

Hints for a biographical sketch of the late Alexander Wood, Esq., surgeon in Edinburgh.

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HINTS

FOR A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE LATE

ALEXANDER WOOD, Esq.

SURGEON IN EDINBURGH.

MR. WOOD was born in the vicinity of Edinburgh, and was educated at its Seminaries. At the usual age, he was apprenticed to his uncle Mr. William Wood, an eminent surgeon there, under whose care he completed his medical education. Having taken his diploma, he commenced his professional career at Musselburgh, where he remained for some time, giving great satisfaction, and making many useful friends; after which he removed to Edinburgh, became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and entered into a copartnership with Messrs. Rattray and Congalton,

men of eminence in their day, and to whose practice he at no distant period succeeded. He now made very rapid progress in his profession; and being possessed of great tact, much urbanity of manner, and acknowledged talents, he soon rose to the highest eminence; and what was most uncommon, he attained this position with the unanimous approbation of his professional brethren, and which he retained through life. Nature had endowed him with great common sense, and with the most benevolent dispositions, which were shown by his unremitting attentions to the distresses of the indigent sick. What has been said of the illustrious Boerhaave may with equal justice be applied to him,—“that he considered the poor his best patients, and that he never neglected one of them.” Mr. Wood also possessed a considerable degree of humour, and was of a highly convivial disposition. He lived in the first society in Edinburgh, his company being universally courted. This convivial turn, however, seemed rather to conduce to his success than otherwise, as he never suffered it to interfere with his more serious duties. As an operator he was greatly esteemed, and his talents in this respect tended much to

raise the character of the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary.

Soon after his connexion with Messrs. Rattray and Congalton, Mr. Wood married Miss Veronica Chalmers, second daughter of George Chalmers, Esq. W. S., a most respectable man, and to whose honesty and integrity his fellow-citizens bore the most ample testimony, by giving him the honourable *subriquet* of "Honest George Chalmers." This marriage turned out most fortunate, Mr. and Mrs. Wood having lived happily together for upwards of fifty years. She survived her lamented husband only six months, having fulfilled, in the most exemplary manner, the duties of a wife, mother, and Christian.* Mr. Wood remained at the head

* Mr. Wood, on obtaining the consent of the lady, having proposed himself to Mr. Chalmers as his son-in-law, that gentleman addressed him thus:—"Sandy, I have not the smallest objection to you; but I myself am not rich, and should therefore like to know how you are to support a wife and family."—Mr. Wood, putting his hand in his pocket, and taking out his lancet-case with a scarlet garter rolled round it, presenting it to him, said, "I have nothing but this, Sir, and a determination to use my best endeavours to succeed in my profession." Mr. C. was so struck with this straight-forward and honest reply, that he immediately exclaimed, "Vera is yours."

of his profession till within a short period of his death, which happened on the 12th of May 1807, at the advanced age of eighty-two.

In Blackwood's Magazine for May 1818, there is a fragment of a fifth canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, the subject of which is Edinburgh. From this it will be seen that the many excellent qualities of Mr. Wood had made a deep impression on the mind of Lord Byron. The author, after noticing many of the most striking features of the ancient city, alludes, amongst other things, to different members of the Medical Profession, and thus concludes—

“ Oh, for one hour of him who knew no feud,
Th' octogenarian chief—the kind old Sandy Wood !”

In a note upon this stanza it is mentioned, “ The reader will recollect the exclamation of the Highlander,—‘ Oh, for one hour of Dundee !’ Sandy Wood (one of the delightful reminiscences of Old Edinburgh) was at least eighty years of age, when, in high repute as a medical man, he could yet divert himself, in his

walks, with the 'Hie Schuil laddies,' or bestow the relics of his universal benevolence in feeding a goat or a raven. There is a prophecy in Meg Merrilies, in which these ancients are thus alluded to—'A gathering together of the powerful shall be made amidst the caves of the inhabitants of Dunedin. Sandy is at his rest: they shall beset his goat; they shall profane his raven; they shall blacken the buildings of the Infirmary; her secrets shall be examined; a new goat shall bleat, until they have measured out and run over fifty-four feet nine inches and a half.' After having reigned more than thirty years at the head of his profession, Mr. Wood died full of years and honours, and was buried; and strangely enough must it sound, that though there are still many excellent practitioners in Edinburgh of the name of *Wood*, there is not one *Sandy* amongst them."*

EDINBURGH, Jan. 31. 1832.

* The present Dr. George Wood is the son of Sandy Wood, and followed his father's professional footsteps with ability and success, until he was obliged, a few years ago, to retire from active practice, in consequence of frequent severe and protracted attacks of chronic rheumatism.

The late celebrated JOHN BELL, who had been a Pupil of Mr. WOOD, in dedicating to him his first Volume of Anatomy, thus expresses himself:—

TO

ALEXANDER WOOD,

SURGEON,

Whose abilities and skill, and disinterested conduct,
have raised him, by common consent,
to the first rank in a most useful profession,
conducting him in honour to that period of life
in which he must feel, with pleasure,
how completely he enjoys the confidence of the Public,
and the esteem of all good men,
this Book of Anatomy is presented by his Pupil,

JOHN BELL.

EPITAPH ON THE LATE ALEXANDER WOOD,

SURGEON IN EDINBURGH,

BY THE LATE

Sir ALEXANDER BOSWELL, Baronet, of Auchinleck.

Vain is the votive stone a name to save,
 If Mem'ry lives but in the dead man's grave.
 Though adulation may her tale rehearse,
 We turn repugnant from the fulsome verse,
 Which glaring stands (while living pride is fed)
 In sculptur'd falsehood o'er th' unconscious dead.

But cold the heart that feels no genial glow,
 Pond'ring on him whose ashes sleep below ;
 Whose vivid mind, with grasping power, could reach
 Truths that the plodding schools can never teach :
 Who scorn'd, in honesty, the specious wiles
 Of dull importance, or of fawning smiles :
 Who scouted feelings fritter'd and refin'd,
 But had an ample heart for all mankind.

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It is the voice that is to save,

If Manly lives but in the dead man's grave,

Though education may be vainly given,

We turn repentant from the false one given,

Which gliding stands (while living) in the bed,

In sculptured falsehood o'er the unconscionable dead.

But cold the heart that feels no genial glow,

Teaching us him whose steps sleep below;

Whose mind, with creeping power, could reach

Truths that the prying schools can never teach;

Who scorn'd, in honesty, the specious wiles

Of dull imposture, or of sly and subtle guile;

Who scouted feelings (friend and rebel)

But had an ample heart for all mankind.

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