

## **Memoir of Sir John Forbes ... / [Edmund Alexander Parkes].**

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Parkes, Edmund A. 1819-1876.

### **Publication/Creation**

London : Savill & Edwards, 1862.

### **Persistent URL**

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IN MEMORIAM.

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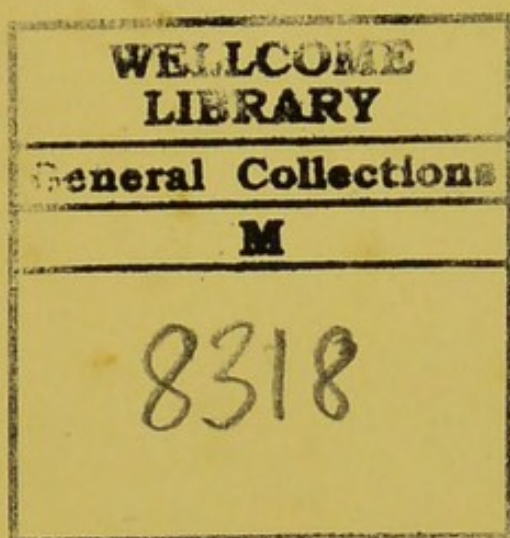




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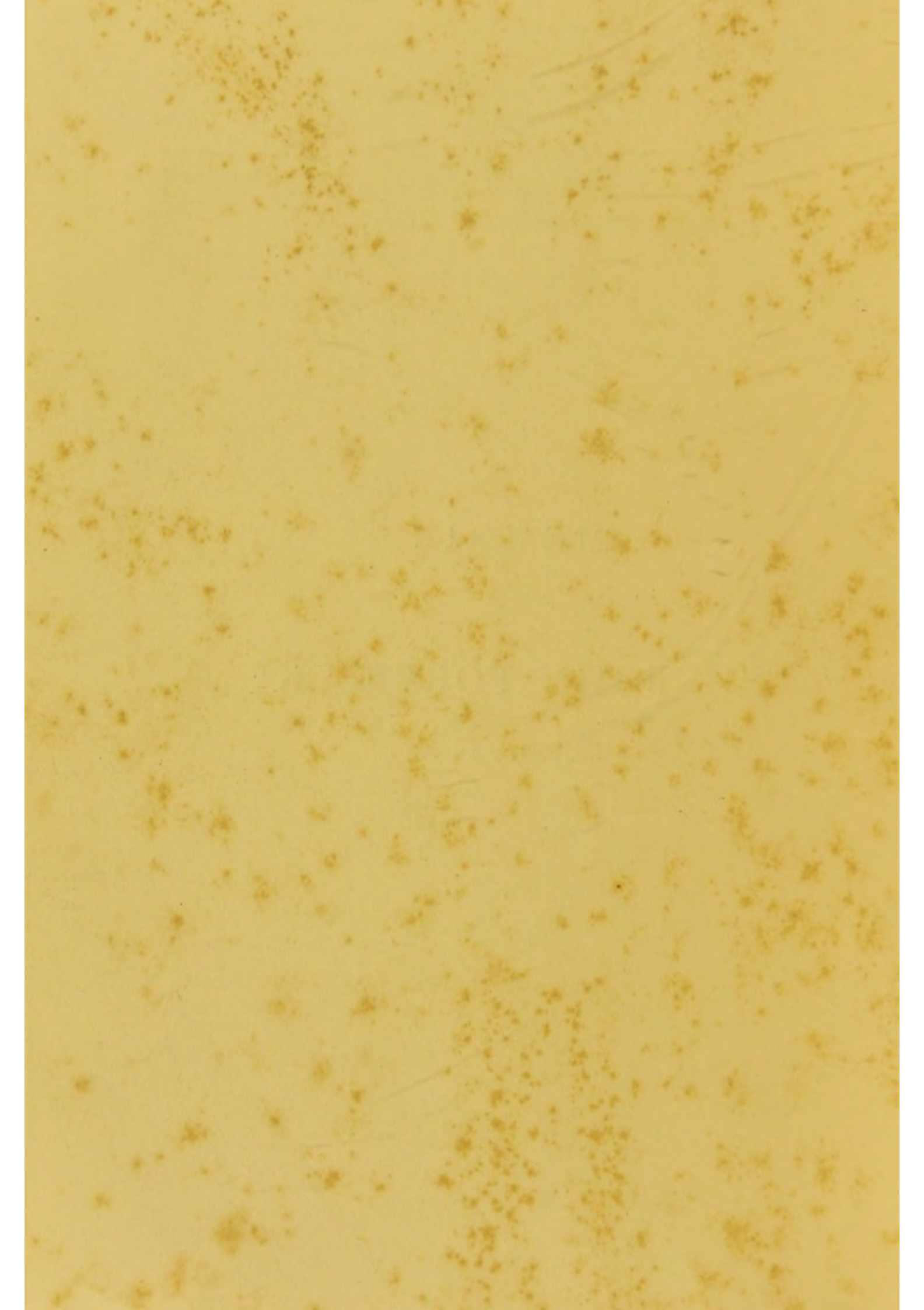
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MEMOIR  
—  
OF  
SIR JOHN FORBES, K<sup>T</sup>.  
M.D., D.C.L., F.R.S., ETC.















MEMOIR

SIR JOHN FORBES, K<sup>t</sup>

BY

WILLIAM G. FORBES

ESQ.

OF THE BARR

AND

OF THE HON. HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD

1841

2S.





MEMOIR  
OF  
SIR JOHN FORBES, K<sup>T</sup>.

M.D., D.C.L., F.R.S., ETC.

REPRINTED, BY PERMISSION,

FROM THE

JANUARY NUMBER, 1862,

OF THE

*British & Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review.*

(FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.)

by  
E.A. Parkes

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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY SAVILL & EDWARDS, CHANDOS STREET,  
COVENT GARDEN.  
1862.

ORRES, ... (1700-1701)

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## P R E F A C E.

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**B**Y the kindness and courtesy of Mr. CHURCHILL and Dr. PARKES, I am permitted to reprint in a separate form the accompanying memoir of my late father, Sir John Forbes. I had at one time cherished the hope of being able to produce a complete biography of my father, but find that this is now impossible. Sir John Forbes, eighteen months before his death, examined and burnt nearly all the papers he possessed, fearing, as he said himself, "that we should publish something that might be unworthy of him." Nothing, indeed, is left of any consequence. Dr.

Parkes most kindly undertook to write the best article he could, out of such materials as still existed. This article was published in the January Number of the "British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review." My father had many friends, non-medical, who would not see this Review. I have therefore felt it incumbent upon me, after obtaining the permission of the above-named gentlemen, to reprint, for private circulation, the Memoir exactly as it appeared in the Review. The only alterations or additions are contained in the notes marked (2) and (3).

ALEXANDER C. FORBES.

WHITCHURCH, *February*, 1862.





## In Memoriam.

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**D**URING the last two years Death has made sad gaps in the leading ranks of our profession. Bright, with his deep sagacity; Addison, with his acute perception; Todd, with his singular tact and insight; Baly, with his calm and calculating judgment, have been taken away; and now we have to mourn the loss of a physician who possessed qualities equal to any of these, and who exerted an influence on his contemporaries and on his art second only to that of Richard Bright.

These pages are an appropriate place for

a short memoir of Sir John Forbes, for his chief influence on the art of medicine was owing to the journal which he established and edited, and of which this Review is the successor. It is right, then, to devote here a few pages to the record of a life so active, useful, and influential.

Sir John Forbes was born in December, 1787, at Cuttlebrae, in the parish of Rathven, Banffshire. In 1799 he went to the Academy of Fordyce<sup>(1)</sup>, and obtaining a Bursary or Exhibition to the grammar-school at Aberdeen, he proceeded there in 1802.<sup>(2)</sup> In

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<sup>(1)</sup> It was at this school that he formed that friendship with Sir James Clark, which lasted through his entire life, and was to him a source of the most constant pleasure.

<sup>(2)</sup> It may not be uninteresting to state here that the exhibition referred to, was founded by an ancestor of Sir John Forbes's mother, and conditioned to be



the following year he entered at Marischal College, in Aberdeen, and remained till 1806. He then went to Edinburgh, and took the diploma of surgery, and in 1807 entered the medical service of the navy.

He used to mention that he came up to London by a Leith smack, and was fourteen days on the passage, and that the journey down to Plymouth to join the *Royal George*, to which ship he was appointed, took three days and nights more. He remained in the navy till 1816, and served chiefly

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held by one of founder's kin not exceeding fifteen years of age. Another of his mother's ancestors had founded a similar exhibition at the Grammar School of Cullen. Probably bearing in mind the benefit arising to himself from this exhibition, and desirous of imitating so good an example, Sir John Forbes by his will bequeathed a cottage with the land belonging to it to trustees, to afford prizes hereafter for the best boys in the school of Fordyce.

in the North Sea and in the West Indies.

Those who knew him, even as an old man, will have no difficulty in forming an idea of his appearance and habits at this time of his life. He was about the middle height, and was strongly and squarely built; he had blue eyes, a bright florid complexion, and was full of spirits, frank and joyous. His manner was bluff and hearty, but pleasing, from the evidence it gave of sincerity and goodness. His habits were extremely active. Through the whole of his service he was a hard student, and besides going through an extended course of classical reading, he learnt French, German, and Italian. He attributed his proficiency in languages to being for several months in a small sloop with no one to



speak to except a young officer in command. A quarrel at length put a stop even to this recreation, and Forbes was driven to his books for society and change.

He obtained very early promotion, in consequence, as he believed, of a Report on the Meteorology of the West Indies. No report of the kind can now be found, and it is possible that promotion was granted on other, and perhaps better, grounds. At this time, and during his whole life, Dr. Forbes possessed the qualities which mark so many of his countrymen. He was a thorough man of business—methodical, accurate, and perfectly to be relied on. An officer of that stamp is of much greater use in the public service than a man of mere brilliancy and originality. Dr. Forbes must have been a first-

rate officer, and his qualities in this respect would soon have become apparent.

When in the West Indies he became flag surgeon to Sir P. H. Durham, and acted as secretary as well as doctor; he wrote many of Sir P. Durham's despatches, and was with him when he took Guadaloupe. Shortly afterwards he was present at the capture of a French line-of-battle ship (*Pompée*), whose crew was terribly cut up by the fire of a small brig, commanded by Lieutenant (afterwards Sir Charles) Napier. After the action, Forbes was sent on board to assist the French surgeons, as he was the only surgeon in the squadron who could speak French.

In 1813 and 1814 he served in the home squadron, and in the former year occurred an incident to which he used to refer as



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one of the most curious of his life. His vessel was off the Elbe, and as he was the only man on board who could speak French, he was sent to Bremen with despatches to a Russian general who was at the head of 10,000 Cossacks. A letter containing an account of this adventure is still extant. Forbes was both surprised and pleased with the Cossacks. Instead of a tribe of savages, he found a set of amiable and pleasant men, remarkably courteous among themselves, and to all strangers except the French. When brought in contact with the French, they seemed suddenly possessed with a devil. On one occasion he witnessed the darker side of the Cossack's character. His escort, consisting of ten Cossacks, surprised two French *gendarmes*. Instead of taking them prisoners, the Cossacks cut

them to pieces with the greatest barbarity, and Forbes's attempt to save them only caused the lance of a Cossack to be turned against himself. Before the men were dead their bodies were rifled and stripped. When this was over, the Cossacks came to Forbes, shook him by the hand, and returned to their previous state of friendliness and good temper. The marches of the Cossacks astonished him, as every one else. Their greatest desire was at that time to join Wellington, who had just forced the Pyrenees and entered France. They looked upon Wellington as the first general in Europe, and declared that 5000 of them would force their way without difficulty across France.

It was soon after this adventure that Dr. Forbes almost lost his life in a desperate



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attempt to save the life of a sailor who had been washed overboard. He was a strong and bold swimmer; but the current of the Elbe was so rapid, that he was carried down two miles from the ship before he was picked up. In the West Indies he had saved the life of a man in the same way.

One more reminiscence of his navy life may be permitted. It was in the North Sea that Forbes volunteered for a cutting-out expedition; the lieutenant in command showed the white feather, and would not bring the boat within reach of shot. Forbes, who was all ardour and courage, was so indignant that he tore off his cutlass, and throwing it down at the bottom of the boat, with some strong expressions, declared that he would not be caught on a fool's errand again.

In 1816 came the reduction, and Dr. Forbes, with many others, was placed on half-pay. He then went to Edinburgh, and spent a whole year there (1816-17). He graduated in 1817, and wrote an Inaugural Dissertation, with the title "*De mentis exercitatione et felicitate exinde derivata.*" This subject was always a favourite theme with him; it was clearly handled in the Dissertation, and, as far as we can venture to speak of it, the Latin seems to us both elegant and clear.

At Edinburgh, Forbes attended very diligently the lectures on geology by Jameson, and it was on the advice of this celebrated teacher, who had been requested to recommend a physician acquainted with geology, that he determined to settle at Penzance, where he succeeded Dr. Paris.



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He remained at Penzance till 1822, and during the greater part of this time was busily engaged in meteorological and geological investigations. He was secretary to the Geological Society there, and wrote several short essays of singular merit. The "Observations on the Climate of Penzance" contains perhaps still the best account of this point; and two papers on the "Geology of the Land's-end," show great knowledge of the subject, and unwearied industry; but his paper on the "Temperature of Mines," written in 1820, is certainly the most philosophical of all his essays, and we are not certain that he ever wrote anything better during his life. It is still much referred to and quoted by writers on this subject.

In 1820 he married a daughter of John

Burgh, Esq., H.E.I.C.,<sup>(3)</sup> and in 1822 removed to Chichester, as successor to Sir William Burnett. His life at Chichester has been so well sketched by a friend who knew him intimately, that we shall use his words in describing this part of his life:—

“ Early in the year 1822, on the removal of the late Sir William Burnett from Chichester to London, when appointed Director of the Medical Department of the Navy, Dr. Forbes became a resident in that city, where he obtained, and for twenty subsequent years had, the principal practice, extending widely over the neighbouring district of Sussex. At that time Chichester, like other county towns, was undisturbed by railways, and, under the shade of the

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<sup>(3)</sup> Mr. Burgh was one of the partners in a bank in Calcutta, and not in the H.E.I.C.S.



cathedral, had an air of repose which contributed to make it the favourite residence of a number of quiet families of a certain station and fortune, of those of retired officers of the army and navy, and others who—with the clergy of a cathedral town—formed a highly agreeable society, courteous and polished, a little old-fashioned, but so generally refined and cheerful, that a pleasanter abode was, perhaps, not to be met with in any part of England. When Dr. Forbes selected it for his home, he was in the most vigorous period of his life—active, lively, full of energy, remarkable for the elasticity of his step, and his almost youthful bloom and freshness of complexion; every movement was expressive of an animation unusual in the older days among the physicians flourishing within the ancient

wall of undisturbed provincial cities. His hearty manner was perhaps somewhat unpolished, and new to the older inhabitants; now and then it was even moody and abrupt, and these peculiarities were still observable in his later years; but his evident sincerity, his good sense and his general intelligence, soon made a favourable impression on his new neighbours, and with their increased knowledge of him there grew the utmost confidence, not only in his skill as a physician, but in his value as a man. His uprightness, and the thorough absence of affectation in all that he did and said, were soon appreciated, and his real kindness was more and more perceived the more intimately he was known. Those who had experienced his attentions in suffering and sickness, or the few who had the privilege of meeting



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him when a few friends were collected, and conversation was not chilled by formality, were fully aware what manner of man the new physician was. Of evening meetings of this kind, those at the house of the late venerable Dr. Sanden must still be remembered by some surviving friends of that accomplished person, who belonged to a class of physicians now nearly extinct—learned, polished, modest, gentle, unacquainted with any of the ordinary arts of obtaining notoriety, or even professional success, to which they scarcely presumed to make a conspicuous claim. Such qualities scarcely fitted them for business of any kind, and, except in such examples as that of Dr. Sanden, where an ample fortune makes a medical man independent of the favour of the public, are not perhaps altogether to be

recommended; but they were never more attractively mingled than in the character of Dr. Sanden. He was then between seventy and eighty years of age, and for at least forty of those years he had lived in great retirement, observing a peculiar regimen, not habitually taking animal food, never taking wine, rising very early, and never dining out, and only known to the community around him by a benevolence which was never appealed to in vain. But although thus carefully avoiding publicity, and leading the life of a secluded scholar, he took a peculiar pleasure in seeing men of more ambitious temperament, and listening to their varied discourse. Among such it need scarcely be said that Dr. Forbes was one of his particular favourites, to whose hopeful views he used to listen with almost as much



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astonishment as admiration, not unfrequently benefiting him and others, entertained in his elegant retirement in the South Pallant, by the old experience that had made him sage, and always charming his guests (never exceeding three or four) at those simple entertainments by his kindness, his varied conversation, and his graceful vivacity. It was chiefly at these agreeable and exclusive re-unions that the acquaintance commenced between Sir John Forbes and Dr. Conolly, which led to their being in after years associated in some medical works of extent and importance. At Chichester they were in some sort rivals for practice, but Dr. Conolly was several years younger than Dr. Forbes, and the rivalry became the foundation of a long-life friendship. When the ‘Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine’

was undertaken, in 1831, Dr. Conolly's name appeared as one of the editors, with the names of Dr. Forbes and Dr. Tweedie. Some years afterward, when Dr. Forbes established the 'British and Foreign Medical Review,' he arranged to be solely associated in the labour of that work with Dr. Conolly; and this arrangement continued until the latter became the Resident Physician of the Hanwell Asylum, of which the duties were incompatible with sustained literary work. The labour arising out of these undertakings was a source of continual delight to a man of Dr. Forbes's habits of mind; and during their whole progress he was indefatigable, not only in mere editorial work, but in seeking knowledge from all the medical writers of past ages, and enlarging his experience by a continual correspondence and inter-



course with the most distinguished of his professional cotemporaries in Great Britain and Ireland, and throughout Europe, and in America. His character for honour and integrity, for punctuality and good faith, enabled him to command the services of most of the distinguished medical writers of his time, and it is generally admitted that their efforts, conjoined with his own, have left an impression on medical opinions which will be recognised for many future years.

“From the first few months of Dr. Forbes’s becoming a practising physician at Chichester down to the day of his beginning to reside in London, it may be truly said that his public and private life were so consistently ordered as to be written in daily benefits to humanity and science, and to all

his fellow-creatures. His great perseverance and resolution led to the expansion of the small Dispensary of that city into an Infirmary, which continues to be one of the most valuable of the charities of Sussex. Every institution for a good purpose, for the extension of judicious aid to the needy, and for the diffusion of education and the advancement of useful knowledge, was patronized by him to the full extent of his power and opportunities. Although disliking all idle sacrifices to what is called society, his house was the hospitable resort of men of science and literature. Above all, his compassionate regard for the sick and the variously afflicted, and the extent of his generous patronage of young persons of talent and virtue, whatever their position in life, although it can never be fully written



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except in many grateful hearts, was such as to deserve perpetual remembrance among the attributes most becoming and most honourable to those whose lives have been devoted to the study and practice of physic."

In 1840, Dr. Forbes removed to London, and in 1841 was appointed Physician to the Prince Consort and to the Queen's Household. The reasons for this removal will be seen hereafter.

As it was at Chichester that the chief part of Dr. Forbes's professional work was done, or at any rate planned, this seems the place to attempt some general estimate of his character and mind, so as to guide us in our judgment of his future literary and scientific career.

The moral qualities which are alluded to

in the memorandum we have just quoted, were perhaps those which were most strongly marked in Dr. Forbes's character. He was one of the most truthful of men ; this was partly from a habit of mental accuracy, partly from an original sound moral disposition. This extreme honesty guided him in everything—in every action, in every thought, in every sentence he ever wrote. It was that which gave him his immense influence, and in great measure won for him the regard of so many of his brethren.

His benevolence was almost as marked a feature in his character. It was shown in all ways, in constant kindness and assistance to individuals, in the most strenuous support of charitable institutions. Both in Chichester and London his private and



public charities were almost incredible.<sup>(4)</sup> He was in this respect almost lavish with his money, and prodigal of his time. But he was not merely generous with money; he was ready with advice, sympathy, and help in all ways. He was generous also in his estimation of the early work of young members of our Profession; whenever he saw honesty, and, as he thought, merit, he sought it out and befriended it. He has been thought to be a severe critic; he was in reality a most lenient judge; when he was severe, he was so at the instance of his truthful judgment, and at the cost of his kindness of heart.

With all this kindness of heart he had

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(4) Like most benevolent men, he was extremely fond of, and kind to, animals, and always had pets of some kind, especially dogs.

a certain impetuosity of temper, which led him to take rapid and strong views. Especially when his moral judgment condemned a man, or an action, he was forcible, perhaps sometimes unduly so, in the expression of his opinion. He had very little of the proverbial caution of his countrymen. His mind was of that strong and determined cast which is not given to reticence, or can tolerate ambiguity. What he thought he expressed, and oftentimes more strongly than in a calmer moment he might have approved. This impetuosity was at variance with his habit of correct thinking, and with his great tenderness of heart. As years passed over, it was more and more controlled by these; and in the latter years of his life it is difficult to imagine a more perfect and even moral character than that which



he possessed. At all periods of his life he was perfectly free from malice, and he was very forgiving when he had been, or considered himself to have been, unjustly treated.

His intellectual gifts were of a very high order, but perhaps were not equal to his moral qualities. His truthfulness was here also a marked characteristic. During his college life, and while in the navy, he was fond of writing verses, and some pretty vigorous little poems were published in some of the West Indian papers. He had command of words and of good sensible thoughts, but he was wanting in imagination and originality. The divine insight of the poet was not his, and of this he was himself conscious. All his life, however, he was a great reader of poetry and

fiction, and was an ardent Shaksperian. When he lived in London he scarcely ever missed a representation of one of Shakspeare's plays, and he read Shakspeare aloud with considerable dramatic power. His pleasure in seeing good acting brought him into contact with many actors, and he attended a large number in London, and always gratuitously.<sup>(5)</sup> He had all the ardour of a Scotchman for the songs of Scotland, and would go anywhere to hear one of his national melodies.

In early life he was more interested in literature than in science, and the circumstances of his life did not fully call out the power of original investigation which he

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(<sup>5</sup>) The managers of the Covent Garden Theatrical Fund presented him, in 1849, with a handsome silver cup, in testimony of these services.



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undoubtedly possessed. His powers of perception were very good ; he was not a rapid man, but he was not at all one-sided. He seized all the aspects of a case, and his great truthfulness and accuracy led him to be never satisfied till he had done so. His judgment was quite judicial ; he considered and balanced, and apportioned with the utmost impartiality ; he tried in all cases to cultivate a rigorous indifference, and to welcome the final decision, however at variance this might be with his previous convictions or wishes. Partly perhaps from original constitution, partly from his acquired habit of thought, the tone of his mind was sceptical ; before forming an opinion he required the most complete and indisputable evidence. Yet, in contrast with these qualities, and in contradiction

to what might have been expected from a character so strong, and in many respects so self-reliant, he was a good deal under the influence of those whom he respected. This occasionally was injurious, and the few mistakes into which he fell in his judgments on men and books were owing to this peculiarity of his mind.

This mind, so large and so strong, was also as active. Work of some sort was a necessity for it, and certainly Sir John Forbes acted up to the views he enforced in his 'Inaugural Thesis,' and in the little lecture he published thirty-three years later, 'On Happiness in Relation to Work and Knowledge.'

In addition to various lectures and little essays, he published, in 1821, a translation of Laennec's great work on 'Auscultation.'



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His accurate mind foresaw the great weight of this new discovery, and in this he was in advance of most of the physicians of the day. Even Dr. Baillie, to whom the translation was dedicated, expressed doubts whether auscultation would ever be used in general practice, although this great pathologist fully appreciated Laennec's discoveries in morbid anatomy. Some years later Forbes published a translation of Avenbrugger on 'Percussion.' Had he been ambitious of notoriety or fond of money, this would have been the time for his removal to London. He would have had the large practice in chest complaints which fell to others who brought Laennec's views before the public. The translation of Laennec went through three editions; it has long been out of print, but it is much

to be regretted that this masterwork, which marks an epoch, should not be more fully known to the younger practitioners. Succeeding writers on auscultation have added little to Laennec's statements; succeeding writers on pathology have lost something of his clearness and precision. If Forbes had continued the editions with notes and emendations, the work would still be in the hands of every one.

It was some time after the publication of this work that, in conjunction with Dr. Tweedie and Dr. Conolly, Dr. Forbes projected the 'Cyclopædia of Medicine.' The original idea of this great work was Dr. Tweedie's. It is unnecessary here to inquire what share of merit should be assigned to each of the three editors. Were Sir John Forbes now living, he would insist, with



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all the generosity of his nature, on the claims of his colleagues, and would ignore his own. But the 'Cyclopædia' was so great a work, that the credit due for its successful issue is enough for any three men. The character of Forbes's mind was precisely fitted for this sort of work. His wide reading, his careful judgment, his honesty, and his methodical and business habits, made him, to use the expression of one who knew all the circumstances of the case, "the life of the work." His own articles are most excellent, and the one on Auscultation we should still recommend to the student commencing the study of the physical examination of the chest. It would form a good introduction to the elaborate works of Walshe or Scott Alison. In the 'Cyclopædia' was also inserted the

‘Bibliography,’ which he subsequently expanded into a separate work. The ‘Cyclopædia’ was commenced in 1832, and completed in 1835.

When this great work was nearly completed, Dr. Forbes planned, and with his friend Dr. Conolly commenced, the publication of the ‘British and Foreign Medical Review.’ He has himself, in the last number of this journal, published in 1847, given a most interesting account of the motives which led to the publication of this Review; of the rules which guided him in its editorial arrangements, and of the sale and expenses of the journal. He conducted it for twelve years (1836-47)—four years in conjunction with Dr. Conolly, and eight years alone after Dr. Conolly’s new duties at Hanwell compelled him to



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withdraw from participation in the labour either of editing or reviewing.<sup>(6)</sup>

The effect of this Review on medical literature, opinion, and practice has been enormous. The fair, candid tone of criti-

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<sup>(6)</sup> The first announcement of the British and Foreign Medical Review was made in May, 1835, and issued from Paternoster-row, the names of the editors being Dr. Forbes and Dr. Conolly. After that announcement, Dr. Forbes considered himself fortunate in effecting an agreement for its publication by Mr. Churchill. We learn from Dr. Conolly that nearly all the editorial labour was performed by Dr. Forbes alone, but that the correspondence between the editors was constant; and he adds, that he remembers Dr. Forbes's lively communication to him of his first introduction to Mr. Churchill, which took place at Chichester, and made an impression that was never effaced. In reality, Dr. Forbes met in the liberal publisher precisely the energetic and exact man of business which a new and extensive undertaking required, and one in whom he felt he could place entire confidence. The first number of the Review appeared in January, 1836.

cism, the careful collection of facts, the freedom from all party bias, have now been received as the basis of all medical reviewing, and for this the profession is indebted to Sir John Forbes. The mere literary merits of the Review were great ; its scientific character was still higher. It may fearlessly be affirmed that it did more than anything else to gain for British medicine a high position in the estimation of Continental physicians. ‘Forbes’s Review’ soon became known and read all over Europe ; and, indeed, in Germany its character was even higher than in this country. In America, also, its reputation was high, and its sale considerable.

At the time of its publication, the ‘Medico-Chirurgical Review’ of Dr. James Johnson was the only English quarterly



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medical journal. The 'London Repository,' a monthly journal of great merit, which most flourished some forty or fifty years ago, had died out; the 'Medical Journal' (also a monthly publication), and the 'London Review,' which succeeded it, had been killed by Johnson's vigour and originality, and now 'Johnson's Review' was itself to suffer a serious reverse at the hand of this new competitor for popular favour. Dr. James Johnson was undoubtedly a man of considerable powers; when he commenced his Review, he conducted it with much skill; his criticisms, and those of his son at a later date, were seldom profound, but were highly vigorous and telling. Authors did not like him, for he extracted their best passages, and no one turned to the works themselves. Publishers did not approve,

for men bought 'Johnson's Review,' and nothing else. But the public appreciated and bought. The circulation of the 'Medico-Chirurgical Review' was large; it is understood that at one time it averaged 2500 copies.

But with success James Johnson became careless; his reviews were sometimes apparently entirely made up by scissors and paste; he paid no contributors for many years, and hence accepted reviews from any one, careless of the motives which actuated the writers. He paid little attention to foreign literature, and as long as he was not dull, cared for little else.

All this was gall and wormwood to a man of Forbes's accuracy, fairness, and wide reading. He therefore established a Review in which the contributors were paid; and



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though the remuneration was not great, yet it and the character of the Review together soon caused it to be considered a favour to write a review, instead of its being a favour to give one. Forbes's principle was to get the best and most impartial man to review a book, and *never* to admit a review written by either friend or foe. He did away with the practice of gutting an author, though he liked good analytical reviews. He attempted to give an account of every part of medicine, and of all progress, wherever made; and he consequently made the foreign department of his Review extremely full and valuable. At the close of his editorial career he summed up his principles in a quotation from Bacon on "Great Place," which he recommended to his successor, but which it will do every man good to lay to heart.

The effect of the 'British and Foreign Medical Review' was soon marked, and was most beneficial. Dr. James Johnson made great exertions to improve his Journal, and he associated with himself some able contributors. Opposition was of the greatest service to the 'Medico-Chirurgical Review,' and had it been as good before as after the establishment of Forbes's Journal, it is possible that the 'British and Foreign Medical Review' would never have been issued.

Dr. Forbes appeared to have fancied that his Journal would get into circulation without injuring Dr. Johnson's; but the result was that the two journals divided the reading, or rather the subscribing public, between them, and that neither was profitable in a pecuniary point of view. Dr. Forbes's kind



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heart appears to have felt some compunction when he heard how the circulation of his opponent had gone down. In a letter to his publisher he says—

“What you tell me of the circulation of our brother surprises me much. I cannot yet believe it; surely we cannot have so reduced the sale. I own I feel rather hurt at the idea of having done so. Still, as I have only used legitimate means, doing only what medical science had a right to demand of me, and what *he* ought to have done, I can have nothing to reproach myself with.”

The writers in the ‘British and Foreign Review’ were very numerous, and many men of note in the present day contributed to it. All that Forbes demanded of a reviewer was, “Has he the best knowledge? Is he

impartial and fair?" If a review was unfavourable, he never shrank from the odium its publication might bring on him, and in this way he incurred a few enmities, and lost a few, a very few, friends.

At this time of day it can do no harm, and may be interesting, to name a few of the early contributors. Forbes's provincial position and the great interest he always took in the Provincial Association established by Sir Charles Hastings,<sup>(7)</sup> led him in the first

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(7) The Provincial Medical and Surgical Association was formed at a meeting of about fifty medical men, held in the Board-room of the Worcester Infirmary on the 19th of July, 1832, on the invitation of Sir Charles Hastings, the founder. The late venerable Dr. Edward Johnstone, of Birmingham, presided; and those present included some of the most eminent physicians and surgeons of the Midland and Western counties of England. Sir John Forbes, it need scarcely be said, took a warm interest in the proceed-



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instance to seek for reviews among his country friends. The first article in the Review, a long and careful analysis of Professor Bene's (of Pesth) '*Elementa Medicinæ*,' was written by Professor Alison, and for more than twenty years this wise and good physician continued to write reviews

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ings of this important association, and contributed a valuable paper to the second volume of its Transactions (1834), on the '*Medical Topography of the District of the Land's-end*;' comprising its natural and physical history, its history—civil, economical, and statistical. This paper is full of interesting particulars of a peculiar portion of our island, collected with his usual industry and related with his usual clearness. It is illustrated by a map of the district, taken from Dr. Boase's Geological Map. The medical history of the district was the subject of a second paper, which appeared in the fourth volume of the Transactions (1836). This paper remarkably exemplifies the author's habits of diligent observation, and the section on the Diseases of Miners is full of curious and instructive matter.

for the Journal and its successor. Dr. Conolly, as might be supposed, was a frequent and most excellent contributor, and his articles on Insanity, Public Health, and Personal Hygiene, are most valuable Reviews. Dr. Andrew Combe, Sir Robert Carswell, Dr. Streeten of Worcester, Mr. Newport, Mr. Dalrymple, Mr. Domier, Mr. G. Toynbee, and Dr. Rigby, wrote largely. We trust we shall not offend some gentlemen who still happily remain among us, if we mention the names of Dr. Brown of Sunderland, the two Bullars of Southampton, Dr. Farr (who wrote some admirable statistical articles), Mr. Cock, Mr. North, Dr. Symonds, Dr. Joy, Dr. Mackenzie, Mr. Ure, Dr. Carpenter, as among those who wrote for the first three or four volumes. Shortly afterwards the names of Apjohn,



Jones, Laycock, Paget, Taylor, Walshe, Spencer Wells, and West are found, and then the reviewers become too numerous to be mentioned.

In the first few numbers there were only six or eight reviews, but subsequently the number was increased to ten, twelve, sixteen, and even more. The shorter notices numbered from twelve to twenty, and the extracts from foreign journals, which were given with the greatest care, occupied from sixty to ninety pages.

Of the character of the reviews we have said enough. They were certainly not light or amusing reading, but with scarcely an exception the subjects were well chosen, and the reviews were well and carefully written. At a later period many of them became scientific essays of very great value, and

there can be few better exercises for a young physician than to go through a course of reading in Forbes's Journal. Forbes managed to stamp upon it everywhere the character of his own mind—justice, accuracy, depth. He did not write many long reviews, but many of the shorter notices are by him, and he often added weighty paragraphs to the reviews of others. Some of these paragraphs show the man better than anything else. We can well remember being very much struck with a paragraph attached to a review of a work of a man of genius, who unfortunately possessed some of the infirmities of genius. The review itself was not by Forbes, but, as we subsequently learnt, he added the paragraph we refer to. We cannot avoid quoting it as an instance of the temper and disposition of the man. After some remarks,



severe, but certainly not too severe, on the querulous and unmanly complaints of neglect and want of appreciation and reward from the author in question, the review continues—

“Such an exhibition of the workings of mere intellectual ambition may usefully show the utter worthlessness of mere intellectual endowment. There is a wisdom, we believe, as well as a happiness, which has its root in the affections and moral qualities; and where it flourishes, the mind expatiates freely and cheerfully beneath its modest shade. In our time this source of wisdom is too little sought. The fruit of knowledge is too often gathered as a mere means of procuring worldly distinction and advantage, and if these do not follow, the blessed fruit itself turns but to bitterness. Hence arise

heartburnings, and jealous controversies, and all that so often makes the minds of scientific men unamiable, and their lives a waste of sour dissatisfaction; and all that so often causes them, when collected into societies, to constitute but a community of angry and stinging insects, whose foibles and whose fierceness console and amuse those who possess no science at all. Even this author, aspiring as he does to the fame of Bacon, forgets one at least of the limitations of knowledge set forth by that great and imperfect man in the outset of his work on its proficience and advancement: 'that we make application of our knowledge to give ourselves repose and contentment, and not to distaste or repining.'

"The man of science, to be happy, must pursue science with exalted aim; forget that



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there are Royal Societies and books of periodical criticism ; and knowing how small a corner of the curtain that hides all truth from man's gaze can be lifted up by any one hand, should be charitable towards those labouring, like himself, for all time. In this spirit, with unfeigned sorrow we say it, this author appears to us to be eminently wanting ; and great as his merits unquestionably are, and praiseworthy and admirable his labours, this defect will detract from his just reputation until, in the course of years, the trifles which trouble the surface of science are swept down the gulf-stream of human events, and the solid deposits alone remain to aid in the formation of the great continent of truth."

We doubt whether a wiser or a better lesson was ever given to irritable or impatient genius.

Dr. Forbes was always very careful in concealing the names of his reviewers. Whether he was right or not in this may be a question ; but he thought so, and it was a point of honour with him, neither to divulge nor to give the slightest indication of the name of a reviewer. He inserted in his own copy of the Review the names of the writers, and that copy he left at his death "to his good friend and faithful publisher, Mr. Churchill, as a small mark of esteem and regard." It is by Mr. Churchill's courtesy that we have been enabled to learn the names of the early writers in the Review.

In 1840 Dr. Forbes determined to remove to London. His motive was simply to improve the 'Review.' He felt that in London he would have a larger staff, and would be able to gather more completely the



scientific harvest of the day. At that time he was completely absorbed in the 'Review,' and was willing to make any sacrifice to improve it. There can be little doubt that it was a sacrifice; his practice at Chichester was very good; he often made as much as £1500 a-year; he was universally esteemed and liked. He was fifty-three years of age, and was conscious that the time for having a good London practice was past. His appointment to the Household would have been a bait to some men; we question whether it was so for him. We think he was influenced solely by his wish to make the 'Review' still worthier.

There is no doubt that he succeeded in his object, and that for several years the 'British and Foreign Medical Review' was as good in all respects as such a journal

can be made. Its circulation was fair; it was not unprofitable, and its verdict on books and men was invariably looked to as the most able and honest that could be given.

During this period Sir John Forbes published nothing except some short lectures, and an account of an inquiry into the truth of some mesmeric phenomena. He succeeded in perfectly exposing the tricks of various reputed somnambulists, but it seems a complete waste of power when we read the account of the dealings of his vigorous mind with these shallow pretenders. It is really like the *Warrior* running down a Thames wherry.

The period from 1840 to 1846 must be considered to have been a prosperous and happy one. He was respected by all, was



looked on with affection by many; he knew himself to be useful, and must have felt that in his way he was powerful and influential.

In 1846, however, a circumstance occurred which had considerable influence on the fortunes of the 'Review,' and on Sir John Forbes himself. We allude to his celebrated article on 'Homœopathy, Allopathy, and Young Physic.' The effect of this article must be allowed to have been in the first instance disastrous. That Forbes, to use his own words, had only one object in writing it—viz., "the improvement of the medical profession," all who knew him and his inmost thoughts, would testify. But the article must, we believe, be now admitted to have been a mistake. Even now, on re-perusing it, we are astonished that a man of

such judgment could have written some part of it. Although with the logic which was natural to him, and with the sarcasm which he could wield at will, he tore to pieces the nonsense of infinitesimal doses, and the absurd idea that almost all diseases are caused by the itch; and although he did not bring forward a single argument in support of Hahnemann's hypothesis that "Like cures like," he yet spoke of Hahnemann, not only with respect, but as one who should be placed on a level with "Paracelsus, or Stahl, or Silviu, or Boerhaave, or Brown." It is difficult to conceive what sort of analogy he found between these several men, and especially between the weak, dreaming, illogical, and, as we believe, insincere mind of Hahnemann, and the subtle spirit which animated Stahl, or the close and sustained



powers of observation which made Boerhaave famous throughout Europe.

But this was not his only offence in this article ; he used the term "Allopathy" as applicable to the ordinary practitioners, although it neither expresses their creed, nor explains their practice, and in his vehement onslaught on the enormous evils resulting from indiscriminate drug-giving, he did not perhaps sufficiently point out that his strictures were directed, not against the proper use of drugs in their proper places, but against that indiscriminate dosing which looked upon the human body merely as an appointed and convenient place for stowing away mixtures at three-and-sixpence, and pills at half-a-crown. In insisting strongly on the curative powers of Nature, and on the necessity of aiding and not impeding

them, he did not sufficiently consider, or at any rate state, that this doctrine has always been taught, and by the best physicians has always been practised.

The consequence was that the article was not understood. What was objectionable was on the surface; what was excellent and good—and much of it was so—was less apparent. If any other man had written it, it would have been of less moment; but that the wise and accurate Forbes should have done so, seemed almost incredible. What, then, were the reasons that led him to write it? They may perhaps have been these.

His natural scepticism and his logical mind led him to be much dissatisfied with the loose evidence which is all that can be brought to prove the efficacy of some even



of our boasted medicines. He was also extremely impressed with the folly of that practice which, instead of searching with great care into the causes of disease, and placing the sick body under the hygienic conditions most favourable to health, is satisfied with pouring almost hap-hazard into the masterpiece of nature, the most powerful and dangerous drugs. He wished to strike a blow at both these errors ; a blow strong and mighty, and that would be felt.

Then with regard to homœopathy, he desired to judge it fairly ; he had that sense of justice which can almost pass into injustice. He was so afraid of being unfair to an adversary, that he was led to be unfair to himself. He could not hold the balance quite even, and he inclined too much to

the weaker party. Then, again, his very fearlessness and moral courage would influence him. He knew the outcry that would be raised against him, and he would have thought it cowardice to soften one word for fear of giving offence.

The effect of this article was, as we have said, at first unfortunate. It lowered Forbes's influence and the influence of the 'Review.' But by degrees it has produced the effect he contemplated. His courtesy towards Homœopathy is forgotten; his exposure of its errors is not so. His sternness in dealing with the shortcomings of his own profession has been long since forgiven; his powerful arguments against these shortcomings have borne their fruit. That Forbes has been mainly instrumental in bringing about a more rational mode



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of treatment among the great bulk of practitioners, and especially among the junior members of the profession, we have no doubt. The good resulting from his article has far outbalanced the evil.

If it be said he could have obtained the good without the evil by a gentler and milder plan, we grant it. But who will cast a stone at this man, so honest, so earnest, so penetrated with the single wish to do good?

At the close of 1847, Dr. Forbes decided on giving up the 'Review.' His reasons were that he was then sixty years of age, and he found the work too much for him. He may have been influenced, also, by finding his work less pleasant. He was a man of a most kindly and even sensitive nature, and the feelings he had raised

distressed him, though they could never intimidate. His 'Review' was bought by Mr. Churchill, and was incorporated with Johnson's 'Medico-Chirurgical Review,' and the two old opponents have since prospered together, and it is hoped have not much degenerated from their vigorous parents.

On resigning the 'Review,' a large number of Dr. Forbes's old contributors, friends, and readers combined to present him with a testimonial. A superb candelabrum was presented to him by Mr. Stanley, in the name of 264 physicians and surgeons of this country and America. Mr. Stanley's eloquent address recapitulated all Dr. Forbes's many services to medicine, but did not say one word that was too much nor too strong.

From 1848 to 1859, Dr. Forbes continued



to reside in London, and employed himself chiefly in works of benevolence and in literary labours. In 1857 he published a little work, called 'Nature and Art in the Cure of Disease,' which was intended to explain his views more fully than had been done in the article before referred to. He wrote it with the knowledge that it would be his last professional work, and he "bequeathed it as a legacy to his younger brethren." It may be said to be an exposition of the views on "Rational Expectation," promulgated by Stahl, and to be intended as an examination of the relative powers of Nature and Art. It is a most able and thoughtful work, yet deals a little too much in general statements, and is even in parts open to the charge of indefiniteness and ambiguity. Those who believe

that Forbes underrated the powers of medicine rightly and skilfully used may be referred to his chapter on the Instruments of the Medical Art, in which is an admirable summary of the various remedial means which the physician can set in action.

He also published several accounts of summer excursions. 'A Physician's Holiday,' 'Memorandums made in Ireland,' and an 'Excursion in the Tyrol,' are all works which were published in this period, and met with much success. They are not brilliant, but are sound good works, with much reliable and carefully arranged information.

In 1853, the honour of knighthood was bestowed on him. The University of Oxford had in 1852 conferred on him the honorary



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degree of D.C.L. He was a member of learned societies belonging to almost all civilized nations.

At the end of 1854, Dr. Forbes was requested by the Government to organize a large hospital at Smyrna for the sick of the Crimean war. He accepted the post with alacrity, and made all the principal arrangements. But he finally resigned on the score of health. It is believed that he became aware even then that his days were numbered. Curiously enough, he appears to have had a presentiment, or, we should rather say a belief founded on correct observation, that the cause of his death would be some affection of the brain. Three years subsequently he began to suffer from giddiness, and frequently fell; and in the course of a few months this increased to such an

extent, that he left London in 1859, and went to live with his only son at Whitechurch, near Reading. Here he gradually sank, and died easily and calmly on the 13th November, 1861.

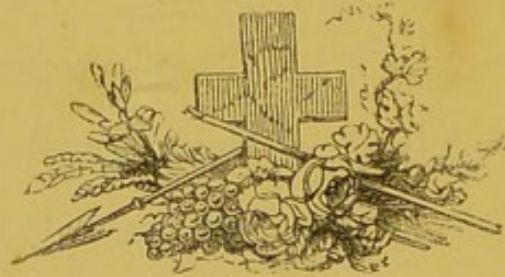
It has been supposed that the cause of the softening of the brain—for that probably was the fatal disease—was Sir John Forbes's incessant mental work. But this may be doubted. For many years he had suffered from pulmonary emphysema and some enlargement of the heart; it is more probable that there was general atheroma of the arteries, and, among others, of the cerebral vessels, and that the nutrition of the brain finally suffered. It appears from a letter still extant, that when he went to Penzance his lungs were affected in some way, and



that probably influenced him in choosing that locality.

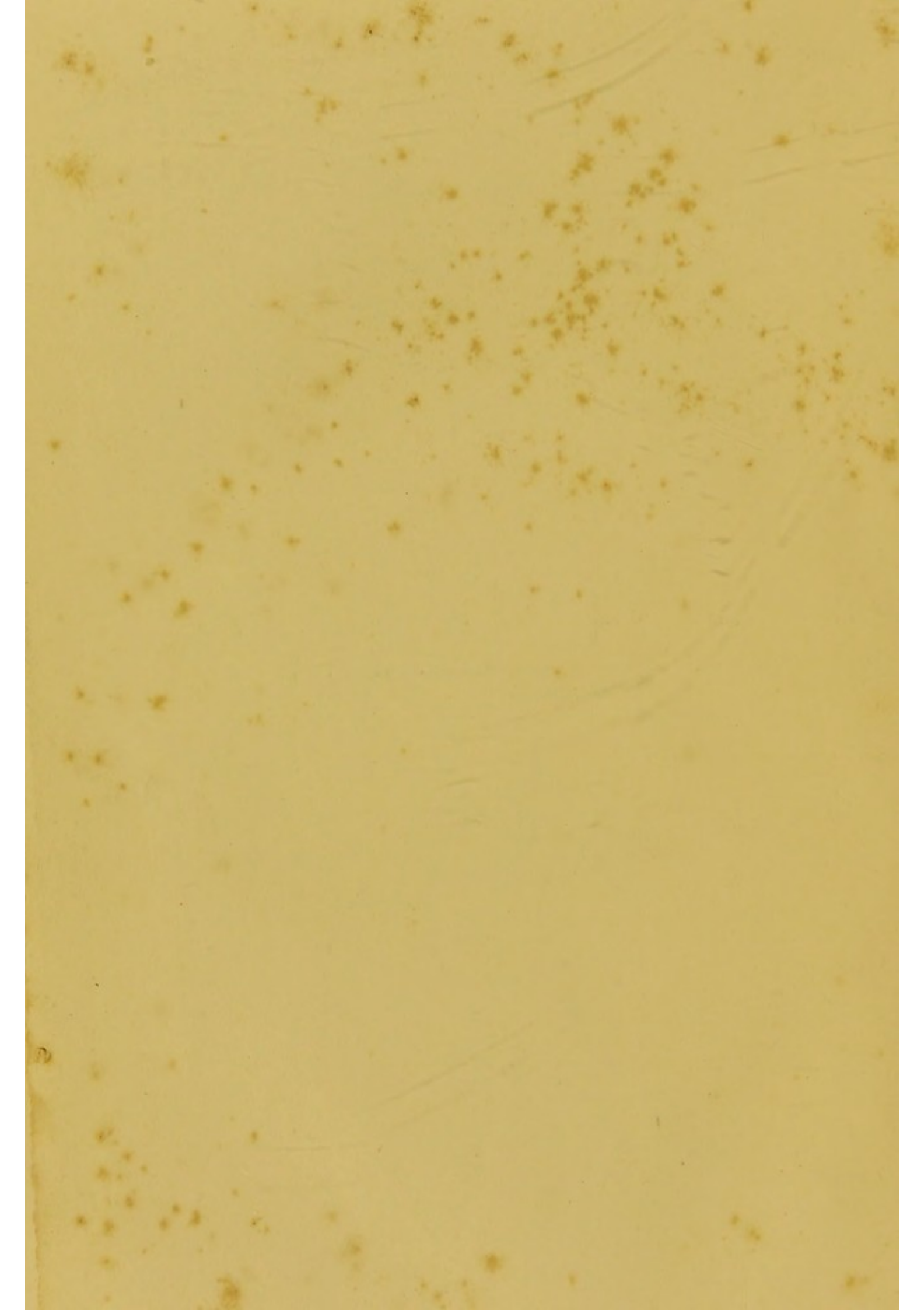
And now we must bring this brief memoir to a close. We have done our best to draw Forbes as we knew him. But how pale and tame a portrait have we drawn of this noble and large-hearted man! Would that to some pen which could draw the outlines more boldly, and could fill in the lights and shadows more delicately, this task had been assigned. But, after all, the true character of Forbes is in his works. By these posterity will judge him, and no friend of his need fear the verdict. He will stand out among the physicians of his day as the bold and yet cautious thinker, and as the uncompromising reformer. His benevolence and his charities

will find no record, nor perhaps is it meet they should. But his uprightness, his candour, and his moral courage, need no testimony, for they are impressed upon his works.





LONDON:  
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,  
COVENT GARDEN.











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