Auldcathie, the representative of the second or Stuart line of Earls of Menteith, who were staunch friends of the old royal family of Scotland, and that his elder brother James married the heiress of Binns, granddaughter to General Dalryell of Bothwell Bridge celebrity. I have further to say, that he bought, in 1707, the estate of Todshaugh, now Foxhall, in Linlithgowshire, which he disposed, four years after, to his eldest daughter Elizabeth, and to her husband John Carre, Advocate; and that one of his lineal descendants in the fifth generation is Mr Walter Riddell Carre of

<sup>1</sup> His lease of the chemical laboratory at the Surgeons' Hall is dated 16th April 1697.

<sup>2</sup> The Auldcathie Menteiths were descended from a son of Alexander, Earl of Menteith, through Sir William Menteith of Kerse, and his son Alexander Lochend.



Cavers Carre, who is now present, and whom I have the pleasure of introducing to the College. Menteith's estate of Todshaugh seems to have some elective attraction for medical families, for it is now the property of Colonel Duncan, grandson of Dr Andrew Duncan, senior, Professor of Theory of Physic in the University. Menteith died 23d December 1713, a few weeks after his friend Dr Pitcairn.

Having yet some things to tell you of the early days of our medical school, I am under the necessity of reminding you that its birth was in the old hall of this College in 1697; that anatomy and chemistry were taught in that hall from the first, the former by members of our body called "operators;" that we were bound by our engagement with the Town-council, who gave us facilities for procuring subjects, to give a public anatomical demonstration every year; that in 1705 we appointed our first professor of anatomy; that, some time after, he received £15 a-year from the University funds, which salary was continued to his successors; and that the medical school was completed after 1720, by the assistance of some energetic Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians, and, thus completed, was transferred to the University from our buildings in 1726. There is a very interesting minute of the Surgeons, dated 18th May 1704, which shows in what an earnest spirit our bargain with the Town-council was carried out at that early date. It is a vote of thanks to the "operators" who had conducted a course of public demonstrations in the previous April. The names and subjects are thus enumerated:—"The first day, James Hamilton—a discourse on anatomie in generall, with a dissection and demonstration of the common teguments and muscles of the abdomen. The second day, John Mirrie—the umbilicus, omentum, peritoneum, stomach, pancreas, intestines, vasa lactea, mesentery, receptaculum chyli, and ductus thoracicus. The third day, Mr<sup>1</sup> Alexander Nisbet—the liver, vesica fellis, with their vessels, spleen, kidneys, glandulæ renales, ureters, and bladder. The fourth day, George Dundas—the organs of generation in a woman, with a discourse of hernia. The fifth day, Robert Swintoun—the containing and contained parts of the thorax, with the circulation of the blood and respiration. The sixth day, Henry Hamilton—the hair, teguments, dura and pia mater, cerebrum, cerebellum, medulla oblongata, and nerves within the head. The seventh day, Robert Eliot—the five externall senses, with a demonstration of their severall organs. The

<sup>1</sup> The prefix *Mr* is uniformly applied to this gentleman. See note to p. 17.



eighth day, John Jossy—the muscles of the neck and arm, with a discourse on muscular motion. The ninth day, Walter Potter—the muscles of the back, thigh, and legg. The epilogue or conclusion by Dr Archibald Pitcairn.”<sup>1</sup>

You will please to observe that these doings preceded the appointment of Eliot, one of the “operators” named, to be the first professor of anatomy in Edinburgh. By him and his three immediate successors the business of anatomical instruction was conducted during a long period of civil commotion and danger, arising from plots got up in foreign countries in favour of the Stuarts. Every friend to our dearly bought liberties felt that he might again have to fight for them. The thunders of Sheriffmuir had scarcely ceased to wake the echoes of the neighbouring Ochills, when fresh conspiracies of Spain and its minister, Alberoni, excited our alarms. A descent was made in the West Highlands in 1719, and another plot was discovered in 1722, for which Bishop Atterbury was attainted. The Edinburgh friends of the Revolution settlement clung to the ancient constitution of the city, and even to its ancient defences, the North Loch, and the Flodden wall, and felt that, with all their defects, they might be useful rallying points in a season of danger.

The second Alexander Monro, in a memoir of his father, written in 1781, in the midst of a country long enjoying the blessings of peace and of a settled government, ignores altogether the difference of the times. The municipal government of Edinburgh had by that time ceased to have so important a relation to our medical and other interests. He tells us that on his father’s return to Edinburgh, “Messrs Drummond and M’Gill, who were the conjunct *nominal* professors and demonstrators of anatomy to the *Surgeons’ Company*, offering to resign in his favour, *he found himself under the necessity of entering a member with them.*”<sup>2</sup>

Now there are three errors in this account, for,—1st, Drummond and M’Gill were not “*nominal* professors,” but as real professors as his father or himself, though not, like them, *ad vitam*; 2d, “The *Surgeons’ Company*” never was the designation of the body of which he speaks; and, 3d, his father was under no other “necessity of entering a member” with the Surgeons than he himself was of entering the University; the necessity, as his father and grandfather, both of them very zealous members of ours, would, I am sure, have

<sup>1</sup> Portraits of all these gentlemen were exhibited, with the exception of Eliot, of whom, unfortunately, there is no picture.

<sup>2</sup> The italics are mine.—J. G.



readily admitted, being that of doing the very best thing to promote his own interest; for he got the only anatomical theatre in Edinburgh for his prelections, and he got as his pupils the apprentices of the Surgeons, the proprietors of that theatre.<sup>1</sup> But the explanation of these disparaging expressions is intelligible enough. About four years before this memoir was written, the Surgeons were desirous to have surgery taught in the University by a separate professor, and their memorial to the Crown for that purpose was defeated by the second Alexander Monro, who had also influence enough with the patrons of the University to get a new commission issued to himself, making him professor of surgery as well as of anatomy;<sup>2</sup> and for more than half a century thereafter surgery was taught as a mere appendage to the university-course of anatomy.

The professors belonging to the Royal College of Physicians to whom I have alluded as having taught at the school in the Surgeons' Hall between 1720 and 1726, were Doctors Andrew Sinclair and John Rutherford, professors of the theory and practice of medicine, and Doctors Andrew Plummer and John Innes, professors of medicine and chemistry. On the 9th February 1726, these very eminent physicians applied to the Town-council to be appointed professors in the University on the same footing on which their colleague Monro had been appointed several years before, but without salaries. Their petition was granted. The medical school, which has been of so much advantage to this city, was thus completed by the almost unaided labours of the physicians and surgeons of Edinburgh. A prodigious boon was conferred by them on this city and its University; and yet there exists in the very minute of the appoint-

<sup>1</sup> I have felt constrained to rectify these errors, because they are injurious to the fair fame of those who founded our medical school, and because they have been copied into almost all the biographies of the first Alexander Monro which are to be found in Encyclopedias and similar works.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Town-council of 16th July and 6th August 1777. He stated to the patrons that, though it was not expressed in his commission, "the teaching of surgery has been universally understood to belong to his office," which was constituted "on the plan of the then most celebrated University of Leyden." His application was supported by the principal and the medical professors, and his appointment as professor of surgery was protested against by Alexander Hamilton, the chairman of the Surgeons, on the ground, *inter alia*, that "as the surgeon must be formed by witnessing the practice in the living body," the professor "could not give the rudiments" of the art of surgery, and "that no man can teach both branches completely within the usual period of a course."



ment of these four professors a curious proof that, in some jealous quarter or other, the value of the boon was little understood or appreciated. For it was provided that Sinclair and Plummer should have the privilege "to deliberate and vote with the other professors in their college affairs till 1st March 1727," and that Rutherford and Innes should enjoy the same privilege for the succeeding year, and so on alternately. Who the authors of this stipulation were, I cannot tell, nor is it worth while to inquire. It is quite enough to know that the labours of the medical men, like those of other benefactors of mankind, were not understood, and not duly valued by some of their contemporaries who ought to have known better.<sup>1</sup>

I have now to bring to a close this address, which I fear has extended to too great a length, though I have suppressed many smaller things for fear of tiring out your patience. It seems to me to be good occasionally to unroll the pages of the past, and to endeavour to discover the successive steps by which the existing state of things has been brought about. Though sufficiently conscious that my task could have been much better performed by one more familiar with historical and antiquarian research, yet I confess to some share of enthusiasm in my subject, and have much more sympathy with a Monkbarns who finds traces of Agricola's camp in "a wee-bit bourock," than with that worldly-minded absorption of the whole soul in the din and strife of the passing moment, which leaves no room for a thought on the lessons of the past or on the prospects of the future; no gratitude for the blessings of an advanced civilisation conferred on us through the labours of successive generations, and no desire to leave this world to others better than we found it. Were such apathy universal, it would furnish an excellent argument to those great antiquaries, who, with astounding humility, have been endeavouring to trace the parentage of the lords of the creation to the chimpanzee and the gorilla.

<sup>1</sup> This absurd limitation of the right of voting was, at the request of the four professors, rescinded by the patrons on 26th February 1729.







