

**Notice of some of the leading events in the life of the late Dr. John Thomson, formerly professor of surgery to the Royal College of Surgeons, and of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh, and more recently professor of general pathology in the University.**

**Contributors**

Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

**Publication/Creation**

Edinburgh : printed by Stark, 1847.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/a9bca5k8>

**Provider**

Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The original may be consulted at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

# NOTICE

OF

SOME OF THE LEADING EVENTS

IN THE LIFE OF THE LATE

DR JOHN THOMSON, F. R. S. L. & E.,

FORMERLY

PROFESSOR OF SURGERY TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,  
AND OF MILITARY SURGERY IN THE UNIVERSITY, OF EDINBURGH,

AND MORE RECENTLY

PROFESSOR OF GENERAL PATHOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY.

---

*(Extracted from the 170th Number of the Edinburgh Medical  
and Surgical Journal.)*

---

EDINBURGH:  
PRINTED BY STARK AND COMPANY.

---

MDCCCLVII.

NOTICE

SOME OF THE LEADING EVENTS

IN THE LIFE OF THE LATE

DR JOHN THOMSON, F.R.S.L. & E.

BY

THE REV. JOHN THOMSON, D.D.,  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,

AND

BY THE REV. JOHN THOMSON, D.D.,

(Author of "The History of the  
University of Edinburgh")

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY LEAK AND COMPANY.

1851.

R35412

## NOTICE,

&c.

---

DR THOMSON was born at Paisley on the 15th of March 1765. His father, who was originally from Kinross, was a silk weaver, and for some time had been rather prosperous in the world, but by an imprudent confidence in a person with whom he was accustomed to have dealings in business, he became involved in debt. His pride not allowing him to extricate himself from his difficulties by declaring himself bankrupt, he borrowed money from a friend for this purpose. The necessity of regularly paying interest on the sum thus borrowed, until he was able to discharge it, obliged him to bring up his family with a rigorous attention to economy, and to put his children to work at an early age. After being engaged for about three years in the minor operations of silk-weaving under different masters, Dr Thomson was, at the age of eleven, bound to his father for a seven years' apprenticeship, and not only served for the whole of this period, that is, to the age of eighteen, but continued to work with his father for nearly two years after his apprenticeship had expired.

During the whole of the period he had been thus employed, Dr Thomson had sought for knowledge from every source from which he could obtain it;—the conversation carried on in the workshops, the newspaper weekly read there, the books in his father's possession, which, however, related chiefly to doctrinal divinity, a circulating library, to which, at a time when a penny a week was his entire free income, that penny was devoted; and books probably borrowed from some of his associates, or, at a later period, purchased with his own earnings. His disinclination for a mechanical employment, and ardent desire for a profession that would admit of, or require, his devoting a larger portion of his time to the pursuit of knowledge, must have been known from an early period to his father, who, being a very warm adherent of the Antiburgher seceders, among whom his honourable character and

great piety procured him a high place, would not have been disinclined to his son's being educated with a view to qualify him to be a minister of that church. But as his son declined to accede to this plan, the engaging in the study of medicine had appeared to him too hazardous a scheme to be encouraged. At length an explanation took place between them which determined Dr Thomson's future destiny. Some occurrence, possibly an appearance on his part of neglect of his work, gave occasion to his father exclaiming, that he wished from his heart he had been at the *learning* long before, as he saw he was never to do good at his *trade*,—adding that it was too late, however, to think of changing, as his want of previous instruction rendered it hopeless to expect, that he should now be able to qualify himself for a learned profession. Upon this, his son, drawing a Latin book from his pocket, and reading a few sentences out of it, to his father's no less delight than surprize, confessed having, about a twelvemonth before, without his father's knowledge, placed himself under a master capable of teaching him Latin. On the instant, his father yielded to his wishes, and from that hour, as Dr Thomson has often been known to mention, with an affectionate tribute to his father's considerateness, though he continued for several years to reside under the parental roof, he “never touched a shuttle.”

Shortly after the occurrence last referred to, in 1785, when he had reached the age of twenty, Dr Thomson was bound apprentice to Dr White of Paisley, in which capacity he continued for three years. His master was a man of good education, and possessed a good library; and Dr Thomson's pursuits, whilst under his charge, partook much more of a scientific character than could have been expected of a country apprenticeship. Writing nearly forty years afterwards, Dr White gave the following account of the manner in which these three years were spent. “His conduct was such as to deserve and obtain my warmest approbation. His zeal in acquiring medical knowledge was ardent and unremitting; and I still recollect, with much satisfaction, the many pleasing hours I passed with him in reading and studying the best authors on medical subjects, and especially in going over with him the excellent MS. lectures of the late celebrated Dr Cullen. Besides the knowledge thus acquired, he had frequent opportunities of visiting my private patients, and also those admitted to the public dispensary. On these occasions I frequently remarked in him a singular talent in discriminating diseases,—a talent which appeared to me almost intuitive. It may not be improper to mention, that he at this time also cultivated the departments of botany and chemistry with great ardour.”

Dr Thomson's taste for general science, and for the several

branches of natural history in particular, must have been greatly strengthened at this time by the intimate friendship which he had contracted with Mr William Lohead, who afterwards became superintendant of the botanic garden in the island of Trinidad. Some letters written by this gentleman when studying medicine in Edinburgh, during the winter session of 1786-87, to his friend Mr Thomson, have been preserved, and are interesting as evidence of an independent and enthusiastic temper of mind, which, had he lived, must have raised him to high eminence in the departments of science to which he devoted himself.

Another circumstance which, at that time, fostered in Dr Thomson, while it afforded him the opportunity of gratifying, these tastes, was the favour conceived for him, and the interest taken in his advancement, by Mr Robert Alexander, brother of Boyd Alexander, Esq. of Southbar, in Renfrewshire. This gentleman, who was himself a zealous naturalist, had stored his garden, in the immediate vicinity of Paisley, with a very rich collection of plants, and his library with a valuable collection of books in the several departments of natural history, particularly botany; and of both of these his young friend was encouraged to make free use in the prosecution of his studies. Mr Alexander seems also to have readily provided such portions of chemical apparatus as were wanted for their joint experimental investigations.

At the beginning of the winter session of 1788-89, by which time his apprenticeship to Dr White was completed, Dr Thomson went to Glasgow to attend the medical classes. He was introduced by Mr Alexander to the particular notice of Mr William Hamilton, who had a short time previously succeeded his father in the chair of anatomy in the university of that city, and who gave promise of rising to very great distinction as a teacher of this branch, and as a practitioner of surgery. He speedily gained Mr Hamilton's friendship and confidence, and in this way his anatomical studies were materially assisted. Besides prosecuting the study of anatomy with ardour, he attended the lectures of Dr Cleghorn, who was lecturer on chemistry in the college, an office which had been successively held by Cullen, Black, and Irvine. He also joined a chemical society which contained several members who afterwards attained great eminence as practical chemists. The doctrines of Lavoisier had just been broached, and gave much interest to the proceedings of a society of ardent cultivators of chemical science, among whom it may be readily supposed that they found a readier reception than among those who, before adopting the new doctrines, had previously to unlearn the old.\* "It is consistent with my knowledge,"

\* Mr Lohead writing to Dr Thomson, at this time, says, "Mr Spiers offers you his compliments, and longs with me to hear from you, especially the chemical news, and to what extent the new doctrines are received at Glasgow."

says Dr White, "that during his studies at the University of Glasgow, he acquired the esteem and confidence of the late worthy Professor Hamilton, and of that eminent lecturer Dr Cleghorn; and from every thing I could learn from these gentlemen, his improvement kept pace with their zeal in teaching."

In the summer of 1789, Dr Thomson had the misfortune to lose his friend and first patron Mr Alexander, after an illness of some weeks, during which he sedulously waited upon him. The history of his connection with this gentleman presents several persons in so agreeable a point of view that we shall venture to dwell on it. Mr Alexander, who seems to have been a diligent collector of objects of natural history, particularly in the vegetable kingdom, was invited by Dr White to come to see a collection of dried plants which his apprentice had brought back with him from the Islands of Bute and Arran, whither he had gone to recruit his health. Mr Alexander expressing much satisfaction with the collection, Dr Thomson on the instant requested his acceptance of it; and this was the foundation of the interest Mr Alexander subsequently took in his advancement. When Mr Alexander, after having introduced him to some of his acquaintances in Glasgow College, was bidding him good bye, he slipped ten guineas into his hand, telling him that he had hoped to obtain a bursary to assist him in his studies, but, having failed in this object, he begged he would make use of that sum for paying his professors' fees and other educational expenses. This, Dr Thomson has been known to mention, was the only pecuniary gift which he ever received. Mr Lochead also was a friend of Mr Alexander's, and in writing from Antigua in April 1789, in reply to a letter in which Mr Alexander had expressed his desire to make him some requital for botanical specimens which he had sent him from that island, he concludes by saying, "Any attention you can show to Mr Thomson will be the same as if it were to myself." Nor is the history less touching of the manner in which Mr Alexander's friendship continued to benefit his young protégé even after he was himself consigned to the grave. At the conclusion of the funeral, Mr Hogg, then manager of the Paisley Bank, afterwards of the British Linen Company's Bank in Edinburgh, coming up to Mr Thomson said to him, that, of the numerous array then present, he believed they two were the parties by whom Mr Alexander's loss was most sensibly felt; that out of respect to his friend's memory he was desirous to be of service to him; and that if he would accept his friendship, he would endeavour to supply to him, as far as he could, the loss he had sustained in Mr Alexander's death. This engagement during the remainder of his life Mr Hogg most faithfully performed.

In the beginning of the winter session of 1789-90, Dr Thomson went to Edinburgh to pursue his medical studies. He has

often been heard to mention that he attended, at the commencement of that session, the introductory lecture of Dr Cullen, but, being satisfied that the doctor was in too frail a condition to make much progress in his course, and the state of his own finances not admitting of his throwing away money, he did not enter to the class. In point of fact, Dr Cullen resigned a few weeks afterwards, and died before the middle of the session. It is not precisely known what courses Dr Thomson attended during this session,—probably those of Drs Monro and Black; but it is believed that a considerable portion of his time was passed with the late accurate anatomist and amiable man, Mr Fyfe, who officiated as Dr Monro's assistant in the anatomical rooms.

In September 1790 he was appointed assistant-apothecary in the Royal Infirmary; in the month of June following, assistant-physician's clerk; and in the following September, house-surgeon, under the designation of surgeon's-clerk. His predecessor in this last office, Mr Clark, as Dr Thomson has been known frequently to mention, had availed himself of the opportunities which the hospital afforded for making the pathology of lumbar abscess a subject of particular investigation, and had satisfied himself of its uniform connection with vertebral disease,—a conclusion which Dr Thomson subsequently confirmed by numerous *post mortem* examinations made in the hospital.

In his residence in the Royal Infirmary, Dr Thomson was particularly fortunate. It may easily be conceived how much influence the character of the matron must have on the comforts of the resident officers, as well as of the patients, of such an institution. Long afterwards Dr Thomson paid the following tribute to the memory of the lady who at that time occupied this position. "There are many who must remember well the daily visits which Mrs Rennie made through the wards of the Infirmary; her unceasing efforts to add to the comforts of the patients; the tenderness with which she inquired into the circumstances of those who appeared to be in peculiar distress; the numberless little acts of kindness which she performed to them; the strict charge which she took of the character and conduct of the nurses; her friendly and maternal attentions to the clerks; and the impartiality, equanimity, and propriety with which, in the faithful discharge of the duties of a laborious and difficult situation, she conducted herself in all her intercourse with the servants, medical officers, and managers of the Infirmary. It is pleasing to record the virtues of such a character; and in paying the tribute of our respect to the memory of departed worth, to point out Mrs Rennie as a model for the imitation of her successors."

He was singularly fortunate also in the young men with whom he was associated in the duties of the house. One of them was



Mr John Allen, afterwards private secretary and confidential friend of the late Lord Holland, with whom, up to the time of Mr Allen's death in 1843, he maintained an uninterrupted friendship, to the powerful influence of which over the fortunes of his life he has himself borne testimony in the dedication, to Mr Allen, of his *Life of Cullen*. Another was the late Dr William Russell, afterwards member of the Medical Board of Calcutta, and who was created baronet on his return from a mission to Russia in 1831, for the purpose of investigating the progress of the cholera in that country. Dr Russell was the brother-in-law of the late Mr Andrew Wood, surgeon in Edinburgh, and through him originated Dr Thomson's acquaintance with that excellent man, to whom in after life he professed himself, in the dedication to him of his *Lectures on Inflammation*, bound by the remembrance of the kind attentions, counsel, and support for which, on various occasions, he had been indebted to his friendship, without which that work would probably never have been composed, nor his attention been directed in a particular manner to the study of surgery.

In the beginning of the winter session of 1790-91, he became a member of the Medical Society,—an institution which has in so many instances served as an arena both for exhibiting and for strengthening the powers of those who have received their education in the medical school of Edinburgh. About that time its business was carried on with even more than its usual spirit; and that Dr Thomson bore his share in its labours might be inferred from the fact of his having, at the beginning of the following session, been nominated one of its presidents,—an office in which he had the pleasure of having conjoined with him, besides his friend Mr Russell, Dr Richard Fowler, now of Salisbury,—a gentleman who early manifested that taste for scientific investigation by which, through his long career of professional usefulness, he has been so honourably distinguished. This gentleman, in reference to the period of which we are now speaking, says, “During three years that I passed in the University of Edinburgh as a student of medicine, I had the pleasure of a frequent intercourse with Dr Thomson, of the most intimate, and, I may add with respect to myself, of the most instructive kind. A stronger, more active, or more informed mind than his, certainly was not to be found within the limits of my acquaintance. As his studies were directed ardently, and almost exclusively, to the profession of which he has become so distinguished an ornament, his example had perhaps more influence than that of any other individual in exciting the emulation of others.”

According to the established usage of the Medical Society, Dr Thomson was called upon during his first session as a member of it, to write upon a “Case” and a “Question.” The case which

fell to him was one of catarrh, and his paper is interesting in this respect at least, that it expressly refers by name to Dr Lubbock and Mr Allen as having separately proposed that view of the theory or intimate nature of inflammation which in his lectures on this subject, published more than twenty years afterwards, he again ascribed to them. The question upon which he wrote, viz. "What are the Agents which Nature employs in the consolidation of the Strata of our Globe?" shows how much his tastes inclined to the consideration of subjects of natural history. In the subsequent session he completed the duties he owed to the society as a writer, by a paper on the question, "In what manner can the mechanism of the Passions be explained?"

After residing for nearly two years in the Royal Infirmary, Dr Thomson resigned (31st July 1792) his appointment as house-surgeon, in consequence, as the minutes bear, of the laborious duties of the office having proved detrimental to his health. Soon after this he proceeded to London and entered himself as a pupil at Mr Hunter's school in Leicester Square. In this year Mr Hunter finally relinquished his course of lectures in favour of his brother-in-law Mr, afterwards Sir Everard Home. Mr Clift speaks of his early recollection of the diligence with which Dr Thomson pursued his studies at the time he was in Mr Hunter's dissecting rooms in the year 1792; and Sir Everard Home, in reference to the same period, says, "I witnessed your ardour in the pursuit of medical science, applauded your zeal, and endeavoured to give you such facilities as were in my power, to encourage you in your labours." The facilities here referred to were acknowledged by Dr Thomson himself in speaking of Mr Home, in his Observations on Lithotomy, as "a surgeon who has enjoyed, and who has known how to avail himself of, the most extensive practical opportunities in his profession, and one to whose instructions as a teacher, and to whose writings as an author, I am, among many others, indebted for much valuable information."

It is believed that the more immediate object of Dr Thomson's visiting London at this time, was to qualify himself for teaching anatomy, a design which he afterwards relinquished, partly in consequence of difficulties connected with the outlay that would have been necessary, and partly in consequence of the high impression which he had formed of the abilities of Mr John Bell, who about that time entered on this department of instruction.

Dr Thomson returned to Edinburgh early in 1793, and in the following year (his friend, Mr Hogg, having kindly interposed his credit with the bank of which he was manager, for the advancement of the necessary funds,) he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, a body with which his connection was

destined to become of a still closer character, and to be the source of much honour to both parties. He seems forthwith to have taken measures for renewing his connection with the Royal Infirmary, as it is recorded in the minutes, (of 2d September 1793), that permission was granted for his attending as surgeon along with Mr Brown.

Upon his leaving the Infirmary, Dr Thomson had entered into engagements to form an alliance in business with Mr Arrott, a fellow of the College—a gentleman of some peculiarity of manner, but withal of very considerable abilities and of great kindness of heart. Under Mr Arrott's hospitable roof he continued till the autumn of 1798, seeing a large amount and a great variety of society.\*

In 1794 his friend, Mr Allen, began to deliver a course of lectures on physiology—a course which, by the testimony of all competent judges, was singularly distinguished at once by the multitude of facts which it placed before the easy comprehension of the hearers, and by the philosophic spirit with which the whole was arranged and animated. The manner in which Dr Thomson's own time was employed during this period, it would, in a regular narrative of his life, be very important to trace, as there can be no doubt that there were then laid the ground-works of many of his subsequent investigations, but we cannot at present enter upon this inquiry.

Chemistry, at all events, occupied a considerable share of his attention; and in 1798 he began to render the fruits of his labours in this department available to himself and the public, by the publication of the first volume of an edition of Fourcroy's Elements of Chemistry and Natural History, with the Philosophy of Chemistry prefixed. In publishing this edition, he adopted the translation of the "Elements" by Mr Nicholson, and an anonymous translation of the "Philosophy;" but to almost each chapter he appended copious notes, in the composition of which, he says in the advertisement, he had had it chiefly in view to exhibit a short abstract of the most interesting discoveries and improvements that had been made in the science of chemistry within the period of the previous twenty years, and to make accurate references, on every subject of importance, to the various original memoirs, essays, and writings from which farther information might be derived. "By intermixing in this manner," he observes, "the history of modern chemistry with a work so long and so deservedly popular, I have endeavoured to assist those who may be desirous to prosecute this

\* Many years after their separation, as those may remember who had occasion to pass down Gray's Close on their way to the Cowgate Episcopal Chapel, the names of "Arrott and Thomson, Surgeons," were to be read on the door plate of Mr Arrott's house.

interesting science beyond the narrow limits of an elementary treatise." The second volume of this work was published in 1799, and the third and last in 1800. In speaking of it, Professor Jameson says, "this edition, as I well remember, was received in a distinguished manner by the illustrious author himself; and your illustrations were considered by your countrymen as a fine specimen of elegant taste and composition, combined with varied and profound philosophical views."

In the winter of 1799-1800, Mr Allen, with whom Dr Thomson had now formed an alliance in business, went to London for the purpose of prosecuting the study of anatomy. During that winter the late Earl of Lauderdale came to reside in Edinburgh, and being, with that ardour which characterised him in all his pursuits, very desirous to prosecute the study of chemistry, Dr Thomson was introduced to him as a person qualified to assist him. Thus originated his acquaintance with that nobleman, of whose patronage and kind attentions he himself said, at a subsequent period, that he must ever feel them to be a proud distinction, as his desire to merit them had long been with him a powerful incentive to exertion.

Under Lord Lauderdale's auspices, a chemical class was formed, consisting chiefly of gentlemen connected with the Parliament House, and which met at Dr Thomson's private residence. Writing to Mr Allen in January 1800, he says, "I delivered my ninth lecture to-day. If I continue to like lecturing as well as I have done hitherto, I shall certainly try to get a larger class from the Parliament House for summer. I speak from short notes, and the embarrassment I experienced for the first days, begins to wear off." After the completion of the course, he writes, "I have resolved on repeating my lessons again in summer; but as the number, I expect, will be too large for my room, I shall be obliged to go to your class-room."\* But in a subsequent letter he says, "Dr Hope has announced a course of chemistry for the gentlemen of the Parliament House. It is to last from the 12th of May to the 12th of July. I shall not go in consequence of this, to (the class-room in) Surgeons' Square, as it would have the appearance of my wishing to oppose myself to the Doctor." His zeal for the advancement of chemical science, however, suffered no abatement, as is shown in the following extract from a letter addressed to Mr Allen, which will not be the less interesting

\* "I am extremely happy," he adds, "in the prospect of being now able to carry into effect the plan I have so long intended for the winter,—I mean a course of lectures on the elementary parts of chemistry, materia medica, and pharmacy." So early as 1793, his friend, Dr William Russell, inquires after a work on Pharmacy, in which he was then engaged; and Mr George Bell, in writing to him from London in 1797, apologises for not having yet obtained for him notes of certain courses of lectures on materia medica, then in progress of delivery in the medical schools of the metropolis

from the incidental glimpse it furnishes of the scientific relaxations of two individuals who subsequently attained great eminence in the councils of the nation; and with both of whom Dr Thomson had the pleasure of living on very friendly terms. "Some of the members of the Natural History Society waited on me some time ago to talk to me about the state of the society. In the course of conversation I could perceive that ——'s salary was considered as an insuperable obstacle to the prosperity of the society in its present circumstances. Various plans of relief were proposed, and I at last suggested the turning the society into a chemical society, that should provide itself with an apparatus, and occasionally make experiments. This proposal has since been talked of among the members, and is, I believe, universally approved of. In mentioning it to Horner, he proposed an alliance with the Academy of Physic. Brougham, in the meantime, came home, and has entered keenly into our views. I have made the continuance of ——'s salary a condition with each of them in private, and the general belief is, that, instead of any want, we are likely, when the plan can be carried into effect, to have an overflow of members. It has, on that idea, been suggested to restrict the number of ordinary members to thirty. The two chief difficulties which at present occur to the plan are, the want of a proper place, and an arrangement which shall combine the interest of the society with the operations of the experimental committee. I have not yet said any thing of the proposal to ——, but with his leave I shall, under him, be acting secretary till you return. I wish you would make an offer to the society of your class-room to meet in till they can provide themselves with a place. Perhaps I am too sanguine, but I conceive, that, if we can give to the infant society a good organization, it may become an institution which you will have pleasure in patronising. We shall be able to draw into it, I hope, all the young men of the place who have any turn for physical researches. It is proposed to meet in summer. Brougham is to write you in a day or two. He looks well, and his present appearance would give you much satisfaction. Horner and he are both particularly anxious that you should approve of the plan of a chemical society." His subsequent letters, during the continuance of Mr Allen's residence in London, contain reports of the proceedings of the Chemical Society, and of the topics he was going over with Lord Lauderdale. An extract from one, dated 12th June, may be quoted, as illustrative of the ardour of that nobleman, to which reference has already been made. "Lord Lauderdale and I made the galvanic experiment last week, and I exhibited it to the society on Saturday. We are getting tubes with gold wires and glass stoppers to try its effects on caustic liquids, and we are getting a very broad plate of zinc made, to

try whether the increase of power be in proportion to the increase of surface. In that case his Lordship's whole service of plate will be converted into a galvanic battery!"

But whilst thus indulging in his fondness for chemical pursuits, and endeavouring to render these subservient to his immediate necessities, Dr Thomson never lost sight of the profession on which he had embarked. Writing to Mr Allen, of date 20th December 1799, he says, "I shall not expect much anatomical information from you, but, indeed, you must treasure up for me every hint in surgery. Notes, however short, of Cooper's Lectures, may be of much use." "Be assured," he writes early in 1800, "I am not to be diverted by chemistry or any other occupation from the prosecution of surgery." Again, a few months later, "I wish to be able to assist you in the anatomical labours you propose; and so long as you continue fond of dissection, be assured I shall never suffer myself to be drawn away from the study of anatomy and experimental surgery." And in May, after noticing that "Mr Russell\* has been rather anxious about my giving in to chemistry," he announces his purpose of "lecturing, next session, if you approve of it, and if my health will permit, on the principles and practice of surgery." The allusion to experimental surgery, in the preceding paragraph, was probably suggested by that inquiry into the changes occurring in the osseous system in the processes of Necrosis and Callus, in which he had been engaged in the previous summer with his friend and pupil, Dr Alexander Hermann Macdonald of Hamburg, the results of which appeared in the thesis published by that gentleman on graduating in September 1799.

The time, however, had now come when it was necessary for him to make a more decided election of the leading objects of his pursuits. In 1800, Dr Gregory addressed to the managers of the Royal Infirmary his famous "Memorial," in which he attacked the mode of attendance of the surgeons in the hospital, promiscuously by rotation, which at that time was followed. A communication on the subject having been made by the managers to the College of Surgeons, and a diversity of opinion having sprung up among the members of that body as to the proper course to be pursued, each fellow was invited to give in his own suggestions. Dr Thomson, on this occasion, published "Outlines of a plan for the regulation of the Surgical department of the Royal Infirmary," in support of a motion which Mr Andrew Wood had submitted to the College, suggesting a middle course between the then existing

\* The Mr Russell here referred to was the late Professor James Russell, to whom Dr Thomson had dedicated his edition of Fourcroy, and of whom he has elsewhere recorded, that when Mr Russell succeeded, in 1803, in getting the chair of Clinical Surgery in the University instituted, he was desirous to have himself associated with him in that chair.

mode of general rotation and the appointment of permanent surgeons, which some had been inclined to recommend. The party then predominating in the College advocated an adherence to things as they were; and very lavishly fulminated their censures against those who supported opposite views. Among others, Dr Thomson was censured for having submitted his proposals to the consideration of the managers of the Infirmary, instead of to that of the College itself; and Mr Andrew Wood was censured for reading to a committee of the managers—of which body he was a member—an extract from a protest that had been lodged by Dr Thomson against a decision of the College, without accompanying it with the answer on the College's behalf. It is not necessary to trace the progress of the lawsuit which arose between the majority of the College and the managers of the Infirmary on this occasion. Suffice it to say that, fortunately for humanity, the courts of law decided that the managers were entitled to select the persons whom they considered best qualified for the performance of the duties of surgeons, irrespective of any bargain supposed to have been entered into by the predecessors of the two parties engaged in the litigation. Meanwhile, however, the managers had resolved to nominate six surgeons, on the principle recommended by Mr Wood, and advocated in Dr Thomson's pamphlet; and accordingly before the end of the year (1800), they agreed on a list in which Dr Thomson's name was included, his associates, all of them his seniors, being Messrs Russell, Wardrop, Law, Inglis, and Brown.

Dr Thomson entered on the teaching of surgery soon after his appointment as surgeon to the Royal Infirmary. In a letter addressed to Mr Keate, the surgeon-general, which must have been written in September 1803, he mentions his having been employed for three years in teaching surgery, and his having given, during that time, two courses of clinical lectures in the Royal Infirmary, and two courses of lectures on the principles and practice of surgery, at a private theatre.

A subject which very early engaged Dr Thomson's particular attention as a teacher of surgery, was the natural means by which hæmorrhage from wounded arteries is suppressed,—conceiving this doctrine to be, as he was accustomed to say, the main pillar on which all speculations regarding the operative part of surgery must depend for their support. It has been repeatedly noticed in other publications than the present, that the inaugural dissertation on the subject of divided arteries, published by Dr Jones of Barbadoes, on graduating at Edinburgh in 1803, and which he afterwards republished in a more extended form in his Treatise on Hæmorrhage (1805), derived a large share of its value from the assistance afforded him by Dr Thomson. The precise share

in Dr Jones's investigation, which Dr Thomson claimed for himself, in the absence, as he conceived, of suitable acknowledgment on the part of the author, appears in the following extract from his surgical lectures.

“ There are two views of this subject (the natural suppression of hæmorrhage), which, from the first moments of lecturing in this place, I have endeavoured to inculcate and explain at some length. The first of these is, that the natural suppression of hæmorrhagy from divided arteries is not a simple event, but one in the production of which several powers concur. The second view which I have been accustomed to take of this subject is, that each of the experimenters who have endeavoured to ascertain the means by which nature suppresses hæmorrhagy, has added something valuable to our knowledge of these means, and that these experimenters have erred chiefly by directing their attention to one step or stage of this process, and by neglecting to take a general and comprehensive view of the whole. These are views which you will find explained and illustrated at great length in a most excellent treatise on the process employed by nature in suppressing the hæmorrhagy from divided and punctured arteries by the late Dr Jones of Barbadoes. They are views which I have reason to know were new to Dr Jones when he first heard me deliver them in these lectures. That gentleman was led to consider the subject of hæmorrhage, in consequence of my explaining to him, in various private conversations, the opinions which I entertained with regard to this process. He had made choice of the absorbent system as the subject of inquiry for his inaugural thesis. I suggested and strongly recommended to him an experimental investigation into the means by which nature suppresses hæmorrhage. It was with no small pleasure I prevailed upon Dr Jones to undertake this investigation, because, among my medical acquaintances, I have seldom known one, who, from previous acquirements, steady attention, and a cautious observation and accurate description of the phenomena which presented themselves in his medical inquiries, was better able to conduct it. How far Dr Jones had the candour to acknowledge the use that he made of the views which he adopted from my lectures and conversations, or the assistance which I lent him in most of the experiments which he performed while in Edinburgh, the perusal of his treatise will inform you. To be obliged to allude in this manner to one in whom I placed unlimited confidence, must ever be to me a matter of the most painful regret and mortification. After Dr Jones had left Edinburgh, he continued his researches, and made several new, original, and most interesting experiments, the details of which you will find in his treatise,—a work to which I can refer with confidence those who are desirous of acquiring



a minute and accurate knowledge of every thing which is at present known, not only respecting the natural means by which hæmorrhage is suppressed, but also respecting the use and application of the ligature to arteries, the most useful of the means which art has ever employed to suppress hæmorrhage."

"The only circumstance which Dr Jones has not made out completely to my satisfaction is the formation of the internal clot." "The conical internal clots which adhere by their bases to the closure of the arteries, have appeared to me to be composed of secreted organizable coagulable lymph, attached often to the artery by one side as well as by their bases. This opinion of the formation of the internal clot I had formed before I prevailed upon Dr Jones to undertake the investigation of this subject. I often communicated to him my opinions with regard to the internal clot in conversation, and I stated to him just before the publication of his thesis, these opinions still more distinctly in writing." "In consequence of the conversation in which this statement was read, Dr Jones added the supplement which you will find at p. 72 of his thesis, printed here in 1803. In this supplement Dr Jones has given an extract from the last of the memoirs of M. Petit, containing an opinion very similar to that which I had formed, and am still inclined to adopt. I do not find that Dr Jones has made any addition to our knowledge of this subject, (the formation of the internal coagulum,) in the very valuable experiments which he made after he left Edinburgh, nor in the account which he has given of it at page 160 of his treatise."

On the renewal of hostilities between this country and France in 1803, the country, as is well known, was thrown into a state of much military excitement by the apprehension of an invasion; and among other arrangements for putting Scotland in a state of defence, the establishment of a military hospital at Edinburgh was contemplated. Previously to being informed of this proposal, Dr Thomson had resolved, at the particular recommendation of the late Sir Thomas Maitland, to give, during the winter session of 1803-4, a course of lectures on the nature and treatment of those injuries and diseases which come more peculiarly under the care of the military surgeon; and as there were but few authors upon these subjects in this country, he employed himself in studying the best French and German writers who had treated of them. The idea of giving a course of military surgery he was the more readily induced to adopt, partly, as he himself says, by the circumstances of the times, and partly by his knowledge that the army and navy during the impending momentous conflict, must in a great measure be supplied with surgical officers from among the young men educated in the medical school of Edinburgh, who, from the narrowness of their circumstances, could not afford to attend the hospitals in

London, but must go immediately from the Edinburgh school into actual practice. Entertaining these views, he listened with no small degree of pleasure to an unsolicited offer which Mr Benjamin Bell made, of endeavouring to procure for him a place in the military hospital about, as was understood, to be established in Edinburgh.

In furtherance of this object, Dr Thomson went to London in the autumn of 1803; and through the influence, amongst other parties, of Sir Walter Farquhar, to whom he was strongly recommended by Dr Gregory, Mr Keate was induced to enter into his views. The rules of the service requiring that the whole surgical department of the army must be filled by those who have begun at the lowest step in the service, viz., that of hospital mate, he was appointed to that rank. In speaking of this arrangement at a subsequent period, he himself says: "In 1803, when an invasion was dreaded, I was attached to the Medical Military Staff of Scotland, with a small salary, it is true, but with directions from the Surgeon General, that I should be employed only in superior duty, and with private assurances from the same quarter, that, in the event of a military hospital being established in Edinburgh, I should have the situation I wished for in the surgical department." And Mr Keate, in introducing him to Dr Rogerson, then principal medical officer in Edinburgh, says, "Mr Thomson has been strongly recommended to me, and is now appointed hospital mate to the proposed general hospital at Edinburgh. He is a gentleman of superior talents, and will, no doubt, if the exigency of the service requires it, prove highly useful in the superior departments of his profession."

Dr Thomson did not allow the time spent by him in London, whilst on this errand, to be consumed in the business of solicitation. On the contrary, he turned it to great account in the way of his own professional improvement. The pathological collections of the metropolis especially engaged his attention. Mr Howship mentions that he applied himself with unwearied assiduity and peculiar diligence to the study of the various departments of pathology, as exemplified in the divisions of Mr Heaviside's Museum; and speaks with admiration of his "most unceasing application to the laborious task of possessing himself, in the least possible time, of all the useful information that could be obtained by a visit to London;" and Mr Clift alludes to his having made at this time a close examination of Mr Hunter's collection, particularly the pathological part of it, "in a manner so particular as had never till that time been done by any visitor, and, indeed, not frequently since, except by the college professors." The ample notes of the preparations in these and other collections, which he

made upon the spot, and which are still preserved, as well as his own private letters, fully corroborate the statements of these gentlemen.

Dr Thomson was accustomed to mention, that, the evening before leaving London on this occasion, he dined with Mr Abernethy, previously to going to hear him lecture at St Bartholomew's hospital, and that Mr Abernethy allowed him to make choice of the subject of the lecture. The subject he chose was Tumours, on which Mr Abernethy had not yet published; and as this was too extensive a topic to be finished in one night, Dr Jones took notes of the subsequent lectures, and forwarded them to him in Edinburgh. These notes also are still preserved, and the subject was one on which, both in his surgical and in his pathological lectures, Dr Thomson used to dilate, always rendering to Mr Abernethy the praise to which he was entitled for his attempt at a scientific classification of morbid growths.

Dr Thomson had at an early period of his surgical studies become impressed with the necessity, towards the elucidation of the subject of hernia, of a more accurate anatomical examination of the regions of the body in which ruptures are liable to occur. Writing to Mr Allen early in 1800, he says, "Marshall, I am told, has studied the subject of hernia. It forms an admirable subject for illustration with drawings and preparations;" and of a later date in the same year, in reference to some preparations illustrative of hernia which Mr Allen had mentioned having seen, he writes, "If the preparations on hernia are very interesting, I wish you would get any kind of outlines of them, however rude." His critical notice of Camper's *Icones Herniarum*, and his short comment on Dr Heberden's article on *Ileus*, both in the second number of the *Edinburgh Review*, (for January 1803;) and his Observations on Mr Hey's chapter on *Strangulated Hernia*, in the third number of the same *Review*, (for April 1803,) as well as other articles in the same work, all show how much his mind was at that time occupied with this branch of surgery.

It was probably during the visit to London, to which reference has just been made, that he saw reason to abandon a design, relative to hernia, in which he had been for some time engaged, as explained by himself in his lectures on surgery, when speaking of the anatomy of the groin. "This is a part of anatomy," he was accustomed to say, "of which you will find no good general description before the publication of Mr Astley Cooper's splendid work upon hernia, though many parts of it separately had been well described. I was so much impressed with the importance of the anatomy of this region, that I had very nearly completed the description and delineation of the different

parts which enter into the formation of the groin, with a view to publication, before I had heard of Mr Cooper's being engaged in investigating the subject of hernia. I was too well aware of the superior advantages which he possessed, to think of continuing my design. Mr Cooper's descriptions and plates contain almost all the information which we possess respecting the anatomical structure of the groin, and confirm the views which I had taken of this part, while they add considerably to their extent and to their importance."\*

The portion of Mr Cooper's work relative to Inguinal Hernia was published in 1804, but the portion relative to Crural Hernia did not appear till 1807. In 1805, Mr William Wood, on being called on to prepare a Probationary Essay for the College of Surgeons, which he was about to enter, made choice of this subject; and with that candour which has characterised him in all the relations of life, frankly avows how much he had been "indebted to Mr Thomson, Professor of Surgery to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, for the information which I have received on the subject, not only from his valuable lectures, but also from his very accurate dissections of the parts concerned in the disease, which he was so kind as to allow me to witness." This gentleman has informed us, that on his return from studying in London in 1804, he was strongly urged by Dr Thomson to set about the preparation of a Treatise on Ruptures, and promised the use of all his materials, as well as of his advice in its preparation. Mr Wood, from a misapprehension, as we conceive, of his own qualifications, shrank from the task. How well a work of the description which Dr Thomson had projected for his young friend was soon afterwards executed by Mr Lawrence (1807) the profession is well aware.

In connection with the subject of hernia, Dr Thomson had paid particular attention to the natural process of repair occurring in Intestines in which, by injury or disease, solution of continuity has been produced. His experiments on this question of surgical pathology he communicated to Mr Cooper, who introduced them into his work on Inguinal Hernia. After mentioning some experiments of his own, in which the intestine was returned into the abdomen, where it rested against the wound in the parietes, and the ligatures were left hanging externally, Mr Cooper proceeds to quote his friend Mr Thomson, Lecturer on Surgery at Edinburgh, as having, with the assistance of Drs Farre and Jones,

\* Among his notes of his communications with Mr Cooper during this visit, there occurs the following observation. : "Mr Cooper's dissections of the termination inwards of the internal oblique and transversalis, much more minute and correct than mine; not so his account of the external fascia, nor of the distribution of the tendon of the external oblique."

performed a series of experiments, from which it appears that, in the animals which were the subjects of them, not only the *intestine* may be returned into the cavity of the abdomen, but the *ligatures* which are applied upon it; and that no apprehension need be entertained of these ligatures being separated into that cavity to produce the inflammatory effects of extraneous bodies, seeing that they are in fact separated into the intestinal canal, and discharged from it by the natural passages. Mr Cooper next proceeds to notice a curious difference in the facility with which a longitudinal and a transverse wound of the intestine unites. "It has been shown," he remarks, "that transverse wounds heal readily; but with respect to the longitudinal, they have a contrary tendency;" and in illustration of this principle, he quotes the experiments of Dr Thomson, "the result of which," he observes, "will be found extremely curious."

Mr William Wood, in a correspondence with the late Dr Monro, in the course of 1807, mentions that "Mr Thomson, in the two courses of his lectures, which he had had the pleasure of attending, described at great length the different modes of stitching divided intestines, that had been recommended from the time that Celsus first mentioned the practice to the present day. But in showing the results of his experiments, which Mr Cooper has described, he took particular pains to caution his students from inferring, that, because the practice of stitching intestines had often succeeded in brute animals, and in a few instances also in the human subject, it was one which should be followed in the diseased state of the intestines usually accompanying strangulated hernia." This subject of the process of nature in repairing wounds of the intestines was, as is well known, at a subsequent period, very fully discussed in a most valuable monograph by Mr Travers, a gentleman whom Dr Thomson had the great pleasure of numbering among his pupils, and the still greater pleasure, throughout the whole of his after life, of counting among his friends.

Dr Thomson again delivered, during the winter session of 1803-4, his course of lectures on the principles and practice of surgery; and in the succeeding summer (1804) he carried into effect his intention of delivering a short course on military surgery. In writing in the subsequent autumn to Mr Keate, he says, "I have taken the liberty to inclose for your inspection a short prospectus of a course of lectures on military surgery, which, in addition to my usual winter course, I gave this last summer at Edinburgh. I trust you will approve of the desire which I have manifested by the delivery of this course, to promote, in as far as in me lies, the good of that department of the public service over which you preside. That I may be able to devote my time exclusively to the learning and teaching of surgery, I intend to

give up private practice for two or three years, or at least while I am continued in the place of resident hospital mate, which I now hold by your goodness."

The beneficial influence of these courses was very speedily perceived by those interested in the improvement of surgical education in Edinburgh, and by none more promptly than by Mr Benjamin Bell and Mr Andrew Wood; and they revived a wish that had repeatedly found vent in the College of Surgeons, to have the teaching of surgery placed in this city upon a permanent and respectable footing. Accordingly, shortly before the commencement of the winter session, 1804-5, a memorial was presented to the college, signed by Messrs A. Wood, George Wood, James Law, William Farquharson, Benjamin Bell, William Brown, James Bryce, Andrew Wardrop, and James Arrott, pointing out the advantages likely to result from the college's instituting a lectureship or professorship of surgery. The college approved of the suggestion, and Dr Thomson was, as was afterwards stated by Dr Erskine, "universally considered by his professional brethren as better qualified than any one else of their number for the office of their professor, which, accordingly, they unanimously conferred upon him." The extraordinary attempts that were made to frustrate this measure were recorded by Dr Thomson in a Statement of Facts published in 1806; of which a considerable part was reprinted in a pamphlet, afterwards to be noticed, published by him in 1826, under the title of Additional Hints. As a part of the scheme of taking on itself to provide instruction in surgery for the medical students attending the Edinburgh School, and, as is well known, on Dr Thomson's suggestion, the College of Surgeons resolved to institute a museum. To this he made over a collection, which he had been himself forming for some years. In the formation and extension of this museum he was zealously assisted by his young friend and pupil, Mr James Wardrop, who, in a few years afterwards, by the publication of the first volume of his *Morbid Anatomy of the Human Eye* (1808), and of his *Treatise on Fungus Hæmatodes* (1809), evinced how thoroughly he had been imbued with the conviction, that a knowledge of the true nature of diseases is the only safe foundation of rational practice. The museum thus commenced has gone on increasing, under the fostering care of the college, partly by the contributions of its members, of whom none was more assiduous in its behalf than Dr Thomson continued to be; partly by the late Dr Barclay's bequest of his valuable museum; and partly by the purchase of that of Sir Charles Bell;—till it has attained a most honourable position among the anatomical and pathological collections of the empire.

In receiving the appointment of Professor of Surgery to the College of Surgeons, Dr Thomson proposed to the college, that medical officers of the army and navy should be allowed to attend the lectures delivered under its patronage, without paying the usual fees. This proposal was immediately adopted by the college; and accordingly his lectures were, on this footing, attended every year subsequently by varying but considerable numbers of officers belonging to these departments of the public service.

The expectations of the college in instituting a professorship of surgery, and conferring it upon Dr Thomson, were speedily realised. Dr Erskine, in writing to Mr Allen in the beginning of 1806, relative to Dr Thomson's claims to an appointment presently to be more particularly noticed, says, "He has, by delivering several full and separate courses on surgery, already performed a service of the greatest benefit to the public; for, since the commencement of his lectures, a very material improvement has taken place in the qualifications of the young men whose education, as surgeons, has been confined to this place, and they are now found to possess such a stock of professional information as, in former times, I am convinced, was rarely to be met with among them. The truth of this I have an opportunity, as one of the examiners of the College of Surgeons, in some measure to ascertain by personal observation. It is also, I conceive," adds Dr Erskine, "no slight consideration, that, in order to do justice to this very important course, he has withdrawn himself, for a time at least, from private family practice." In reference to the same subject, the late Mr George Bell, at a later period, speaks of the "increased and increasing improvement in the qualifications of candidates for surgical diplomas since the establishment of the professorship of surgery by the Royal College of Surgeons in 1804. The beneficial effects of this professorship have been made manifest over a large portion of this country, and have been very generally acknowledged, not only by practitioners in civil life, but also by the medical officers both in the army and navy. No one acquainted with these facts," says Mr Bell, in addressing himself to Dr Thomson, "can hesitate to attribute a great part of this visible and important alteration to your exertions."

In 1806, on the formation of Mr Fox's administration, Dr Thomson was encouraged by Lord Lauderdale to apply to his Majesty's government for a commission to be Professor of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh. Earl Spencer, at that time Secretary of State for the Home Department, after a personal interview and minute inquiry into the objects and probable usefulness of an institution for the instruction of medical students intending to enter the service of the army and navy, advised his

Majesty to create this professorship, and recommended Dr Thomson for the appointment, which he accordingly received.

A fact which came to light during the preparation of his commission, may give some idea of the lengths to which the bitterness of party feeling was at that time carried. The clerk in the Secretary of State's office, to whom the preparation of this deed was referred, reported to Lord Spencer that a *caveat* against Dr Thomson's receiving any appointment from the crown had been lodged in that office for a considerable time; and that it had, on a previous occasion, prevented his receiving an appointment of a different sort, even after it had been promised him by two different ministers. We have been assured that an impression prevails in some quarters, that Dr Thomson, at an early period of his medical career, took a share in political movements of a character hazardous to public tranquillity, and particularly that he was a member of the association known under the name of the Friends of the People. These notions, however, are utterly erroneous. Whilst warmly attached to popular rights, he was persuaded that these can be soundly advanced only by moral and intellectual persuasion, and not by physical force. And it was with him a matter of extreme regret, that his friend Mr Allen, who, in general, was most particularly distinguished by calmness and soundness of judgment, allowed himself to be entangled in proceedings which had the not uncommon consequence of extreme measures, viz. that of strengthening the hands of those against whom they were directed. Of the motives by which Mr Allen was influenced in the conduct he pursued at this time, we have, it is believed, a correct statement, in the following extract of a letter from their common friend, Dr W. Russell, to Dr Thomson, when in London, of date, 20th November, 1792. "Allen has left the hospital, but, notwithstanding your good advices, is still by far too deeply engaged in democratic politics, I think. I have constantly urged him to *give out*, as I conceive it is not only inconsistent with his present situation, but occupies his time, and introduces him to a public notice which, at best, can be of no advantage to him. There is to be a public meeting of delegates to-morrow, after which I hope he will be persuaded. His fears are, that from the *volcanic* heads which, certainly at least here, conduct them, viz. Muir and Johnson, they will be misled; but I am afraid that, though he were even to devote his whole time, this will not be prevented, unless some of the more *staid men* join, who rather at present keep back." And a passage in one of Mr Allen's own letters to Dr Thomson, of date 4th January 1793, points at one of the difficulties experienced by a man of spirit in quitting a cause in which he has once embarked, even when he comes to disapprove of the



means by which it is pursued. "I have given up their societies, but on the whole I believe they are still increasing. If I ever return, while in my present situation, it will be merely to prevent any imputation of desertion in the hour of danger."

Dr Thomson has been heard frequently to mention, in illustration of his anxiety to steer clear of the "volcanic heads" referred to by Dr Russell, that having occasion to speak with Mr Allen, at a time when he was in attendance on one of the meetings of delegates, he abstained from going himself to the place of meeting, and sent a messenger to fetch him; and that on Mr Arrott informing him that Margarot, who, as a medical man, had brought an introduction to Mr Arrott, from a common friend, was to dine with them on a particular day, he immediately replied that he was to dine on that day at Stenhouse Mills, *i. e.*, at Mr Allen's stepfather, Mr Cleghorn's, where all Mr Allen's friends at that time experienced the comforts of a kind home. In giving these explanations, it is not meant to suggest a doubt as to the strength of Dr Thomson's political opinions, or to offer any apology for them, but only to establish the fact, that, in entertaining these opinions, he was very guarded to give no countenance to measures for their advancement, by which there was risk of the public tranquillity being put in peril.

The issuing of Dr Thomson's commission, as Professor of Military Surgery, again renewed that strife which each successive attempt to improve the system of teaching surgery in Edinburgh had created. Some of the particulars are related in the Additional Hints already referred to. It has often been disparagingly objected, to the creation of the chair of military surgery, that much more advantage would have resulted had a chair of ordinary surgery been at once instituted in the university; but those conversant with the actual circumstances of the case will allow that as much was done by the creation of this chair, for benefiting surgical instruction, as could be accomplished at the time.

Early in 1808 Dr Thomson, being then one of the acting surgeons of the Royal Infirmary, printed "Observations on Lithotomy, being a republication of Dr James Douglas' Appendix to his History of the lateral Operation for the Stone, and of the other original papers relative to Mr Cheselden's invention and improvement of that operation." To these papers he added, "A proposal for a new manner of cutting for the Stone." It will not be necessary to enter here into a discussion raised by our friend the late Dr Yelloly, as to whether Dr Douglas has given in his Appendix a correct account of Cheselden's final operation. It will be sufficient to state that the main object of Dr Thomson's own "Proposal" was to point out the practical objections to the use of the gorget, in its multiplied forms, as a cutting instrument in lithoto-

my ; and to suggest a certain procedure whereby the knife may be employed in this operation so as to obviate the risk of wounding the rectum with it. His manner of operating differed, as he himself stated, from that then generally practised in this country, in the instruments used in making the internal incision, in the direction, in some cases, of the incision itself, in the constant introduction of the finger into the bladder, previous to that of the forceps, to ascertain the size of the internal incision, and, if possible, also the size and situation of the stone ; and in employing the finger as a conductor for the knife, in all cases in which it may be necessary to enlarge the internal incision. This mode of operation he put in practice in five cases on which he operated for the stone in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh during the years 1808-9. One of these, a child of four years of age, proved fatal ; and in another case, great difficulty being experienced in seizing the stone, after various ineffectual efforts to accomplish this, by himself and Dr Brown, who was acting as his assistant in the operation, Dr Thomson caused his patient to be put to bed. Some days subsequently, the attempt at seizing and extracting the stone was renewed, and after very considerable difficulty this was accomplished by Dr Brown, into whose hands, after the stone had on three several occasions escaped from between the blades of the forceps, Dr Thomson put the instrument, with a request that he would extract it for him, being himself, as he says, overcome with fatigue, and beginning to be agitated with emotions of anxiety. Dr Thomson's own conjecture with regard to the source of the difficulty attendant on extraction in this case was, that the stone was lodged in a lateral sac or pouch of the bladder, from which it projected more or less according to circumstances ; but as the patient recovered, and was dismissed cured, no opportunity of ascertaining this point was afforded. Mr John Bell published an account of the two cases that have been referred to, in which he not only himself condemned the proceedings, but, in respect of the second case, referred to two other surgeons as joining in the condemnation, one of whom was a manager of the Infirmary. One of these gentlemen on being applied to, denied having said anything which could justify such a statement, and declared that "the operation was performed, in his opinion, in every step with great propriety ; although the stone could not be extracted at that time, which has often happened without any blame being imputable to the operator." The surgical manager, on being similarly applied to, acknowledged his recollecting having had an accidental conversation with Mr Bell relative to the operation alluded to, and thought he might possibly have "expressed regret and dissatisfaction at its failure."

That, in point of fact, nothing either in the design or in the execution of the operation had been deserving of disapprobation, far less of censure, is fully established by the statements of Dr Thomson's colleagues, and particularly of Dr Brown, by whom, as has been seen, he was so efficiently assisted. "My situation as your immediate assistant during the operation," said that gentleman, "and the actual share I had in it, afforded me an opportunity of understanding more of the circumstances of the case than could be learned by your other colleagues, or by the bystanders. I have great pleasure in being able to declare, that in my apprehension the operation was performed with deliberation, caution, and ability. An opening into the bladder was expeditiously made, and the forceps cautiously introduced; the search for the stone was diligent, and tender, though ineffectual; the stone was not discovered, and *the patient was put to bed*. This part of your procedure met with my warmest approbation. It was acting according to a rule of practice which had been repeatedly a subject of conversation between you and me, long before this operation took place, and which we both had determined to follow in all cases of stone circumstanced as this was." "The patient was put to bed, not because the stone could not have been then extracted, but because its extraction could not at that time have been accomplished without risking a material injury of the bladder, and exhausting the patient's strength and endurance, and thus exposing him to a much greater danger than could possibly arise from allowing the stone to remain. From this view of the matter I think I am warranted in declaring, the patient had no cause to regret his having been put into your hands, but, on the contrary, has every reason to be well pleased that he was not in the hands of an operator who might have thought it necessary to persevere in his attempts to extract the stone till he had accomplished his object. In acting in this manner, give me leave to say, I think you acted the part, not only of a good surgeon but of an honest man, not hesitating to risk professional reputation to your patient's welfare." "So far from having any reason," says Dr Erskine, "to regret that he had come under your care, your patient, in my opinion, had much cause to congratulate himself in having fallen into the hands of one who, in circumstances so embarrassing, conducted himself not only with much practical skill, but with exemplary humanity and caution. In point of fact, indeed," adds Dr E. "I know that Robert Walker returned to his family impressed with a grateful sense of your kindness, sympathy, and attention."

Dr Thomson thought it incumbent upon him, in consequence of the sanction which this attack appeared to receive from one of

the managers of the Infirmary, to address to that body a request, that they would "inquire into the truth of a statement affecting so materially the honour of one of their own body, and his own professional character and interests as a teacher of surgery." The managers declined to comply with this request, on the ground, that, "as nothing appeared on their books, and no report was ever made to them on the subject alluded to, they could take no concern in the business." On receiving this declinature, Dr Thomson resigned his appointment as surgeon to the Infirmary, and published, under the title of an Appendix to his Proposal, &c., an account of the cases he had operated on, after the manner therein explained, in the Infirmary; and he further announced to his professional brethren, his resolution to retire altogether from the practice of operative surgery.

It must be acknowledged, that some of Dr Thomson's best friends felt extreme regret, that he should not have treated this attack upon him, as he had treated many previous attacks from the same quarter, with silent contempt; and it is scarcely possible to doubt, that such is the line of conduct which, in the cool exercise of his judgment, he would have recommended to another. That he followed a different procedure is probably to be accounted for by the influence, which he thought the statements of Mr Bell might exercise on the public mind, and by what he conceived was expected from him as surgeon to a public institution. Nor can it be altogether overlooked, that the state of Dr Thomson's own feelings at this time was ill calculated to render him tolerant of a charge of the nature of that which had been preferred against him. In point of fact, the practice of operative surgery was extremely disagreeable to him. He possessed a practised dexterity of hand and great quickness of eye; but he was deficient in that freedom from commiseration, which Celsus declares to be requisite in a surgeon. Both previously to the performance of any serious operation, and during the doubtful period of the subsequent progress of a case, in which he had operated, he was oppressed with an anxiety that went so far as to deprive him even of that moderate share of rest which he was accustomed to allow himself. No wonder if, under these circumstances, an attack characterized by Mr John Clerk, afterwards Lord Eldin, in language which we shall not venture to quote, and which induced Professor Playfair to send back to the author a presentation copy of the work in which it was contained, on the ground that he never received a present for which he could not return thanks,—should have disturbed the equilibrium of Dr Thomson's temper, and led him to follow its promptings rather than the counsel of attached but unruffled friends.

But whatever diversity of opinion may arise on this point, there

will be none as to the spirit which—when Mr Bell was no more—dictated the following tribute to his merits as a promoter of surgical science,—“ Mr John Bell, in the course of lectures on anatomy, which he gave for some years in Edinburgh, delivered lectures on select subjects of surgery also, which were listened to with the greatest attention by his auditors. His Discourses on Wounds, and his Observations on Aneurism, in particular, have, since their publication, been read with much eagerness and delight by all ranks of medical men, and have contributed in a powerful manner, to promote the study of these dangerous affections; and, of course, to lead to more correct views than had been previously entertained with respect to their nature and treatment.”

In 1811, Dr Thomson renewed his attempt to obtain a connection with the military hospitals, but in this he was unsuccessful. In the memorial which he presented on the occasion to the army medical board, he expresses his wish to extend in future, the course of lectures he delivers in the university to the principal diseases which, in different regions of the world, come more immediately under the care of the military surgeon. He mentions also that he had annually delivered a course on military surgery in the university, and that, in the previous winter, he had read these lectures without fee to the students of surgery in Edinburgh, nearly 200 of whom had availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them.

In the course of the same year (1811) his friend Dr Erskine, to whom on retiring from general practice he had as far as possible transferred his business, was seized with a fatal illness, of which he died. It was Dr Thomson's wish that his friend Dr John Gordon, who was then residing with him, should have taken Dr Erskine's place; but Dr Gordon being averse to form any engagements that would interfere with his duties as a teacher of anatomy, declined this proposal; and Dr Thomson resolved, himself, with the assistance of his friend Mr Turner, who had for some time been acting as Dr Erskine's assistant, to take up the business, which he accordingly did.

About this period Dr Thomson seems to have taken a considerable interest in the success of a Chirurgical Society, then existing in Edinburgh, in connection with the College of Surgeons. In the Number of this Journal for April 1812, (viii. p. 249), it is mentioned, that “ at a late meeting of the Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh, Professor Thomson gave an account of a particular species of counter-fracture which he had repeatedly had occasion to observe in the examination of the crania of persons dying in consequence of injuries of the head. This is a variety of counter-fracture which seems to be more frequent in its occurrence, and more determinate in its position, than any of those hitherto

described by practical authors. It occurs in the basis of the cranium, and runs along that portion of the temporal bone which forms the roof of the cavity of the tympanum, and of the *meatus auditorius externus*. In some instances it exists on one side only of the head; in others it occurs on both, sometimes with, and at other times without a fracture of the sphenoid or occipital bones." To this notice are appended some of the more general results which Dr Thomson deduced from the particular histories of the cases he related.

In 1813, he published his Lectures on Inflammation, exhibiting a view of the general doctrines, pathological and practical, of medical surgery. This work was received with universal approbation, and speedily insured for itself a permanent position in the medical literature of the country. It was recommended by the Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the University as a treatise of great merit, communicating much information, and likely to be most useful to the student. All this it did and a great deal more; it supplied a deficiency long felt in the literature of medical and surgical pathology, and exerted a remarkable influence on the subsequent progress of these two departments of science. The real services which the publication of this treatise rendered to the profession deserve especial attention.

Previous to the time when Dr Thomson's Lectures on Inflammation appeared, the only work which the student, desirous of obtaining a knowledge of the general doctrines of this, the most important of all the pathological conditions of the economy, could consult with advantage, was the Treatise of John Hunter on the Blood and Inflammation, originally published in 1794. Mr Hunter's work was remarkable for the number of new and important facts which the author had adduced to elucidate the pathology of inflammation; for the great originality of the doctrines; and for the strong tendency to simplification, both as respects pathology and treatment, which was evinced in the application of principles to practice. Probably no work contains so many new and curious facts regarding the state of the blood and the vascular system in health and under various states of disease; and certainly no work published before that time contained so many important and instructive observations on the phenomena of inflammatory diseases, and their constitutional effects. With all these advantages, the work of John Hunter was, and continues to be, extremely difficult to study and to comprehend. The method of arrangement is perplexed in the extreme; and the author often throws out the most important facts and hints in the place where they are least expected to be found. The statements contained in this treatise were interesting, because they were new and pointed; but it was difficult to remember them, in consequence of

their not being at all times arranged in the most methodical order. Mr Hunter had also suggested for consideration many points which he had not himself fully discussed, or sufficiently explained. In short, the work of John Hunter required to be read and studied several times before its doctrines could be thoroughly understood, and their actual bearing and applications could be estimated; and as few possessed the fortitude and perseverance requisite for an undertaking so arduous, the work was too often, after the perusal of a few chapters, laid aside in despair; and eventually it had come to be an authority much more frequently quoted and spoken of, than carefully studied.

Several of these evils, and perhaps others, Dr Thomson doubtless felt in studying the work of John Hunter, and expounding its doctrines to his pupils; and it was manifestly one great object of his lectures on Inflammation to render the doctrines of this surgeon more easily intelligible, and thereby to cause the merits of his work to be more thoroughly appreciated. It is certain that he arranged these doctrines in a much better order, and explained them in a much clearer manner than their author had done; and by his own comments on, and additions to, Mr Hunter's statements, he exhibited a more connected, systematic, and complete view of the pathology of the process of inflammation, and its effects, than had ever before been taken. Respecting the *state of the vessels in inflamed parts*, or the *proximate cause*, as it used to be called, of inflammation, Dr Thomson advanced a large amount of new, original, and, in general, accurate information. This subject had been a favourite topic for discussion in the Medical Society; and from the contending hypotheses maintained in these discussions, in which Dr Thomson was wont to take an active part, he was led to investigate the subject experimentally, and by the aid of the microscope. By applying the results of his experiments to explain and rectify the theory of inflammation proposed in 1765 by Vacca Berlinghieri, Dr Thomson was enabled to present a view of the pathological characters of this process, more complete and accurate than any previously adduced, and one which has formed the basis of the efforts of many subsequent inquirers, as Hastings, Wedemeyer, and Kaltenbrunner. Into this experimental inquiry, it is proper to admit, a few fallacies had entered. These, however, his labours enabled subsequent observers to discover the means of avoiding and rectifying.

One of the most important parts of Dr Thomson's Lectures on Inflammation, was the examination of the *influence of different textures* on this process, and on its effects. Though Dr Carmichael Smyth had given a short view of this subject in 1790, yet Dr Thomson certainly had the undisputed merit of giving the first

clear and comprehensive exposition of it, elucidated by the lights of morbid anatomy and pathology, and enriched with much new information.

The history which he gave of the *constitutional effects* of inflammation was remarkable for its philosophical views, and for the correct and ingenious manner in which he traced, after Whytt, the effects of morbid sympathies. This subject had been very much neglected, surgeons too often confining themselves to the mere local treatment of inflammation. Dr Thomson inculcated strongly the necessity of general, and the value of medical treatment. It is not unworthy of notice, that the view given by Dr Thomson of the influence of local inflammatory affections in producing a great diversity of constitutional disturbances, has led to his being claimed by the Broussai-ists as entertaining pathological opinions similar to, or identical with, those of their master.

Not less original and instructive were the views given in this work, of the *effects* of inflammation, especially suppuration and ulcerative absorption. In explaining the nature of these morbid processes, Dr Thomson performed the part of a faithful and intelligent interpreter of the doctrines of Hunter, which, without his exposition, must have remained in a degree of obscurity quite impenetrable to the great body of students. In the history of the different forms of gangrene, also, Dr Thomson showed himself to be an equally able and learned expositor of the multiplied and often contradictory facts which had been recorded on that subject. His description of traumatic gangrene, of the gangrene of the aged, and the state of the arteries in these affections, as well as his account of the gangrene which arises from the use of spurred rye, presented specimens of the most accurate and precise generalization on these subjects; while his remarks on their treatment, and especially on that so confidently recommended by Mr Pott in the senile gangrene, showed the philosophical spirit with which he estimated the powers of remedial agents in diseases.

The most unequivocal proof of the high value of these lectures is found in the facts, that in a very short space of time large portions of them were transferred to the pages of Mr Samuel Cooper's *Surgical Dictionary*, by which the knowledge they contained was diffused most extensively through the profession at home; and that translations of the work itself appeared in France, Germany, and Italy, and a reprint in America. The English edition was soon exhausted; and copies became so rare, that when they appeared they were bought with avidity at four or five times the original cost.

The publication of this work, in short, exerted both at home and abroad, a most beneficial influence on the study and practice of surgery. It gave a new direction to the minds of the reading



and reflecting portion of the profession; and all subsequent essays and monographs on the subject of inflammation have been written, more or less, upon the principles therein adopted, and present distinct traces of the influence of this great example.

By the publication of the part of his course relating to inflammation, Dr Thomson was enabled, in his public instructions, to devote a larger amount of time to various other important subjects. He had now lectured on the principles and practice of surgery for thirteen years; and as every year had enabled him to introduce from foreign authors, and the experience of the military surgeons, improvements and rectifications, his course of lectures may be regarded as having at this time, 1814-15, &c. reached its highest degree of perfection. This, therefore, may be not an inappropriate point in our narrative at which to offer a few observations relative to Dr Thomson's merits as a teacher of surgery.

The great peculiarities in Dr Thomson, as a lecturer, were the large amount of accurate and correct information which he communicated, the clear and methodical order in which it was presented, and the sound spirit of criticism and judgment with which the different opinions, propositions, and theories that came under review were examined. At the time when Dr Thomson began to lecture on surgery, no separate or distinct course on that subject was delivered in Edinburgh, either in the university or by any private teacher. Surgery was taught only as an appendage to anatomy; and the result was, that a few lectures hurriedly introduced at the close of the anatomical course, long formed the only instructions in surgery given in this city. It is easy to perceive that from such courses, comparatively little benefit could result. Little attention could be paid in them to surgical anatomy; and none could be given to the pathology of surgical diseases. The important and essential part of surgery, viz. the phenomena, causes, and effects of local diseases, was either neglected, or treated in a cursory, meagre, and unsatisfactory manner. These lectures were, indeed, merely short courses or demonstrations on the principal surgical operations,—their history and their different modes of performance,—a view of surgery, at once narrow and unjust. Dr Thomson was among the first who recognised and showed the necessity of establishing the teaching of surgery on a more extensive and stable foundation, and who supplied the serious defect that had existed in the education of surgeons, by delivering a complete course of lectures on surgery, presenting a systematic view of surgical anatomy, surgical pathology, and surgical operations. In these lectures the student found not only ample and correct information on surgical anatomy, but what was nowhere else given, either in a satisfactory manner or in any form at all, a large amount of information, often entirely new, on the pathological his-

tory of surgical diseases. He impressed on his pupils the necessity of studying well the phenomena and progress of those diseases which the surgeon is expected to treat; of discovering their natural tendencies and terminations; and of ascertaining, if possible, how much or how little they require of manual, or proper surgical, interference. He always studied also to distinguish and appreciate the exact influence of remedies and operations; and it is believed that his example has tended more than that of any individual to diminish the number of operations, and to direct the minds of practitioners to the great use of medical treatment in surgical diseases, and to the value of what has been called medical surgery. In short, his course upon surgery was unequalled in importance and judicious selection; and when students found how much information was communicated in an interesting manner in these lectures, they became indispensable to every one who desired to qualify himself for the conscientious discharge of his professional duties.

Dr Thomson devoted much attention in his course to the diseases and injuries of the arteries and veins, to the pathological history of aneurism, to the subject of injuries of the head, to the anatomico-pathological history of hernia, to the pathological history of calculous and urinary affections, and to that of diseases of the joints; and all his pupils, who were competent to judge of his instructions at the time of receiving them, or who have since remembered them, will be able to bear testimony to the novelty as well as accuracy of his information, and to the high value of these lectures.

It was not only, however, as an instructor who communicated correct and useful information, that Dr Thomson showed his pupils what surgical pathology really is, and what the scientific surgeon ought to be. By examining not only opinions, hypotheses, and theories, but facts and statements of facts in the spirit of candid criticism and inquiry, he taught his pupils to observe, to think, and to reason for themselves; and by setting them the example of original and vigorous yet perfectly logical reasoning, he laboured to train their minds to that species of mental exercise, which is of all others the most useful to the medical practitioner, —the faculty of estimating the true value of medical doctrines, and the actual merits of various remedial measures.

His lectures on syphilis and the use of mercury, and the progressive but decided course which he adopted in demonstrating the pernicious effects of this fancied remedy, form a most conspicuous era in the history of modern pathology and therapeutics. Though several other practitioners had already begun to doubt whether mercury was really remedial in this disease; and both Mr Abernethy and Mr Pearson had, by describing affections which they

termed pseudo-syphilis, attempted to put the profession on their guard against the indiscriminate and lavish use of this mineral, and a dear friend now no more, the late Dr Burder, had in a very valuable dissertation shown the detrimental effects with which its employment was in many instances followed; yet to Dr Thomson, by directing attention to the natural history of the disease, and trying how far it was practicable to cure it on general principles, belongs the merit of showing more decidedly and clearly than any of his predecessors had done, that the use of the mineral was not only in many instances hurtful, but in a very large proportion of cases totally unnecessary. These gentlemen said that the mineral was too largely and indiscriminately given; they still allowed that a small quantity of mercury was useful and necessary. Dr Thomson showed that the disease might be cured without the aid of mercury; that, in many cases, when this mineral seemed to cure, it merely produced a temporary amelioration which would disappear in a short time, leaving the patient in a worse condition than that in which he previously was; and that the cures or recoveries effected without its aid were, in the aggregate, more permanent and more complete than those in which it had been used.

Dr Thomson had established the practice of teaching surgery in separate courses on a foundation so firm and stable, that it was soon adopted by several able instructors. Students found that they could not obtain the necessary information in this branch of study, without attending such a separate course; and the different boards followed the example set by the College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, by requiring such attendance on the part of candidates for their licences. Of this great and beneficial change in surgical education, Dr Thomson must be regarded as the originator; and whatever benefit has thereby accrued to the profession and the public must be ascribed mainly, if not solely, to his sagacious discernment of what was required by the actual state of surgical science. To us it always appeared singular that in the university of Edinburgh, no provision for teaching this important branch of medical education was made, till, by his influence and at his suggestion, a professorship was established by the government then in office, so late as 1831. If it was requisite to teach the practice of medicine in a separate course of lectures, not less necessary surely was it to devote a distinct course to the principles and practice of surgery.

Of the effect of Dr Thomson's surgical lectures on the students, an eye-witness gives the following account.

"It was in the winter of 1815 and 1816 that I attended the lectures of Dr Thomson. At that time, partly from the great enthusiasm felt in the study of medicine and surgery, partly from the great number of army and navy surgeons who came to

Edinburgh to renew or complete their studies, the number of medical students was great and annually increasing. The lecture-room was crowded daily to its greatest capacity. There must have been at least 250 or 280 auditors, and of these about 50 or 60 were men who had been in the service of the country for ten or fifteen years. During lecture every one listened with the deepest attention and interest, eager to carry away every word of the discourse, which was always animated and often eloquent. The impression it produced was evinced by the conversations and discussions that ensued after lecture. The army and navy surgeons especially used almost invariably to carry on a keen discussion on the merits of the various doctrines propounded in the lecture; and these discussions were often continued or revived in the Medical Society, or in the clinical wards of the Royal Infirmary. The proper treatment of gunshot wounds, the comparative advantages of primary and secondary amputation, the causes of traumatic tetanus, traumatic gangrene, and hospital gangrene, all formed points on which every individual present was induced to state his opinions, and the results of what he had himself seen and done. These discussions among the army and navy surgeons were often of great use to the mere student, by making him think, read, and inquire, and thereby leading him to increase his knowledge, and render it precise; and all this intellectual exertion was unquestionably to be ascribed to the influence of the surgical lectures of Dr Thomson."

But the course of lectures delivered by Dr Thomson was valuable, not simply as a body of chirurgical instruction. From the method of arrangement which he adopted, and the subjects of which he treated, it followed that much information on medical pathology was communicated. Hence not only were his lectures on inflammation equally useful to the physician as to the surgeon, but his lectures on cutaneous diseases, on injuries of the head, on wounds of the chest, on hernia, and on syphilis, led him to communicate a large amount of information of the utmost value and interest to the physician.

Thus in his lectures on cutaneous diseases, besides taking a full review of the more chronic or local affections of the skin, he considered carefully the history and pathology of the acute eruptions;—measles, scarlet-fever, small-pox, and chicken-pox, and the important subjects of vaccination and the modified forms of small-pox. His lectures on cutaneous diseases, indeed, gave the only accurate view of the subject at that time taught, and first brought before students the distinctions of Willan and Bateman.

In his lectures on injuries of the head, he considered carefully the alleged distinctions between the symptoms of concussion and compression, the subject of cerebral inflammation, and of apoplectic and epileptic symptoms, and he was among the first in this

country to distinguish the peculiar disease since denominated softening of the brain.

Again, in treating of wounds and injuries of the chest, his mode of considering the injuries of the lungs, the larynx, and the windpipe, led him to speak of the various diseases of these organs for which operations are required ; and in lecturing on aneurism, he introduced an account of the diseases of the large vessels and the heart, which was the only one then given in Edinburgh, and on all of these subjects the information he communicated was new, accurate, and interesting.

Lastly, in treating of wounds and injuries of the abdomen and intestines, and of the diseases of these parts requiring surgical operation, Dr Thomson took occasion to consider the subjects of abdominal and intestinal inflammation and obstruction, of ileus arising from internal causes, of intestinal concretions and tumours, thus passing in review various diseased states with which it is of the utmost importance for the physician to possess a perfect acquaintance.

From these circumstances it resulted that the course of Dr Thomson, indispensable to the well-educated surgeon, was not less necessary to the physician ; and hence there were few physicians at that time educated in Edinburgh who did not feel the importance of attending these lectures with the utmost regularity. Dr Thomson, indeed, evinced as intimate a knowledge of medical diseases, and especially of those depending on organic changes, as of those falling under the proper management of the surgeon ; and he was destined to exemplify, in his own case, the principle, that the practitioner who is trained fully and sufficiently in surgical pathology, necessarily becomes acquainted with medical pathology, and that, however the arts may be disjoined in practice, in study they must be conjoined and made to assist each other.

In the summer of 1814, availing himself of the termination of the war to execute a purpose he had long had at heart, Dr Thomson, accompanied by his young friends, Dr Robert Renton, now of Edinburgh, and Dr Thomas M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie, now of Newcastle-under-Lyne, made a tour for the purpose of examining into the state of medicine in the different schools of Europe. " In the course of this journey," says Dr Renton, " we visited France, Italy, Austria, Saxony, Prussia, Hanover, and Holland. Dr Thomson examined minutely into the modes of medical and surgical practice followed in the public hospitals of those countries. His practical knowledge of diseases, and his extensive acquaintance with the works of the best medical writers of the different countries through which we passed, procured for him everywhere the respect and attentions of the teachers and practitioners of medicine, and facilitated great-

ly the attainment of the objects which he had in view. The minute accuracy, also, with which he examined the anatomical and pathological collections, at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris, at Pavia, Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Halle, Gottingen, Amsterdam, and Leyden, evinced an ardour in his researches which I and my fellow-traveller, well as we knew Dr Thomson's zeal in professional pursuits, could not observe but with feelings of surprise and admiration."

In the ensuing summer he again returned to the continent, with a different object, but one not less indicative of his anxiety for professional improvement. "Upon hearing of the result of the battle of Waterloo," as he has himself said, "I immediately resolved to proceed to Belgium, that I might have an opportunity of observing the medical and surgical condition of the men who had been wounded in that battle. My friend Dr Somerville, principal medical officer in Scotland, to whom I communicated my intentions, instantly formed the wish of accompanying me thither, and gave me encouragement to hope that the medical board would not disapprove of the objects which we had in view, in wishing to visit the different military hospitals in Belgium. We had the satisfaction to find, on arriving in London, that the Director-General approved warmly of our intentions, and was disposed to afford us every assistance in his power to carry them into execution. Dr Somerville accordingly received a letter from the medical board, accepting his offers of service, and containing instructions and recommendations with regard to me, in every respect calculated to procure the opportunities of observation which I so much desired. We left London on the 4th and arrived in Brussels on the 8th of July; and, conformably with the instructions which he had received, Dr Somerville reported himself, and introduced me to the senior medical officers there, Mr Gunning and Dr M'Niel. We made known to these gentlemen our desire to visit the different military hospitals under their charge, and to have an opportunity of observing the condition of the wounded whom these hospitals contained. They received us with the cordiality of friends, entered readily into our views, and introduced us without delay to the other officers who composed the medical staff at Brussels. By these officers we were everywhere received with the most flattering marks of attention; they did everything in their power to forward our examination of the wounded; and by their frank, open, and liberal communications on the individual cases of their patients, facilitated greatly the attainment of the objects of our inquiry."

The duty which he had thus zealously undertaken, Dr Thomson most faithfully and laboriously discharged. "On the late occasion of the severe action in Flanders," says Sir J. M'Grigor, "he was the only one of the three gentlemen then honoured with acting

appointments, who devoted himself entirely to the professional duties for the relief of the wounded; and the testimonials which reached me of the services he rendered both to the patients and to the medical staff by his advice were most gratifying." "At Brussels, after the battle of Waterloo," says Deputy-Inspector Irwin, "I knew you to be consulted on every case of moment, and you never failed to convey the most satisfactory information and useful advice, both as physician and surgeon, which your judgment and research so qualified you to communicate." "I have had the comfort and gratification," says Deputy-Inspector Gordon, "of experiencing the benefit of your able counsel and advice at the bed-side, on many important and trying occasions, in the hospitals of the wounded at Brussels. On this subject I need only say, that as I appreciated them highly at the time, so do I still feel gratitude and complacency at the recollection of the advantages derived from your assistance and co-operation." "When I first had the pleasure of your acquaintance at Brussels in 1815," says Deputy-Inspector Hennen, "I was struck, in common with every officer of the staff, with the enthusiastic zeal and indefatigable attention with which you investigated the wounds, and the endemic and other diseases which at that time abounded in the military hospitals. And I can never forget the professional emulation which you excited among the junior officers,—the friendly and unpretending style in which you communicated information,—and the ready and available assistance which you offered to us all."

Shortly after his arrival at Brussels, Dr Thomson was apprised by a communication from the Secretary of the Army Medical Board, that, on being made acquainted with the disinterested manner in which he had resolved to proceed to the Netherlands, for the purpose of assisting the wounded in the late glorious battles, they had deemed it advisable to submit to H. R. H. the Commander-in-Chief, the advantage that might be derived from his accepting the appointment of acting staff-surgeon; and the Director-General having accordingly recommended this measure, H. R. H. had been pleased to approve of it, in a full assurance of the benefits that would result to the service from the exercise of his talents in the military hospitals. On his way home from Belgium, Dr Thomson conceived the idea of applying for a continuation of his appointment as an army surgeon, on the understanding that he should be attached to the military hospitals in Edinburgh. His position as Professor of Military Surgery had made him long regard a connection with the military hospitals as highly desirable; but he had recently come to attach to such an appointment the greatest importance from the opportunities it was calculated to afford him of prosecuting his inquiries into the necessity and expediency of the administration of mercury in the treatment of syphilitic diseases, a subject which

for several years previously he had been prosecuting in the necessarily circumscribed field of private practice. He accordingly addressed a memorial to the Duke of York, praying for the permanent appointment of surgeon to the forces. The memorial was referred to the director-general of the army medical department, who returned it with the expression of his hope that the Commander-in-Chief would be pleased to honour this request with H. R. H.'s sanction. "Being strongly impressed," the director-general added, "with the opinion that great and permanent advantage may be derived from the employment of Dr Thomson, and from the public being enabled to avail itself of his talents in forwarding the education of students intended for the army, and perfecting those already holding appointments in it in the higher branches of scientific surgery, I beg leave most respectfully to recommend for the approbation of H. R. H. the Commander-in-Chief, that Dr John Thomson may be appointed surgeon to the forces." The appointment accordingly took place.

On his return to Edinburgh, Dr Thomson occupied himself in reducing the observations which he had made in the British military hospitals in Belgium into the shape of a Report, which he published in the following year, along with a very valuable discourse upon Amputation. This report he inscribed to the Duke of York, by whom his services had been viewed in so gracious a manner. The great variety of important surgical topics concisely but forcibly handled in this report, show how much Dr Thomson was at home in this department of the healing art; and how diligently he must have availed himself of the comparatively limited opportunities occurring in civil practice for making himself acquainted with the more immediate and more remote effects of injuries and wounds of every description.

It is not to be supposed that so signal a mark of favour as had thus been conferred on Dr Thomson could fail to excite jealousy in some quarter or other; and, accordingly, much pains was taken to convey to the mind of the secretary at war, by anonymous communications, an impression of the impropriety of the appointment he had received. In the beginning of 1817, the secretary at war having indicated a disposition to recal his commission, Dr Thomson submitted to the Director-General the following statement. "You are not ignorant what share of my time, since my return to Edinburgh, has been employed in official military medical duties; but I beg leave to state for the information of the secretary at war, that, in addition to these, in the winter session of 1815-16, I gave admission without fee to my lectures upon the Principles and Practice of Surgery to 18 medical officers belonging to the army, and to 62 medical officers belonging to the navy; and that in the summer session of 1816, I delivered, without fee, a course of lectures on Military Surgery, which was attended by



110 students, of whom 17 belonged to the army and 28 to the navy; and that this winter I have given out 51 gratis tickets for each of my courses of lectures to medical officers of the army, and 53 to those of the navy. Further, you are aware that the depot hospital, which has been under my charge since March last, and the hospital of the 92d regiment at present in Edinburgh Castle, have been open to the medical officers of the army for the purpose of instruction under my superintendence; and that I have been, and am at present, employed during this winter in giving clinical lectures, on the cases admitted into these hospitals, to the medical officers attending there."

It was under such a surveillance as is here adverted to, of gentlemen who had been engaged for longer or shorter periods in medical practice in the public service, that Dr Thomson conducted his trials, in the military hospital under his immediate charge, of the treatment of syphilis without mercury. On this subject nothing was ever published by him, besides a very short paper communicated, towards the latter end of 1817, in the shape of a letter to the late Dr Duncan, Jun., and inserted by him in the 53d Number of this Journal. From that paper we shall make two extracts, as explanatory of the progress of Dr Thomson's own mind in this inquiry, and as showing that his course of procedure was independent of what—as he ascertained in prosecuting his investigations—had been previously done by some other practitioners.

"I was led, many years ago, by a careful investigation into the history of syphilis, and by having had occasion to see a considerable number of anomalous and untractable cases, treated by full, but ineffectual courses of mercury, to doubt the justness of the opinion so generally received, that mercury, in some one or other of its forms, is the only safe, effectual, and specific remedy for the cure of that disease. These doubts were much increased by the discussions to which the various communications made to the late Dr Beddoes gave rise, respecting the efficacy of nitric acid in venereal complaints; by the appearance of Mr Abernethy's valuable publication on the diseases resembling syphilis; and by conversations, at different times, with my friend Mr Pearson of the Lock Hospital, as well as by the perusal of notes taken from his excellent lectures upon that subject. In the uncertainty in which I was respecting the proper diagnostic marks of constitutional syphilis, I resolved, in the treatment of those cases that should come under my care, in which mercury had had a full trial, and particularly in which it seemed to have produced injurious effects, to abstain altogether from prescribing that remedy, till a trial should be made of some of the other remedies which had at different times acquired reputation for the cure of venereal complaints. That which I made choice of was the simple decoction of sarsaparilla; and, after a very ample employment of this substance, I

feel myself compelled to adopt the opinions of some of the earlier writers on the venereal disease, with regard to the singular efficacy of this root in curing symptoms which have usually been reputed syphilitic; and also, with a few exceptions, to believe in the justness of the conclusions to which the late Sir William Fordyce had been led from an extensive trial of sarsaparilla. I have employed this remedy in every form of the disease, which either remains after, or succeeds to, the use of mercury, and have had the satisfaction to observe all manner of cutaneous eruptions and ulcerations, ulcerations of the throat, pains and swellings of the joints and ligaments, and nodes of the bones, gradually disappear under its mild operation, when its use was duly persisted in, and was, at the same time, accompanied by attention to regimen, and to proper local treatment. In particular cases, the recovery has been tedious, and it has been necessary to have recourse to the use of the sarsaparilla a second, or even a third time. I may, however, remark, that I have never had occasion to see the venereal diseases in which it was employed make those rapid and alarming advances which we see so often occur in them during the use of mercury; nor am I aware of any permanently injurious effects which the sarsaparilla produces, either immediately, or remotely, upon the constitution."

And, again, "In the want of an accurate diagnostic symptom between syphilitic chancre and ordinary ulceration, and often also from the situation of a patient, upon his first applying to me, rendering it improper for him to undergo a course of mercury, I had for many years frequently been induced to treat Primary venereal sores with simple local remedies. The great number of these sores which disappeared under this treatment, some with, and others without the formation of bubo, and many of them possessing all the characters usually attributed to syphilitic chancre, rendered me extremely desirous to ascertain whether there be indeed any primary venereal sores which are not capable of being healed without the use of mercury. An opportunity for bringing this matter to the test of public experiment has been afforded me in the practice of the Consolidated Dépôt Hospital in Edinburgh Castle, to the charge of which, through the kindness of the Director General of the Army Medical Department, I was appointed in March 1816. In this hospital, open to the inspection of all the medical military officers attending the university, I have, since that period, carefully abstained from the employment of mercury, not only in the treatment of secondary, but also in that of the primary symptoms of syphilis, and have found that chancre and bubo have in every instance disappeared under an antiphlogistic regimen, rest in the horizontal position, and mild local applications, as speedily as I had ever seen them disappear in similar

cases in which mercury was employed. In the management of these cases, I have had the able assistance of Hospital Mate Macgibbon, and of Assistant Staff-Surgeon Blackadder.

“The mild manner in which both chancres and suppurating buboes were observed to heal under this treatment in the Depôt Hospital, induced the late Mr Hicks to follow a similar practice in the treatment of the men, affected with syphilis, of the 92d Regiment, at that time stationed in Edinburgh Castle. The results which this gentleman obtained in the cases so treated, and which I had an opportunity of seeing until the regiment marched for Ireland in April 1817, were precisely similar to those which I had obtained in the Depôt Hospital.

“In the course of reporting the cases in these hospitals for my clinical lectures on military medicine, I was surprised to be informed, in February 1817, by Mr Kenning, resident surgeon of the Ordnance Medical Department, that a practice similar to that which I was following in syphilitic cases had been employed for a considerable period (I have reason to believe even some time previously to my appointment to the Depôt Hospital) by Mr Rose, surgeon of the Coldstream Guards, and I was happy to learn that the results of his practice were similar to mine.

“Soon after this period, on the 88th Regiment arriving here from France to replace the 92d, I found, that, in consequence of communications from London, the medical officers of this regiment had begun a short time before to treat all their syphilitic cases without mercury; and since that time, up to the present date, I have had an opportunity of seeing a very great number of syphilitic cases in this regiment treated in this manner, with uniform success, under the judicious management of Surgeon Johnston and Assistant-Surgeon Bartlett.

“In private practice I have followed a similar mode of treatment in a great number of syphilitic cases, many of which were seen by my friend Mr Turner, who for several years lived with me, and assisted me in my practice; and, in treating these cases, I have obtained results in all respects similar to those stated to have taken place in the military hospitals.”

That a practice so strongly opposed to what was considered as about the best established position in medicine, the utility and necessity of mercury in the treatment of diseases truly syphilitic, should find ready credence, among those particularly who had been long engaged in giving practical effect to the opposite persuasion, was not to be expected. Various attempts accordingly were made to decry the practice recommended by Dr Thomson as a wild innovation, fraught with the greatest danger to the sufferers affected by syphilis; and he had occasionally to complain that some of the opponents of his procedure were not very scrupulous as to the

accuracy of the facts by which they sought to impugn it. It was in reference to some such misrepresentations that his friend, Sir A. Cooper, wrote him the following note.

“MY DEAR SIR,—It is reported in London that many of your cases of syphilis are now labouring under secondary symptoms. As I do not choose to mention this without your authority, I trust you will excuse the trouble I give you in requesting your answer to this inquiry. Believe me, yours truly, ASTLEY COOPER.” To this communication Dr Thomson instantly returned the following reply.

“MY DEAR SIR,—In reply to your letter of this morning, I beg leave to say that nothing has occurred with regard to syphilis, within my observation, that is in any respect inconsistent with the printed statement which I sent you, some time ago, of the cases treated here without mercury. The reports, therefore, to which you allude must have had their origin either in ignorance or in malice.

“No case of chancre or bubo has resisted the non-mercurial treatment, and buboes in particular have appeared to me to heal much more kindly without than with mercury.

“Of the Eruptions which have occurred, the proportion has not hitherto been greater than that which I have stated in my paper: a considerable number of them have disappeared in a very short period of time; in a few cases they have been obstinate, and in their progress have exhibited a variety of appearances; but, though obstinate, they have all run their course without ulceration, and have yielded without its being necessary to have recourse to mercury.

“Affections of the Throat are not, according to my observation, so frequent in their occurrence after the treatment without mercury as when mercury has been employed. I have seen no deep or foul ulcer of the throat, and no sloughing nor mortification in any of the cases which have occurred. The amygdalæ swell in these cases, and they may be said to be excoriated or apthous rather than ulcerated.

“As to affections of the Bones, I know of but two instances which can be fairly considered as examples of the occurrence of these from syphilis where no mercury has been employed; they were in both cases seated on the forehead, and have occurred since I published my report. In one, the affection yielded very speedily to the application of a blister and the use of sarsaparilla. In the other case, the patient, an officer, was put on the use of mercury at his own request, I believe, without any trial being made either of blisters or sarsaparilla.

“What number of nodous affections may occur in those who are treated without mercury, and whether mercury will be required

for their removal, it is in vain for us at present to conjecture. Time and experience can alone reveal this to us; but I may remark to you, that, since the year 1806, I have not given mercury in any case of node, the treatment of which has been left entirely to myself; and, when the disease had not previously proceeded to caries or necrosis, I have not seen it ultimately resist the use of sarsaparilla and blisters. These, of course, were all cases in which mercury had previously been employed. I have treated in the same manner, and with equal success, a very great number of deep foul ulcerations of the throat and ulcerations of the cutaneous texture, which have succeeded at very different intervals of time to venereal affections treated with mercury.

“ This is all that at present occurs to me to say in answer to your letter; but as I know you love your profession, and desire above all things the discovery of truth in it, I am assured that you will think well of the trials of the non-mercurial practice which are being made in the military hospitals, under the superintendence of the most active, intelligent, and enlightened medical officer that has ever held the place of Director-General. Whether, from the investigation which has just been entered upon, it shall ultimately be found advisable to administer mercury for the cure of syphilis, and whether, in the event of the use of this medicine being found to be advisable, it will be better to employ it in the first or in the secondary stages of the disease, are, I conceive, legitimate subjects of inquiry, concerning which very little satisfactory information is to be found in the past records of our art. From the trials I have myself made, and seen others make, I am fully satisfied that not a single individual has hitherto been injured, and that, on the contrary, many, particularly persons of scrofulous constitutions, have been saved much evil, by abstaining, during the treatment of syphilitic complaints, from the use of mercury. Be assured that if I should ever see anything contrary to this in practice, I shall feel myself bound in honour and duty to state it, not only to my private friends, but to the public; and I think I may do this the more readily, that I never pledged myself for anything besides the accuracy of the statements which, in order to attract attention to the subject, and to secure my share of a claim to which I conceive myself entitled, I was induced to make public.”

Dr Thomson had returned from the continent in 1814, strongly impressed with the advantage, both to the sick and diseased poor, and to the medical school in Edinburgh, that might arise from the establishment in this city of an efficiently conducted dispensary. This led to the institution of the present New Town Dispensary, which, at its commencement, met with a vehemence of opposition, of which, at the present day, it is difficult to form any conception. The gentlemen engaged in the design found it ne-

cessary to lay before the public a detailed statement of facts, which, if we mistake not, was chiefly prepared by Dr Thomson. The simple fact that the number of patients admitted to the benefits of this institution, from its first establishment in September 1815 to 31st December 1844, was 229,020, of whom the number visited at their own houses was 97,819, contains the best practical refutation of the allegation then strenuously urged of its being unnecessary; and nothing, certainly, has since occurred in the history of the other charitable medical institutions of Edinburgh to justify the apprehension then so loudly expressed, of its being calculated to be prejudicial to them. We scarcely think we are attributing too much to the influence of Dr Thomson's example upon the gentlemen with whom he was associated in this measure, when we say that, had not his professional zeal been equalled by his moral courage, the New Town Dispensary would have been strangled at its birth.

In 1818, another occasion occurred for testing his moral courage in the cause of humanity. In the course of the previous year, principally through the instrumentality of his friend and former pupil, Dr Gordon, an inquiry was set on foot as to certain defects in the economical treatment of the patients in the Royal Infirmary. This inquiry gave great offence to the managers, a very influential portion of the community, and to their friends. Previously to the meeting of the Court of Contributors at which the Report of the Committee of Inquiry was to be considered, Dr Thomson drew up and published, in the form of a letter to the Court of Contributors, a summary of the results of the investigation. At the meeting, the managers' party mustered in overpowering numbers. Whoever attempted to speak on the opposite side was overpowered by clamour; whilst a very high functionary was listened to in a lengthened oration, in which he censured, in no measured terms, the conduct of those who had been in any way instrumental in the inquiry; and particularly vituperated the author of the letter to the Court of Contributors. When the meeting, at which Dr Thomson had not been present, was over, a general feeling prevailed that this speech had not been met as it should have been; and deeply participating in this feeling, Dr Thomson set about the preparation of a second letter to the Court of Contributors, in which he went into a full examination of the arguments by which the honourable manager had endeavoured to set aside the report of the Committee, and the recorded evidence on which it was founded. These two letters appeared without his name. In the "Advertisement" to the second letter, he says, "The author of the following letter is fully aware of the well-founded prejudice which exists with regard to anonymous publications, and his name certainly should not have been withheld, could he imagine it would have added any weight to that side of the question respect-

ing the late inquiry into the state of the Royal Infirmary, which he has felt himself compelled, by an imperious sense of duty, to adopt. But in delivering his opinions with the freedom which the nature of the subject seemed to him to require, he is conscious that he has endeavoured to avoid everything which might give offence to those connected with the management of that institution; and he trusts that he has in no respect expressed himself differently from what he would have done had he judged it proper to subscribe his name to this or to his former letter." But though appearing anonymously, it is believed that the source from which these letters proceeded was very generally understood. What share they may have had in strengthening prejudices which led in a few years afterwards, as we shall presently see, to Dr Thomson's exclusion from the place in the university to which the voice and the interests of the public loudly called him, it would perhaps be vain to conjecture. It is extremely gratifying, however, to know, that not only have the greater part, if not indeed the whole of the economical arrangements recommended by the committee of inquiry, and enforced by Dr Thomson in his two letters, been since adopted in the Royal Infirmary, but that changes pointed out by them in the constitution of the management have been introduced, which, by placing that management more under public control, have secured for the institution a much larger share of public support than it had ever previously received.

In the course of 1817-18 commenced an epidemic of small-pox in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland, which for a succession of years engaged a large share of Dr Thomson's attention, compelling him to abandon the pleasing conviction he had up to that time entertained of cow-pock being an absolute preventative of small-pox, though it left him fully convinced of its possessing extraordinary powers in modifying the severity of that disease when occurring in persons previously vaccinated; and leading him to the persuasion that the distinction between small-pox and chicken-pox, established by Heberden, and since generally admitted, is erroneous.

The results of much personal observation of the disease, and of much reading, were communicated to the public in two volumes, viz. the "Account of the Varioloid Epidemic," &c. published in 1820, and in his "Historical Sketch," &c. published in 1822.

The opponents of vaccination had, from an early period of the practice, brought forward examples of what they regarded as the occurrence of small-pox subsequent to cow-pock; and represented this as an overwhelming objection to placing confidence in that practice as a preventative of small-pox. The champions of vaccination, on the other hand, had denied that such an objection lay to the practice; alleging that what had been represented as cases of

small-pox, occurring subsequently to vaccination, were actually cases of chicken-pox, and not of small-pox. By degrees, however, they were coming to be compelled to acknowledge the reality of this occurrence, and these reluctant acknowledgments were well calculated to lead both themselves and the public into the persuasion, that, as the opponents of vaccination had proved correct as to their facts, so also they were correct as to their inferences, and that the practice of vaccination was not deserving of the confidence it had acquired as a preventative of small-pox.

It was, we think, in a very considerable degree, if not mainly, by Dr Thomson's labours that the profession and the public escaped from falling into what would, practically, have been a most unfortunate error. These labours clearly established that what was happening in the case of cow-pock, had previously happened in the case of small-pox, whether natural or inoculated; that is to say, that the persons who had passed through one attack of that disease had been liable to one if not more subsequent attacks of the same disease; just as those who had passed through cow-pock were now found to be liable to a subsequent attack of small-pox; but that though in neither case is there absolute exemption from the occurrence of small-pox, the general rule is, that the secondary attack of small-pox in the one case, and the attack of small-pox after vaccination in the other case, is greatly milder than a primary attack of small-pox; and his personal observations even led to a conclusion far more favourable to vaccination than could *a priori* have been anticipated, viz. that small-pox occurring in those who have previously passed through cow-pock is on the whole a much milder disease than small-pox occurring in those who have previously passed through small-pox.

In the concluding part of his historical sketch, written at a late period of 1821, Dr Thomson mentions that, since June 1818, 836 cases of the varioloid epidemic had come under his observation. "Of the whole number, 281 have occurred in individuals who had neither had small-pox nor cow-pox, and of these fully more than one in four have died; 71 had previously passed through small-pox, and of these two have died; and 484 had undergone the process of vaccination, and of this number one only has died, results which evince," he observes, "beyond the power of cavil, the beneficial effects of vaccination in protecting the human constitution from the dangers of small-pox, and the great advantages which must ultimately arise from the universal adoption of this practice."

In finding himself compelled to admit that some of the small-pox-like, or varioloid, cases which occur after vaccination actually proceed from small-pox contagion, and cannot be got rid of, as he and other advocates of vaccination had been wont



to suppose, on the plea of their being cases of chicken-pox, Dr Thomson was naturally led to inquire how it had happened that he and others had failed to recognise their true small-pox nature, and had set them down as cases of chicken-pox; and the conclusion at which he arrived was, that there was a fundamental error in Dr Heberden's recognition of chicken-pox as a disease distinct from small-pox, and that, in point of fact, what had been established as a generically or specifically distinct disease, is only one of the many varieties which small-pox, as it occurs under various modifying influences, is liable to exhibit in its external characters. It is not the purpose of this memoir to discuss or to vindicate the correctness of Dr Thomson's medical opinions, but, we believe, we may safely say, that the number of believers in the separate and independent existence of chicken-pox as a distinct disease from small-pox, is already very much reduced, and that, under the progress of time and observation, it is likely to become still more diminished, if not entirely to disappear.

The labour which Dr Thomson went through in the prosecution of this inquiry, the almost entire possession which it took of his mind for a long period of time, can be conceived only by those who were witnesses of it. Independently of the interest and importance of the investigation, Dr Thomson had unquestionably a very powerful stimulus in preparing his two works on this subject for the public, in his desire of rendering them worthy instruments of associating his own name with that of Sir James M'Grigor, to whom they were dedicated—a gentleman to whom he felt himself attached by obligations of which he could make no other acknowledgment besides that of cherishing them, as he did to the last hour of his life, in the most grateful remembrance.

In connection with the subject of cow-pock and small-pox, it is proper here to notice a short letter from Dr Thomson to the late Dr Duncan, which appeared in the 21st volume of this Journal, (p. 92,) in which he suggests, that the well-known test-pock of Mr Bryce bears the same relation to the primary cow-pox which secondary small-pox bear to primary small-pox; that cow-pox modify cow-pox as small-pox modify small-pox; and these diseases produce each a diminutive or spurious pock in being reciprocally modified by one another; and that if medical men previously to the introduction of vaccination gave the name of variella to varioloid eruptions, many of which we have reason to believe were cases of secondary small-pox, we may now, with equal propriety, give the name of vaccinella to secondary cow-pox. These analogies, he adds, between small-pox and cow-pox, are as curious in a speculative, as they are important in a practical point of view.

In the summer of 1819, Dr Thomson delivered a course of

lectures on the diseases of the eye, partly systematic and partly what is usually, though inaccurately, termed clinical,—the patients affected with eye diseases who applied for advice at the New Town Dispensary being transferred to his class-room, and other means being used for bringing together illustrative cases. In Edinburgh, at that time, there did not exist any separate institution for the treatment of this class of diseases, and no separate course of lectures for its consideration had been previously delivered. Dr Thomson's inducement to undertake this course was, it is believed, his desire and hope that it should be continued by his pupil and esteemed friend, Dr Tweedie, whose early removal to London frustrated this expectation. There can be no doubt, however, that this course paved the way to the institution, five years later, (1824,) of the present Eye Dispensary, as well as at a subsequent period, (1834,) to that of the Eye Infirmary, the senior surgeon of which (Dr Watson) always refers to the course of lectures delivered by Dr Thomson in the summer of 1819, as having first directed his attention in a special manner to this department of practice, in which he has justly attained great eminence. Dr Thomson had, throughout his whole professional career, bestowed much study and attention on the diseases of the eye, and seems at more than one period to have entertained serious thoughts of selecting them as a special department of practice. Amongst his correspondence is found a letter from Dr De Carro, well known as an early promoter of the practice of vaccination upon the continent, and who was then resident in Vienna, giving an account of the celebrated living oculists of that capital, and advising his friend in what way he would be able to derive the largest amount of benefit from their instructions; and, in letters written by himself from London in 1803, he repeatedly speaks of the diseases of the eye as being likely to be the first professional subject on which he would venture to appear before the public as an author.

In the spring of the same year, (1819,) on the death of Dr Rutherford, the Professor of Botany and Medicine in the University, Dr Thomson had offered himself to the Town-Council as a candidate for the vacant chair. At the same time he suggested that, in the event of the patrons wishing to secure for the chair of botany the services of a distinguished cultivator of that branch of science, not belonging to the medical profession,—its medical duties, including that of delivering clinical lectures in medicine, might advantageously be transferred to a chair of surgery, for which, in the event of its being created, he purposed to be a candidate. This application was without result. It is not easy to say what would have been the consequence on Dr Thomson's subsequent

career, had it been successful, to the extent of obtaining for him the botanical chair ;—whether the attractions of the study of the vegetable economy would have gained the ascendancy over his mind, and withdrawn him from the active cultivation of medical science ; or whether the improved opening which the medical duties of the chair would have afforded him to the study, practice, and teaching of physic, would only have enabled him to enter with increased advantages on the career of medical exertion, which was then opening before him.

However this may be, Dr Thomson being now comparatively little engaged in the practice of surgery, and that only in the way of consultation, had become desirous to transfer his energies as a teacher to a new field. His connection with the university, however, so long as it continued, debarred him from delivering any course that could be considered in the light of competition to any of those delivered by his colleagues. The history and treatment of Organic Diseases was a department of medical science which his habits of pathological investigation had especially prepared him to teach ; and though not one, attendance upon a special course of which was required by any of the public boards, on the part of candidates for their licences, he hoped to be able to render such a course attractive, particularly by extending in it a practice he had pursued to a considerable extent in his course of surgery, that, namely, of illustrating the various diseased appearances of the different organs of the body by coloured delineations. With this view he secured the services of Dr Carswell, whose singular talents for the representation of morbid structure have since been so advantageously manifested, not only in the large collections of drawings which he executed successively for Dr Thomson and for the University College in London, but in his published “*Illustrations of the Elementary Forms of Disease.*”

The benefits that might result from the application of coloured delineations to the representation of diseases, were fully pointed out by Professor Delius in his “*Meditatio de Iconibus Pathologico-Anatomicis ad Naturam pictis,*” published at Erlangen in 1782. But though, in some particular departments, and especially in the illustration of the diseases of the eye and of the skin, advantage had been taken of this mode of representation, the idea of applying it, in a systematic course, to the elucidation of the whole range of diseases, does not seem ever to have been entertained by any teacher, previously to the bold conception of Dr Thomson. It is scarcely necessary to remark what important benefits have resulted to pathological science from his engagement of Dr Carswell in this design. Had it had no other consequence besides that of training Dr Carswell himself to an intimate acquaintance with morbid anatomy, to the promotion

of which his personal observations and labours have furnished very large and important contributions, it would have conferred a most valuable service. But when we look to the numerous works on morbid anatomy, illustrated by coloured delineations, which have since appeared, and consider how much both the preparation and the publication of these works have tended to the promotion of pathology, we cannot fail to regard this as another instance, in addition to the many which Dr Thomson's history affords, of the beneficial effects resulting to science from a new direction being given to the labours of its cultivators, by an impulse from a judicious and intelligent mind.

In the year 1821, Dr Gregory died, and Dr Thomson, along with many others, offered himself as a candidate for the vacant chair of the Practice of Physic in the University. In that application he was most nobly supported. His early instructors, his fellow students, his pupils, his professional brethren, all combined in furnishing a body of testimony in his favour which left the Town-Council,—who are patrons of the chair,—no room for difficulty. “Most of these,” said Dr Thomson himself, in transmitting a portion of his testimonials to the patrons, “are from individuals who have themselves been employed in teaching branches of medical science; and all of them from men of such worth and eminence, that, as it is my highest pride to have obtained their good opinion, so it shall be the study of my life to endeavour to justify it.”

In indulging our own feelings so far as to lay before our readers a single specimen of these professional testimonials, we might perhaps present it under a name of more extended and imposing authority than attaches to the one we shall select,—that of the late Dr Kellie of Leith; but certainly not under that of one more capable of estimating the qualifications of a colleague than Dr Kellie was, in the judgment of those who knew him most intimately, and no one knew him better than Dr Thomson, or valued more highly those talents and attainments which only needed a wider field of exertion to have raised their possessor to a first rank position in his profession.

“Your printed testimonials, which you have done me the honour to send me, are indeed most ample and respectable; but you have lived so long amongst us, and have been so long and so eminently distinguished for all those accomplishments which the vacant chair of our medical school demands, that I should have thought such a mass of testimonials little wanted to substantiate your claims.” “A physician of mere *practical experience*, and one of mere *science* and *research* would be equally unfit to discharge the important duties of professor of medicine in our *alma mater*. You, in an eminent degree, unite the qua-

fications of *both*. With great talents, joined to unrivalled industry, you have established for yourself abroad, as well as at home, a distinguished reputation as a man of literature and of science, and have become equally eminent as a writer, a teacher, and a practitioner of medicine. As I know few men who have better deserved this high fame, so surely I know no one who has made greater sacrifices to merit and obtain it."

Nor was the evidence borne in his favour confined exclusively to members of the profession; and one non-medical testimony to Dr Thomson's high qualifications we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of introducing here—prompted not more by the singularly truthful and eloquent exposition of his scientific character it affords, than by our knowledge of the value he attached to the long and steady friendship which it records. "It is now, I think," says Mr Thomas Thomson, to whose labours all interested in the constitutional history of Scotland are under perpetual obligations, "more than thirty years since I first had the good fortune to make your acquaintance, when we were attending the chemical lectures in Glasgow College; and I can distinctly remember the high opinion we all then formed of your scientific talents, as well as of your zeal in the acquisition of knowledge. That acquaintance laid the foundation of a friendship which has ever since subsisted between us; and which, while it has certainly afforded me ample opportunity of estimating your character in riper years, may probably be thought to have disabled me for judging impartially in any thing where your interests or your fame are nearly concerned. At the same time I am confident that I shall not offend against the conviction of any of those to whom you have been best known, in stating, that from the period when you first entered on the career of science, down to the present day, throughout a life devoted to the laborious and anxious duties of your profession, your original ardour in the pursuit of knowledge has never suffered the slightest abatement, but has carried you onward in an uninterrupted progress of discipline and of acquirement, which constitute at once the highest title and the best qualification, for the important and honourable office to which you are now aspiring."

It soon, however, became apparent that other considerations than the qualifications of the candidates, or the reputation and welfare of the University, were to determine the choice. As the day of election approached, representations were made to the Duke of York, of the individual injustice and public injury that were threatened by the disregard of Dr Thomson's claims. Upon this his Royal Highness addressed to the Lord Provost a letter, in which, to a strong representation of the opinion entertained of Dr Thomson's character and services in the army, he subjoined

the expression of his own best wishes for Dr Thomson's success. This communication unfortunately arrived a few days too late. The majority of the Council, at a previous meeting, had committed themselves as to the course they were to pursue, to such a degree as to render it impossible for them to draw back. There can be no doubt, however, that this letter produced a very startling impression upon them; and with a view to counter-balance its effect, and to justify the conduct of the Town-Council in His Royal Highness's eyes, a declaration of the high qualifications of the gentleman on whom the chair was to be conferred, was obtained from several of the members of the Medical Faculty in the University—a declaration that has gone far to destroy all confidence on the part of the patrons of university chairs in the judgments of academic colleagues.

Early in the competition for the Practice of Physic chair, Dr Thomson resigned the chair of Surgery, which he had held for seventeen years from the College of Surgeons, and had the double gratification of receiving the warm thanks of that body for the manner in which he had discharged the duties of his office, and of seeing elected as his successor in that office, his former pupil, and latterly assistant as well as friend, Mr Turner. In the course of the following summer, his services as surgeon to the forces having been discontinued, in consequence of reductions in the military establishments of the country, he resigned his appointment as Professor of Military Surgery in the University, thereby freeing himself from any restrictions as a teacher; and accordingly, in the subsequent winter session, he delivered, as an extra-academical lecturer, a course upon the Practice of Physic.

In entering on this course he at once put aside that arrangement of diseases which nosologists had adopted, in their desire to imitate the classifications of naturalists, and to secure to medicine the benefits which these classifications had conferred on the several departments of natural history. In its place he substituted an anatomico-physiological arrangement, as the one best adapted for lectures or for treatises on the practice of physic, inasmuch as it brings together, in the first place, the different diseases of the same organ, and, in the second place, those of the organs most intimately related to one another. The expediency of this change has received the best sanction which it could have obtained in the rapidity with which it has been almost universally followed by other teachers of the same department of medicine in this country.

Our limits do not admit of entering into any exposition of the character of this course generally, or of the topics discussed in it, and the manner in which they were treated. We may observe, however, that the view which Dr Thomson presented

of the diseases of the respiratory and circulatory organs, in particular, embracing as it did the most recent researches of continental as well as domestic pathologists, and more especially those of M. Laennec, which had been published two or three years before, was probably fuller and more systematic than had ever previously been exhibited in a course on the practice of physic. And illustrated, as it was, by coloured representations of almost all the morbid alterations of structure to which these organs are subject, it could not fail to give his students a deep interest in these two classes of diseases, and to urge them to a more accurate investigation of the many circumstances in their natural history which he pointed out as being still imperfectly understood.

It has been erroneously said, that Dr Thomson treated the stethoscope, on its first introduction, with ridicule. So far from this being the case, he took infinite pains, in his lectures on the two classes of diseases that have been mentioned, in making his students acquainted, as far as can be done in a merely systematic course, with the various acoustic phenomena which the practice of auscultation reveals, and with the inferences to which the occurrence of these phenomena in particular cases, leads, so far as the then existing state of knowledge admitted of such inferences being deduced; and he urged upon them the propriety of making themselves practically familiar with these phenomena as they occur both in health and disease. It was in respect of the risk of being led by an over-implicit reliance on auscultatory phenomena, to set down as cases of organic disease of the heart what are really only cases of functional disturbance of that organ, that Dr Thomson principally cautioned his students against an imprudent confidence in drawing inferences from stethoscopic signs; and no impartial person who reviews the progress of knowledge in this department, since the time when the first edition of M. Laennec's work was published, can fail to acknowledge, that, in the doubts which Dr Thomson expressed as to the sufficiency of the knowledge that had then been acquired, for effecting the discrimination of the diseases dependent on organic alteration from those of a simply functional or dynamical character, he only afforded an illustration of his usual sagacity, and of his practical acquaintance with both classes of diseases.

What Dr Thomson may perchance have been tempted to say on some particular occasion, in bantering a stethoscopic enthusiast, must not be construed to the precise letter, any more than his off-hand profession that the practice of the homœopaths differed from that which he followed, chiefly in this respect, that while they gave very little medicine, he gave none at all. His sentiments as to the employment of medicines as remedial agents

in the treatment of diseases, on which, also, there seems to be some misconception, may be best learned from the following observations with which he was accustomed to conclude his course on the practice of physic.

“ I am aware that on looking back on the Remedial part of the Treatment of most diseases, there are two points in which my course may appear to some of you to have been defective. The first is, the small number and great similarity of the remedies which I have usually recommended in the treatment of diseases; and the second is, the entire omission of the mention of many of those remedies which you will find strongly recommended in your books on materia medica, and which are even still much used by many respectable practitioners.

“ Respecting these points, all I can say is, that I have been chiefly desirous to make you acquainted with the general facts or principles which appear to me to have been ascertained with regard to the antiphlogistic plan of curing diseases; and at the same time with some of those salutary changes which Nature, aided by Diet and Regimen, often accomplishes, but which are usually ascribed by the ignorant to the operation of the medicines that have been administered during the time that those natural and salutary changes by which diseases are, in fact, ultimately cured or relieved, have been going on in the constitution.

“ With regard to the *small number* of remedies which I have recommended for the cure of diseases, I have to observe, that though it be certainly very desirable that we should have in our possession a sufficient store of remedies, and some room for choice in their adaptation to different constitutions, even in the treatment of the same diseases, yet I cannot but regard the infinite number of remedies with which the Materia Medica is incumbered, as one of the greatest evils to which the practice of physic is at present exposed. The endless number of these remedies, and the variety of powers which each of them is supposed to possess, renders the study of the Materia Medica painfully and uselessly laborious, the choice of remedies perplexing, and the consideration of their results doubtful and unsatisfactory. There is certainly no mechanical art in which a man could be expected to acquire much skill in the application, or in the knowledge of the comparative effects, of different instruments, were he obliged to employ, in the exercise of his profession, instruments as numerous as the remedies are which it is deemed necessary that the medical practitioner should employ in the exercise of his art.

“ In no department of the healing art is a greater reform, in my opinion, necessary than in the Materia Medica. But from the number and strength of the prejudices and interests with



which this reform has to contend, I fear that it will be long—that it will be ages—before it can be accomplished. We must hope, however,—and by our exertions endeavour to promote it—that in the progress of the healing art, the articles of which our *Materia Medica* consists shall be such only as are universally acknowledged to have the sanative powers ascribed to them; and that these powers shall be such as to produce *sensible* effects; in the same way as those remedies which we at present include under the general terms of Cathartics, Diuretics, Diaphoretics, &c., and not of the kind which have been so long included under the indefinite and deceitful terms of Tonics, Alteratives, and Specifics.”

There is one medicine, his testimony to the powerful efficacy of which is too striking and too important to be withheld, and which we shall insert here, though, chronologically, somewhat out of place. It relates to the use of elaterium in dropsical complaints, and is contained in a private letter which he addressed to Lord Lauderdale in the latter end of May or beginning of June 1830, during the progress of the illness which terminated the life of George the Fourth, with whom, it is well known, Lord Lauderdale had been, in early life, on a footing of great intimacy.

“MY DEAR LORD,—I am glad to perceive from the bulletins and the newspaper accounts that there seems to be some little mitigation in the severity of his Majesty’s complaints, and the mention of the fact that this relief has succeeded to punctures of his limbs shews that the complaint is now acknowledged to be dropsical. In these circumstances, I cannot help repeating to your Lordship in writing, what, I dare say, I may have mentioned to you in conversation, viz. the remarkable effects which, during the last few years, I have had occasion to see produced in dropsical affections, hydrothorax, ascites, and anasarca, whether single or combined, dependent upon organic affections or arising from other causes, by the use of extract of elaterium. My experience entirely coincides with the account which is given of this medicine by the late Dr Ferriar of Manchester, in his *Medical Histories and Reflections*, vol. ii. p. 203, and vol. iv. p. 21.

I state this to your Lordship in perfect ignorance of his Majesty’s present condition, and of the remedies which may have been, or are at present employed; but I have now so often found the elaterium succeed after all the usual diuretic and hydragogue medicines had failed in dropsical affections, that I consider it as the most powerful of all the remedies for the cure of dropsy, that are as yet known to us.

The use of the extract of elaterium always occasions a considerable degree of temporary sickness; but this has appeared to

me to be capable of being alleviated, and its depressing effects obviated, by wine, spirits, or æther.

This medicine not only causes a copious watery discharge by stool, but I have found it occasion, in many instances, a large secretion of clear urine, where that fluid had been not only deficient in quantity, but altered in its qualities, for a series of months previous to its use. A person under its use should never leave his bed nor get into the upright position.

To an adult I give half a grain or three-quarters of a grain of the extract of elaterium at bed-time in a common colocynth pill, and repeat this daily till its effects are established. After this, the repetition of the dose every second, and afterwards every third or fourth day, has, in a variety of instances, proved most beneficial.

It is more than probable that His Majesty's medical attendants are as well or better acquainted than I am with the use of elaterium; but I feel that I should not discharge my duty towards you without giving you my testimony in its favour. I should like that you read the passages in Dr Ferriar's work to which I have referred, and make such use of them, or of the information contained in this letter, as you may judge proper. I need hardly add that I trust you will say nothing of this communication.—I am ever, my dear Lord," &c. &c.

In 1824, it having been rumoured that proposals were under the consideration of the Senatus Academicus of the University, for improving and extending the curriculum of study required of candidates for the medical degree, Dr Thomson, under the designation of a Graduate of King's College, Aberdeen, addressed to the Patrons and Professors a few remarks which he entitled, "Hints respecting the improvement of the Literary and Scientific Education of candidates for the degree of M. D." &c. In 1826, on the appointment of a Royal Commission for Visiting the Universities of Scotland, he prefixed to these Hints, "Observations on the Preparatory Education of Candidates for the degree of M. D. in the Scottish Universities," and addressed the whole to the Royal Commissioners in his own name. He subsequently printed "Additional Hints respecting the Improvement of the System of Medical Instruction followed in the University of Edinburgh," the object of which was to call attention to two great defects, as he conceived, in that system, the want of separate professors of surgery and clinical medicine.

In consequence, probably, of these publications, Dr Thomson received notice that he was to be summoned before the Commissioners for examination; and, a considerable interval having elapsed between the time of notice and his being called to give

evidence, he had an opportunity of extending into short essays on each topic, the heads on which he at first proposed to offer remarks *viva voce*. Besides impressing on the Royal Commissioners his views as to the improvements desirable in the preparatory education of medical students, which he regarded as of incomparable importance, and in the modes of teaching surgery and clinical medicine, he suggested to them the expediency of making general pathology, then taught as a department of the institutes of medicine, the subject of a separate course of lectures.

In the course of 1827, Dr Thomson published his edition, in two volumes 8vo, of Dr Cullen's Works, containing the Physiology, Nosology, and First Lines of the Practice of Physic, with numerous extracts from Dr Cullen's MS. papers, and from his treatise of the *Materia Medica*. "In preparing it for the press," he observed, in a dedicatory address to the students of the medical school of Edinburgh, "I have had two objects chiefly in view; first, to furnish you with such extracts from Dr Cullen's MS. papers as seem to throw additional light on the subjects of which these books treat; and, secondly, to put the public in possession of documents that appear to me to establish Dr Cullen's claims to originality for observations and doctrines which, under various modifications, have been repeatedly brought forward since his time, and made the bases of new theories or systems of medicine." And, again, "In presenting you," says he, "with these elementary works in their present form, I am well aware that the science of medicine has made great advances since they were first produced; advances which require corresponding changes in the manner in which this science should now be taught. But I know of no general work on the practice of physic, hitherto published in this country, calculated to supersede Dr Cullen's writings as text-books; and certainly none which can bear a comparison with them in the extent and variety of the medical information which they contain; in the model which they afford of distinct and comprehensive definitions and histories of diseases; and in the talent which they display for the accurate discrimination and simple generalization of the results of experience."

During the sessions 1828-29 and 1829-30, Dr Thomson delivered his course on the practice of physic in conjunction with his elder son, after which he transferred it wholly to his son, with no expectation of again resuming the duties of a teacher. In discontinuing this course, he probably felt that the motives which had prompted him to commence it, had now, in a great measure, ceased to operate. One of these, his desire by teaching to augment his own knowledge, he had in a very considerable degree removed, by making himself acquainted, so far as his very

extensive and laborious business would permit, with the latest and best writings upon special pathology. He had established a greatly improved method of teaching this important department of medical education upon a solid foundation; and he might well feel, also, that he had amply justified the favourable opinions of his qualifications for teaching it, that had been expressed by his friends, in reference to his application for the chair in the university.

In the course of the autumn of 1830, he indulged himself with the recreation of a tour through a large portion of England, accompanied by his younger son, chiefly for the inspection of asylums for the reception of the insane; a class of institutions which he lost no opportunity of visiting. On his way homewards he paid a visit to Dublin and Belfast.

In 1831, Dr Thomson addressed to Lord Melbourne, then secretary of state for the home department, a memorial representing the advantages to medical education likely to flow from the establishment of a separate chair of General Pathology. The result was the issuing of a commission in his favour, conceived in terms which inferred that the course of pathology should be added to the curriculum of study required by the university of its medical graduates. A similar commission was at the same time issued in favour of his friend Mr Turner, to be the first distinct professor of surgery in the university. From the latter appointment, Dr Thomson derived even more gratification than from that in which he was himself concerned,—not less on public grounds than on account of the acknowledgment it implied of the high qualifications of one with whom, after having seen him educated to the profession under his immediate superintendence, he had, for upwards of twenty years, lived upon habits of the most intimate and confidential friendship.

The creation of the pathology chair gave rise, at the time and on several subsequent occasions, to much discussion. Dr Thomson defended the utility of the measure first in a letter to the college bailie, of date 29th October 1831; and a second time in 1837, in Remarks on the Memorial of the Town-Council to Lord John Russell, &c., respecting the Professorship of Medicine and General Pathology. These discussions are too recent to render it either necessary or desirable to revive them. But we cannot abstain from giving insertion here to a valedictory expression of Dr Thomson's opinion on this subject, which he gave after he had retired from active life; nor from expressing our conviction, that the time is not far distant, when his conception of the advantages to be derived from the institution of this chair, and his struggle for its maintenance, will be looked upon as among the most valuable of the services which, in the

course of a career unceasingly directed to the advancement of medical instruction, he was able to render to it.

“CHAIR OF PATHOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY.—It may perhaps be satisfactory to some of Dr Thomson’s medical friends and of his former pupils, here or elsewhere, to be informed that, notwithstanding the late proceedings of the medical faculty, and of the patrons of the University of Edinburgh, in relation to the chair of pathology, he remains firmly persuaded that a knowledge of general pathology,—as treating of the symptoms, causes, nature, and particular seats of diseases,—and of pathological anatomy,—as treating of the alterations of structure produced in the different organs of the body by disease,—is indispensably necessary to students and to practitioners of medicine; seeing that these branches necessarily form the basis of all scientific or rational practice in the healing art;—and that, in his opinion, no course of medical education can be regarded as proper, sufficient, or complete, in which these branches of medical science are not made separate subjects of full, distinct, and deliberate consideration.

“It has been in this persuasion, and with the knowledge of the want of proper opportunities in Edinburgh for studying pathological anatomy in particular, that Dr Thomson has for a long series of years been induced to devote much of his time and of his professional income to the remedying, as far as has been in his power, of this most important defect in our medical institutions. It would be ungrateful in him, as well as unjust, were he to omit this occasion of acknowledging the able and valuable assistance which he has received from many of his professional brethren in his efforts to facilitate and to promote the study of pathological science in a school in which it has been his ambition and his pride to hold official appointments both without and within the walls of the university.

“Whatever may now be the determination of Government with regard to the continuance or discontinuance of the chair of pathology, Dr T. has had the gratification, during the time he has had the honour to hold it, of being listened to by his pupils, in his lectures, with profound attention; and he has the satisfaction to believe that no complaint has ever been heard to proceed from them of the additional expense which attendance on his class has necessarily imposed upon them, nor any wish been at any time expressed upon their part for its abolition; though it has been made but too evident what encouragement they would have received in the expression of such complaints or wishes, had they entertained them.

“That the institution of the chair of general pathology has tended in any sensible degree to diminish the number of stu-

dents attending or wishing to graduate at the University of Edinburgh, is an assertion which can mislead those only who are entirely ignorant of what concerns the history of the improvement of medical education in these kingdoms,—which history fully shows that, except under the operation of other counter-acting circumstances, and these frequently of a temporary nature, the number of those who have sought for medical honours has regularly increased, with the more extended course of study and higher qualifications required for their attainment.”

Soon after his appointment as Professor of General Pathology, Dr Thomson published the first volume of the *Life of Cullen*, a work in which he had been long engaged, but which had been greatly retarded, partly by his numerous engagements, partly by his great fastidiousness as to what is required in a work to be presented to the public, and by his apprehension of falling short of what was due to the memory of one, of whose scientific character he had formed a very high estimate. Our opinion of the value of this work we had the pleasure of recording at considerable length at the period of its publication, (see vol. xxxviii. p. 384), and it is gratifying to us to know that this opinion has been confirmed by that of the most competent judges.

In the winter session of 1832–33, he delivered his first course of lectures on general pathology. In the succeeding autumn, he again made a continental tour with his younger son. On this occasion they proceeded through the Low Countries up the Rhine, visiting some of the German universities; then through Switzerland to the north of Italy, and by Turin, Milan, Bologna, Florence, and Rome, to Naples; thence they returned by sea to Marseilles, and visited successively Montpellier, Lyons, and Paris. This extensive tour was performed in less than three months, and every place visited was seen in a very thorough manner. He was accustomed, on his return, when asked how long he had been at any particular town, to reply, “Don’t ask me how long I was there, but what I saw.” His visit to the Italian schools of medicine derived great additional interest from his having been for some time previously engaged in the study of the works of the Italian pathologists, in reference to their bearing on pathology generally, and on the doctrines of Brown in particular.

In the summer of 1835, in consequence of repeated attacks and long continuance of illness, Dr Thomson formally announced to his professional brethren his resolution to decline in future attendance on patients at their own houses, and to confine himself exclusively to such consultation practice as could be pursued at his own residence. This measure he adopted in the hope that he would thereby be enabled to go on with his course

on general pathology. At the beginning of the winter, he experienced a severe blow in the death of Mr Turner ; and in the succeeding spring, he was again seized with illness, which greatly reduced his strength, and by the approach of the following winter he found it necessary to obtain the consent of the patrons to his delegating his university duty. With the exception of some occasional lectures delivered in subsequent sessions, his labours as a teacher now terminated, the course being conducted by deputy up till his resignation in 1841, and the appointment of a successor in 1842. In 1837, however, on a proposal threatening to be fatal to the permanent existence of the pathology chair, on the part of the town-council, to which body, mainly on his recommendation, the patronage had been transferred, he made his last visit to London for the purpose of defeating these efforts.

From the time of his quitting the practice of his profession, Dr Thomson resided principally at his villa, on the south side of Edinburgh, near the foot of Blackford Hill, making occasional visits, particularly for portions of the winter, to his sons. The purpose of the present notice, and the length to which it has already extended, equally preclude us from following him into his retreat. We may remark, however, that in retiring thither from the field of active life, Dr Thomson ran no risk of being the victim of that ennui which is so apt to make a prey of those who venture upon such an exchange. He was now at liberty to follow those pursuits in natural and mental science which were congenial to his tastes, without distraction or interruption from the laborious duties or harassing anxieties of his profession.

In the course of our narrative we have had repeated occasion to refer to the interest which Dr Thomson took in studies, cognate, indeed, with medicine, but not absolutely appertaining to it. But into how many tracks, and how far, he pursued these studies, it has not been possible for us to indicate ; nor is it at present in our power to supply what, in a picture of his intellectual character, necessarily constitutes so serious a defect. "When I say that Dr Thomson is the most learned physician I ever met with," observed one who is perhaps himself better entitled to that character than any living competitor, "I know that I am quite safe from any appearance of exaggeration ; because I have heard the same language employed by many medical men in England, and by all those foreigners with whom he became acquainted during his professional tour on the continent. It is not only in medicine and its immediate branches that Dr Thomson has a most remarkable degree of knowledge. No one, I am certain, can have conversed with or consulted him upon the actual state or previous history of chemistry, botany, mathematics,

or general philosophy, without being surprised at the extent and accuracy of his information ; which can have been acquired only by a devotion of time and attention to laborious study, seldom found and but little expected in an individual engaged as Dr Thomson has been, in an anxious and fatiguing profession."

It is perfectly true that Dr Thomson's acquirements were the result of much assiduous application superadded to the possession of large natural endowments. Few men, we believe, ever wasted less time than he did upon frivolous or unimproving occupations. Every morning, for a long period of his life, with the assistance of his flint and steel, he had lighted his candle, and was busy in the work of self-improvement, during hours which most students think themselves entitled to devote to repose. And when professional avocations used to call him to the country, the quantity of reading he was able to get through upon the road, communicated to these journeys an especial degree of enjoyment.

A circumstance of primary importance, as we conceive, in consolidating in his mind the extensive and varied information which he possessed, was his persuasion that knowledge is not to be seized by a sudden onset, but must be regularly approached through her portals. To whatever subject his studies were directed, therefore, his first concern was to make himself familiar with its elements. He had gained for himself a ready access to the knowledge contained in the writings of foreign authors, by the diligent cultivation of a considerable proportion of the European languages ; and in French, Italian, and German he had acquired such facility in correct and even elegant extempore translation, that when in his lectures he had occasion to read a passage from a book in one of these languages, it was not uncommon for his students to go away under the impression that he had been reading from a translation, and not from the original edition of the work he had quoted.

Another leading feature in his character as a student, was his intolerance of imperfect information, and the resolution with which, when, in the course of reading, a term occurred, or a fact was adverted to, of which his knowledge was deficient, he would, before allowing himself to proceed, seek to obtain, at whatever expense of time and labour, an explanation of the difficulty that had presented itself. From these two characteristics it arose that not only were the shelves of his library alongside his habitual chair, and the table beside his bed, loaded, but the pockets of his carriage were stuffed with Grammars, Elements, Manuals, and Dictionaries of all descriptions, readily available for strengthening the foundations of his knowledge, and for aiding him in its extension.



Did space permit, abundant illustrations might readily be adduced to exhibit Dr Thomson as not less amiable in disposition than vigorous in intellect. Considering, indeed, that he was not in the exercise of any public patronage, the number of parties on whom, in the course of his life, he conferred essential obligations, and particularly the number of young men whom he was able effectively to advance in their career, prove the kindly interest which he took in the welfare of others, while it evinces the judgment with which he made his friendly offices bear upon their peculiar circumstances and qualifications. Acts of this description originated less frequently in applications addressed to him, than in the spontaneous suggestions of his own mind; for he was ever anxious to discover opportunities of rendering services to those whom he esteemed; and desirous to see placed, in situations of responsibility, the parties by whom their duties would be most efficiently discharged.

His own disposition to advance in the career of improvement, caused Dr Thomson to take especial pleasure in the society of the young. In him the author of any train of original investigation was sure to find a warm sympathiser; one ready to go over with him, and to authenticate, his observations, to suggest additional modes of illustration, and to trace out any correlative facts that had been previously recorded.

From the wide range of his information, his readiness in bringing it to bear on the subject in hand, and the animation with which he was ever disposed to enter on the topic that might be uppermost in the thoughts of those who came in contact with him, Dr Thomson's conversation could not fail to be most improving. But it had also, in a singular degree, that quality which, more than any other, perhaps, tends to render conversation agreeable, its being conducted, as nearly as possible, on the principle of intellectual equality between those engaged in it; never manifesting any intolerance of listening, nor dictated by any love of display; but indicative of a genuine desire to acquire as well as to convey information, so that the opposite party had the gratification of feeling, along with his consciousness of deriving, that he was also conveying, improvement,—that the advantage was at all events not wholly upon one side, however unequally it might be divided.

We have already adverted to the great interest which Dr Thomson took in the prosperity of the Medical Society. The winter session after the publication of his Lectures on Inflammation, the Medical Society raised him to the rank of an honorary member; and when it is considered, that the list of those to whom this compliment had been paid for a succession of years previously to its being rendered to himself, presents, in unbro-

ken line, the names of Jenner, Vauquelin, Cuvier, Abernethy, Davy, Werner, Pearson, Playfair, Berzelius, and Astley Cooper, it will be admitted that this honour, which the society always showed great judgment and scrupulousness in conferring, had, as it reached him, lost none of its value. Dr Thomson did not, till a late period, become a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians; but soon after his joining that body, its members called upon him to accept, greatly out of the order of college seniority, the office of president.

Dr Thomson was twice married; first in 1798, to Margaret Crawford, second daughter of John Gordon, Esq. of Carroll in Sutherlandshire, who died early in 1804; and a second time, in 1806, to Margaret, third daughter of Professor John Millar, whose lectures on jurisprudence and government long shed much lustre upon the University of Glasgow. By his first marriage, Dr Thomson had three children. The eldest of these, John Gordon Thomson, died in the beginning of the winter of 1818, at the age of 19, when he had already given evidence of the possession of excellent abilities, and of a soundness of understanding rare at his period of life, embellished by uncommonly prepossessing manners. He was studying anatomy under the superintendence of the late Dr Gordon, who was desirous that he should be prepared as speedily as possible for taking his own place as a teacher of anatomy, an occupation in which a rapidly increasing practice warned him that it would be impossible for himself long to persevere. While the pupil was declining under the effects of a slow malady, the instructor was cut off by sudden and rapid disease; and within a few months Dr Thomson found himself deprived, as it were, of two sons.

His eldest daughter, who died in 1824, at the age of 23, had for a number of years been her father's companion in those scientific pursuits which constituted his relaxations from professional duties and studies, a part for which she was singularly well fitted by talents of a very high order, most sedulously cultivated by an education that comprehended almost every branch, not only of polite learning, but of general science, and accompanied by that entire freedom from display, that disarms the censure even of those who are most jealous of female learning.

The survivor of Dr Thomson's first family is the present Professor of Medicine in the University of Glasgow. Of his family by his second marriage, two only outlived the age of childhood, both of whom still survive, a daughter and a son, the present Professor of the Institutes of Medicine in this city.

Dr Thomson died at Morland Cottage, on the 11th October 1846, in the 82d year of his age.

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is arranged in several paragraphs and appears to be a formal document or report.

## APPENDIX.

---

EXTRACTED FROM THE SCOTSMAN NEWSPAPER OF 17TH OCTOBER 1846.

---

IT is with much regret that we announce the death of Dr John Thomson, late Professor of General Pathology in the University, which occurred at his residence in the vicinity of this city on Sunday last.

We fear that we are not competent to form a just appreciation of those powers and qualities which enabled Dr Thomson to raise himself from a very humble condition of life to a distinguished place in the first rank among the practitioners of so honourable a profession, and the cultivators of so extensive and difficult a science as medicine. And yet we are reluctant that the occasion should be allowed to pass over without some attempt being made in our pages to pay a tribute to the memory of one whose talents, acquirements, and energy of character, have for a long time largely contributed to maintain the reputation of the Medical School of Edinburgh, in which our fellow-citizens feel so just a pride.

\* \* \*

Till he reached the age of twenty, whatever cultivation his mind received was obtained under difficulties which nothing, perhaps, could have enabled him to overcome but the consciousness of the mental powers that nature had bestowed upon him, and the inward conviction that, by the steady exercise of these, he would be able to place himself in a position more favourable than a mechanical employment, for the gratification of that thirst for information which seems to have been an inherent element of his mental constitution.

At the age which has been mentioned, he succeeded in overcoming his father's reluctance to his embarking on what the old man could not but consider a perilous enterprise; and entered on the cultivation of that branch of knowledge in which he was des-

tinued in after life to attain so much eminence,—as an ardent student, an acute observer, a sound reasoner, a skilful practitioner, and an enthusiastic and impressive teacher.

Our limits do not allow of our attempting to trace Dr Thomson's progress through life in these different capacities, and we would rather occupy the space which we can allot to this purpose in an attempt to pourtray, however feebly, the more striking features of his character, than in that statement of particular facts which would be proper and requisite in a narrative of his life.

As a practitioner, successively, of the two departments of medicine, surgery and physic, in each of which he may be said to have acquired the highest confidence of his professional brethren, and of the public, Dr Thomson was particularly distinguished, we conceive, by the acuteness and promptness of his discrimination—by the rapidity with which he detected the actual position of his patient, and traced the phenomena of disease which presented themselves, or which his discriminative sagacity enabled him to bring to light, to those inward changes in the economy on which they depended. Many of his intelligent and experienced professional brethren who had occasion to consult him in cases of difficulty and doubt, have been known to say, that the rapidity with which the mental processes of what medical men style diagnosis and prognosis were carried on by him, seemed to them to participate largely of intuition.

In proceeding to adapt the mode of treatment to be pursued to the conception which he had formed of the nature of the particular case, Dr Thomson's first object may be said to have been to determine in his own mind what assistance could fairly be expected from those natural processes by the agency of which, in so many instances, the state of disease more or less quickly disappears, and is replaced by the state of health. He was persuaded that, in a great many instances, effects are attributed to remedies which are properly referable to the powers of nature, and that much mischief is often occasioned by unnecessary interference with these; and both in his surgical and in his medical practice, therefore, it was with him a fundamental principle to secure, as he was wont to say, "fair play to nature." But the same sagacity which enabled him to detect what was amiss in the economy, singularly assisted him in judging how far, in the particular circumstances, nature might be relied upon; and where such reliance seemed doubtful or hopeless, the remedial measures which he considered appropriate were prosecuted with a vigour that bore no indication of inertness or indecision. At the same time, these measures were eminently characterised by their simplicity, as he was strongly impressed with the conviction that the practitioner will effect a larger amount of good by the employment of a limit-

ed number of means with the use of which he is familiar, than by that of a wider range of remedies, of the action of which, from their very number, he can have only an imperfect knowledge. As an operative surgeon, as well as in the character of a prescribing physician, he ever aimed at simplicity in the instruments he employed; and it was a very favourite expression of his, that, in their long careers as practitioners, as well as improvers, of their respective departments of the healing art, Mr Hunter had never invented a new instrument, nor Dr Cullen introduced a new remedy.

His intercourse with the sick was singularly agreeable, bringing into exercise not only the vigour of his understanding but the kindly dispositions of his heart. The interest which he manifestly took in the individual circumstances of his patients, speedily inspired them with the confidence that their ailments were duly considered, and understood as far as science and skill would allow; and that nothing would be neglected that could contribute to their cure or relief. In a profession singularly distinguished for the unremunerated work which it performs, Dr Thomson's liberality was conspicuous.

The duties of a consulting practitioner—the form in which Dr Thomson, both as a surgeon and as a physician, had principally occasion to exercise his profession—are apt to place him in a position of great delicacy, as between the sick, or their friends, and their ordinary medical advisers. Dr Thomson's professional brethren had a perfect assurance that in his hands their reputation was safe—that, where the measures which had been adopted previously to his being consulted appeared to him to have been proper, he would cordially bear testimony to the fact; and where it might seem to stand in need of correction, that he would sedulously guard them from blame; and that while every justice would be done to their patients, no change would be made in their mode of practice, merely to create or strengthen an impression of the expediency of his assistance or advice having been had recourse to.

Regarded as a cultivator of medical science, a leading feature in Dr Thomson's character was his desire to know everything relative to the subject under consideration, that had been previously ascertained, and his honourable anxiety to vindicate for every author of an original observation or opinion the claim which it might appear to give him to the gratitude of men of science. For proofs of his talents for original observation and inquiry, we may refer with confidence to his published works, as well as to the writings of several of his pupils, to whom he was ever ready, in suggesting topics for investigation, to transfer the fruits of his own, frequently laborious, inquiries. A fastidiousness in respect of

publication, arising out of the difficulty he had in satisfying himself with his own intellectual performances, limited the number of his published works much below what might have been expected, and could have been desired, from one so capable of conveying instruction in an agreeable and impressive manner.

His "Lectures on Inflammation" is a work that has carried his name to all quarters of the globe, in his own time—having been translated into French, German, and Italian, as well as republished in America;—and it is one which, amidst the changes necessarily arising among the *hand-books* of the day in consequence of the constantly advancing tide of knowledge, must remain in all future times as a portion of the permanent stock of medical literature. His "Report on the State of the Wounded in Belgium, after the battle of Waterloo," displays a practical and literary knowledge of the effects and treatment of wounds and injuries of the several parts of the human body, that is well calculated to create regret that he should not have given to the public those able and more detailed discourses in which he was accustomed to expound this important and extensive department of surgery to his students. His "Account of the Varioloid Epidemic which prevailed in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland, from 1818 to 1820, including Observations on the Identity of Chicken-pox with Modified Small-pox," and his "Historical Sketch of the opinions entertained by medical men respecting the Varieties and the Secondary Occurrence of Small-pox, with Observations on the Nature and Extent of the Security afforded by Vaccination against the attack of that disease," evince a remarkable combination of professional ardour, acute observation, close reasoning, and great learning; and have powerfully contributed to settle the opinions of medical men on the very important topics of which they treat. And, lastly, not to mention various other literary productions of less extent but of great professional value, his life of Cullen is a work which, of itself, by the luminous exposition it affords of the progress of medical science during the last century, stamps his character as a medical philosopher of the first order.

As a teacher, he was singularly successful in engaging the attention of his audience by the judicious selection of materials which he laid before them, as well as by his power of generalising the results of his observation, reading, and reflection, and of presenting these results in a clear and simple form; and above all, perhaps, the interest he himself evinced in the subject under discussion had a powerful influence in stimulating the enthusiasm and energy of his pupils. Another striking feature in his character as a teacher was the rapidity with which he discriminated the several capabilities of his students, and directed their energies into those channels in which they might be most usefully employed.

To this early direction of their thoughts and pursuits, many of his more distinguished pupils have been known in after life gratefully to ascribe much of their worldly success, and of any scientific reputation which they had acquired.

Considering the wideness of the range of professional subjects which Dr Thomson embraced in his course of study, and the laborious manner in which he conducted his inquiries into each of them; and considering also the impediments and interruptions arising to the prosecution of his studies, not only from his entire dependence on the fruits of his own toil, but also from the delicate state of health which he experienced during a considerable portion of his life, it might have been supposed that even for his ardent mind the investigation of these subjects would furnish ample occupation. But this was far from being the case. Indeed, so varied were his studies, that no work, in almost any department of learning, came amiss to him; and so accurate and extensive was his information, that he never came in contact with any person, of however different occupations and pursuits from his own, from whom he did not extract, or to whom he did not convey, information in the particular department of business or study which his companion had made the occupation of his life.

\* \* \*

To the cultivation of moral science, also, he devoted much time and labour, and was extensively read in the writings that have emanated from the different schools of metaphysics. Indeed, even if his own tastes had drawn him less powerfully in that direction, his ardent admiration for Mr Dugald Stewart, and his hereditary affection for the present distinguished occupant of the chair of logic, would, in themselves, have supplied powerful motives to maintain and extend his acquaintance with this department of knowledge. As a portion of medical science, too, he felt a deep interest in the natural history and treatment of those modifications to which both the mental faculties and moral feelings are subject in the state of disease; and in various tours which he made both at home and abroad for the improvement of his own professional knowledge, asylums for the reception and treatment of the insane formed an object of primary interest.

That a well-educated physician should possess some general acquaintance with several, if not with all, of the branches of knowledge to which we have referred—and they are far from exhausting the catalogue of Dr Thomson's studies—is what the public is prepared to expect; but that he should possess a familiar acquaintance with their principles, doctrines, and details, so as that those who had made any one of them the object of their special study should be led by his conversation to conclude that in him they had encountered a fellow-labourer in their own department,



is well calculated to excite surprise, and could have been brought about only, as was well said by an eminent physician whose own attainments render him a highly competent judge (Dr Henry Davidson), "by a devotion of time and attention to laborious study seldom found, and but little expected, in an individual engaged, as Dr Thomson had been, in an anxious and fatiguing profession."

At an early period of life, and when in an humble sphere, Dr Thomson was led to adopt political opinions favourable to popular constitutional rights. These opinions he continued to retain through life; and not conceiving that any one who lives under and enjoys the benefits of a free constitution, is entitled to withhold whatever support it may be in his power to render to free institutions, he never shrank from avowing the opinions which he entertained, and that at a time when such avowals not only closed the doors of official preferment on those who made them, but caused them to be looked on by the great body of the wealthy with suspicion, distrust, or aversion. He was no admirer, however, of extreme opinions even in favour of popular rights. He was strongly impressed with the persuasion that the gradual amelioration of political institutions is not only safer than that which is effected by sudden convulsions, but affords more security for their permanence, and that the extension of political privilege should go hand in hand with, or rather should follow in the wake of, intellectual cultivation—a persuasion which heightened, all the more, the interest he took in everything calculated to promote the education of the people.

Though ten years have elapsed since the state of Dr Thomson's bodily health obliged him to relinquish his duties as a practitioner and teacher, his mental faculties remained to the latest unenfeebled and his zeal for knowledge unabated. Up to his very last days he continued to hear with the most lively interest of what was passing both in the scientific and in the political world; and it will be agreeable to his many friends to know, that in the full conviction which he entertained, for some weeks previously to his decease, that his period of earthly existence was hastening to a close, he contemplated the approach of death with all the dignified calmness which the consciousness of a well-spent life could inspire. At the time of his death Dr Thomson was in his 82d year.