

Notice of William Davidson, M.D. (Gulielmus Davissonus), first Professor of Chemistry, and Director of the Jardin des Plantes, Paris, afterwards physician to the King of Poland / by John Small.

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NOTICE
OF
WILLIAM DAVIDSON, M.D.
(*GULIELMUS DAVISSONUS*),

FIRST PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY, AND DIRECTOR OF THE
JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS, AFTERWARDS
PHYSICIAN TO THE KING OF POLAND.

BY
JOHN SMALL, M.A., F.S.A. SCOT.,
LIBRARIAN TO THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

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NOTICE
OF
WILLIAM DAVIDSON, M.D.

The following Notes relating to Dr William Davidson were collected several years ago, with the view of their forming one of a series of sketches of Scottish Alchemists, and they are now submitted to the Society in the hope that possibly some additional information may be obtained regarding the very remarkable man to whom they relate.

William Davidson (or, as his name is Latinised, Gulielmus Davissonus) had attained such skill in the hermetic art, that it was attested by several of his contemporaries, and by no less an authority than the famous Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, who, in his "*Εκσκυβαλαυρον*, or the Discovery of a most Exquisite Jewel," says:—"The excellency of Dr William Davidson in alchemy above all the men now living in the world, whereof by his wonderful experiments he giveth daily proof, although his learned books published in the Latin tongue did not evince it, meriteth well to have his name recorded in this place."¹

Of Davidson's history, the greater part of the following particulars have been gathered from his published works. From them it would appear that he was born in Aberdeenshire in the year 1593, and studied medicine. On his receiving his degree of Doctor of Medicine he settled in Paris, about the year 1620. After some years' residence there, being anxious to have an authentic certificate of his parentage, he wrote to King Charles I. for the desired information, and the following interesting letter of the King to the Scottish Privy Council is still preserved in the General Register House, Edinburgh, with reference to this application:—

"CHARLES, &c.

"Ryght trustie and ryght weil belouit Cusines and Counsellors we greit yow weill. Whairas our weil belouit M^r W^{am}. Davidsoun Doctor of Physick at Paris is desyrous to have a testificat vnder the great Seale of that our king-

¹ Works, p. 268.

dome certifeing his lafull birth and progenie, and seeing the said M^r William is as we are informed a native born man in that our kingdome Our pleasure is that you tak notice of his lawfull and lineal descent, which being so done by yow Our further pleasure is that you caus append the Great Seale of the said kingdome vnto the said testificat ffor doing quharof these presents sall be your warreind. Giuen at o^r Court at Whitehall 14 of May 1628."

In consequence of the royal commands, the Privy Council furnished Davidson with a grandiloquent Latin document, of which the following is a translation:—

"Charles, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. To all and several, Kings, Princes, Marquises, Archbishops, Bishops, Earls, Abbots, Priors, Nobles, Barons, Presidents, Stewards, Magistrates and Councillors of Cities: Also to all and several Admirals, commanding officers of districts, fortresses, cities, camps, armies, fleets, vessels, rivers, or harbours: And to others whomsoever exercising authority by land or sea, to whose knowledge these present letters shall come, everlasting happiness and salvation in Him who is the most sure protection of his people. Forasmuch as it ought to be the chief care of those on whom the administration of states devolves that due honor be conferred upon the meritorious and virtuous, and that perpetrators of actions contrary to law and equity be restrained by due punishment, it has hitherto been a fixed and constant principle with us that we should not appear remiss in providing for the discharge of both these duties: Therefore as far as possible, either on particular occasions, or in the course of the more important business of the state, we have assiduously endeavoured, and do endeavour, that whatever individuals have received the acquired rights or honours of noble birth, of illustrious actions, or other sources of distinction, that those rights and honours should be transmitted unimpaired and confirmed to posterity in the longest possible order of succession, unless where the individuals themselves have fallen from the probity and the example of their ancestors.

"Wherefore, that they may be stimulated to acquire like renown, and may by their own virtue add to that of their ancestors, and, mindful of their parents, do nothing unworthy of their dignity and fair fame, but closely emulating those from whom they are descended, become good and faithful subjects to the king and kingdom in all things as far as consistent with law and right. Hence it is that we have resolved to adorn with the same token of our benevolence and commendation our beloved and trusty subject, William Davisson, now Doctor of Medicine in the most celebrated city of Paris, devoted to the study of literature

and to the more fruitful cultivation of his mind, and on that account already from his merits affectionately regarded by foreigners, he being either desirous of longer travels for the purpose of seeing more distant parts, or perhaps entertaining the intention of taking up his residence and domicile elsewhere : And what is quite consistent with equity, that as he has given a specimen of his erudition and modesty celebrated abroad, we, in like manner, being humbly requested, shall not refuse firm testimony to the undoubted truth, according as is just and right :

“ Wherefore, after an inquest made by most trustworthy men, to whom we had committed that duty, it has been thus found by us, we proclaim and testify that the foresaid William Davissone is lawfully born of lawful marriag, and honourable parents, and is descended of noble families both on the father's side and the mother's side ; his father being an honourable and respectable man, Duncan Davissone of Ardmakrone, within our county of Abirdein ; who was the lawful son of Thomas Davissone of Ahinhampers within our county of Bamf, begot between him and Elizabeth Forbes his spouse ; which Elizabeth was the lawful daughter of William Forbes, baron of Tolwhone, lawfully got betwixt him and Elizabeth Leith his spouse, the lawful daughter of George Leith, baron of Barnis, within our foresaid county of Abirdein : As also the foresaid Thomas Davissone was the lawful son of John Davissone of Ahinhampers, lawfully begot betwixt him and Jonet Leslie his spouse, lawful daughter of Sir William Leslie of Balwhane, knight, within our foresaid county of Abirdein : Which John Davissone was the lawful son of William Davissone of Ahinhampers, lawfully begot betwixt him and Jonet Coutts his spouse, lawful daughter of William Coutts, baron of Auchtercoull, within our county of Abirdein : His mother likewise being a good and virtuous woman, Jonet Forbes, lawful daughter of William Forbes, baron of Pitsligo, lawfully begot between him and Katherine Gordoun his spouse, lawful daughter of Alexander Gordoun, baron of Strathdoun and Cluny. Which Alexander Gordoun was the lawful son of Alexander then Earl, now Marquis of Huntley, lawfully begot between him and Jonet Campbell his spouse, lawful daughter of the Earl of Argyll : Likeas the foresaid William Forbes, baron of Pitsligo, was the lawful first-born son of Alexander Forbes also baron of Pitsligo, [begot] betwixt him and Barbara Abernathie his spouse, lawful daughter of John, laird of Saltoun, lawfully begot between the said laird of Saltoun and Elizabeth Hepburne his spouse, lawful daughter of Patrick, laird of Haile : Which Alexander Forbes was lawful eldest son of John Forbes, baron of Pitsligo, lawfully begot between him and Elizabeth Keith his spouse, lawful daughter of Sir John Keith of Craig, knight baronet : All of whom, bound by the lawful tie of matrimony heretofore were conspicuous by the splendour of their race, and transmit the same untarnished to posterity : All which things, as they are true in themselves and established, that they may remain more corrob-

rated and certain among all and sundry we have willingly granted these Our Letters Patent to the foresaid William Davissoune, to which, in order that full faith may be given among all people, we have commanded our great seal to be appended.—Given at Edinburgh, on the second day of the month of July A.D. 1629 and the 5th year of our reign.”¹

After receiving this patent, Davidson always styles himself “Nobilis Scotus.”

Davidson’s high position in Paris was well known to his friends at home, and his influence seems to have been of service to them on the following occasion :—

In 1634 the Rector of the University of Aberdeen, the celebrated Dr John Forbes of Corse, was initiating a movement for the revival and extension of the ancient privileges of King’s College. He addressed King Charles for the royal corroboration and amplification of these rights and privileges. At the same time he was anxious to ascertain the constitution and laws of the University of Paris. Accordingly, he wrote to his friend Davidson to favour him with the desired information. The minutes of the University bear—“Lykwayes the said Rectour declarit that in respect this Universitie of Aberdeine, in the ancient monumentis thairof, have expres relatioun to the Universitie of Paris in France, having grantit to hir by the Kings of Scotland all jurisdiction conservatorie immunities and privileges quhatsumevir the Kings of France have at onie tyme grantit to the said Universitie of Paris. Thairfor the said Rector had written a speciall letter to our native countreyman and speciall good friend D. Williame Davidsoune, Doctour of Physick and resident in Paris in France, requesting him to deale in name of the said Universitie of Aberdeine with the Rector and Universitie of Paris for the better cleiring and setting in good ordour the rights and priviledges belonging to this Universitie of Aberdeine.”

Davidson seems to have entered warmly into the matter, and sent the following reply, which was minuted as follows :—

“Lykwayes the said Doctour Gordoune delyverit ane letter from the said Doctour Williame Davidsoune, direct to the Rectour of the said Universitie, of the tennour following :—‘Right Worshipfull, I esteime myselff so muche honored to be employit in so worthey and generall a causs by yourselff, and in

¹ Prodrumus Comment. p. 424.

the name of the rest of your colligis, that I sall not fail to seik all possible moyanes to faorize your most just and worthie petitioun. Yesternight I resauit your letters, and to-day I went with some of my friends to the Rector of the Universitie, to quhome I representit how honorabill and important your sute was to the renovne of the Universite, and how sensible they sould be to furnische yow all moyans possible for the intertaining of your richts. Quho ansverit me verrie favorable and protestit that he will do his powar, esteiming for honour that you wold imploy him concerning that suiect. But fearing to detein Doctor Gordoune so long in London, by their advyce I send you their privileges in compend; and if you neid any moir they have promised to lat anie man be me imployit copie their registers, the quhilks ar bigger than any gryt byble. Gif then you neid anie forder of my helpe let me know, and yow shal be assurit that nather lake of freinds, nor paine nor expenssis sall gainstand your most iust desire: being to yow all, and to your worship in particular, richt worshipfull. From Paris, this 15th Septt stilo novo 1634. Your most humble servand and lowing freind,

“WILLIAME DAUIDSON.

“And with the said letter ane printed book in Frenche language intituled ‘Privileges de l’Universite de Paris,’ &c.”

The minutes of the University further bear that—

“The said day the Chancellor, Visitouris and Members forsaidis ordanit the said Rector in name of the said Universitie of Aberdein to writ a letter to the Rector of the Universitie of Paris to rander to him and that Universitie heartie thanks for their kyndlie ansuer and loving correspondence, and to exhort them to continew therein in all tyme comeing with promeis of all mutuall deutie frome this Universitie; and to wryt another letter to the said Doctour W. David-soune, thanking him for his love and paines in the erand forsaid; and giving him commissioun and powar, in name of this Universitie of Aberdeine, for to caus subscriye ane autentik copie of the evidentis and registers of the Universitie of Paris concerning their conservatorie jurisdiction privileges and immunities and to bestow theropoun tua hundredth franks or therby, if it may not be had cheaper.”

The troubles in Scotland in 1638 caused by the attempt of Charles I. to establish Episcopacy, which led to the signing of the celebrated Solemn League and Covenant, were not unknown to Davidson. In the following letter, addressed to the Earl of Ancram, reference is made to “the Covenant,” and to the zeal he had for the “commun caus,” although he deeply sympathised with the misfortunes of his old patron, King Charles. The letter is preserved in the archives of the Marquis of Lothian at Newbattle:—

“ My right honorabill Lord, It has pleased your Lordship by ane excesse of your goodness to wreit in my faueurs not only to the Erlle of Laudien your Sone, bot also to the Erlle of Iruing, and I haue found the effects to haue bein suche as I could haue desyret upon thaire part; altho’ the euent has proued altogether contrary, some malignant spirit hauing informet our Scottes Court that I was ane colde countreyman and namly in the latte caus of the Couenant. This aspertione has bein very muche sensible to me wha haue leauet all my dayes passionet for my countrey and for the weill of their commun caus, yit I shall tak all in patience thinking that I am not only ane sufferer in thois dangerous tymes bot many that be better. I haue neuertheless justifiēt myselfe with the modesty I could and sall not, for all that, appear anything diminisched in the affectione and duty I aw to my countrey in generall and to my freinds thaire in particular. I rendre your Lordship infinitte thanks for the goode effects I fand in your Lordship’s part, for my Lord Iruing awoued that he was muche inclyned to my part becaus of your Lordship and my Lord your Sone his prayers, bot did suffer violence in himsealf to giue it to ane other wha was strongly recommendit to him before by my Lord Chancelor and maistre Arthour Jonstoun: the refusse has not bein so sensible to me as the reproche not to haue bein so goode ane countreyman as I sould, quhilk as God is my witnes hath euer bein far from my intentiones. This far I do let your Lordship knaw to the end you may think wherin I can be useful to your Lordship and to thois worthy noblemen wha haue employet thame with the so muche passione upone my behalfs. This schall be all wherewith I mean to importune your Lordship at this present, desyring only that your Lordship astime me æternally,

“ My right honorabill Lord,

“ Your most humble and most obliget seruant,

“ D’AUDSONE.

“ PARIS, *this 23 of July 1642.*”

While practising as a physician in Paris, Davidson, according to Jocher,¹ at first followed the doctrines of Paracelsus, and also gave his attention to judicial astrology, but these he afterwards abandoned, and applied himself to chemistry with such success that he began to teach it publicly. A Chair of Chemistry was at length founded in the Jardin des Plantes, and Davidson was appointed the first Professor. He also was appointed Director of the Garden, and Counsellor and Physician to the King of France. According to Kopp,² Davidson taught the theory of chemistry, while a demonstrator illustrated his theories by experiments. In the

¹ Bücher Lexikon.

² Geschichte der Chemie.

appendix to one of his works Davidson gives the following announcement of his course of lectures:—

“AUSPICIIS REGIIS.

“Willielmus Davissonus, Scotus, Consiliarius et Medicus Regius, Horti Regii Plantarum Medicinalium Præfectus,

“Botanicum et chemicum fontem aperiet cognitionis et scientiæ cupidis. Ex illo studiosum cultum, novum ordinem, plus septingentarum plantarum accessionem videbunt. Ex hoc animalium vegetabilium et fossilium analysin accipient. In antimonii præparatione et exaltatione multus erit quia non sufficiunt nomina, ad tam divitem naturam appellandam, quæ principium vitæ, balsamum, et medentem mumiam in se habet. Verum, verum dico non est sub cælo medicina sublimior.²

“In Aula Horti Regii Plantarum Medicinalium quæ Parisiis est die 23 Julii, et deinceps hora sexta matutina anno 1648.”

In the Diary of John Evelyn, the well-known author of “*Sylva*,” is an entry as follows:—“October 21st, 1649.—I went to hear Dr D’Avinson lecture in the Physical garden, and see his laboratory, he being Prefect of that excellent garden, and Professor Botanicus.”

The earliest of Davidson’s publications was his “*Philosophia Pyrotechnica*” (12mo, Paris, 1635, and of which editions appeared in 1640, 1641, and 1646). The first part of this book is dedicated to James Stuart, Duke of Lennox; the second to George and Ludovic Stuart, brothers of the Duke; the third to Henry Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland; and the fourth to Gilbert Gomin, Councillor of the King of France. At the beginning of the work is a curious allegorical frontispiece, containing his coat of arms and motto, “*Fortunam humili memento figere saxo.*”

In the approval of the work by the French censor of the press, H. Maillard, it is described as a learned and elaborate work illustrating the power, nature, and use of speculative and practical chemistry, and the connection of that science with the Aristotelic and Galenic philosophies—his theories also illustrated by quotations from the ancient philosophers, which being often metaphorical and allegorical, are set forth in their true meaning.

¹ Sir R. Christison states that so much mischief had been caused at this time by the indiscriminate use of antimony, that it was prohibited by an Act of the French Parliament.

² This work was translated into French in 1651 by A. Pellot.

Although in this curious work there is no chapter specially devoted to alchemy, yet its author gives a short account of the origin and nature of the metals—whether they differ in kind, and whether one is easily transmutable into another; whether they live, grow, and have seed; whether they are inimical to the human body, and by what process they may be made potable.

The next in order of his publications is one which is sufficiently explained by its title: "*Oblatio salis sive Gallia lege salis condita. Tractatus salis naturam ex reconditis philosophiæ pyrotechnicæ principiis explicans, nec non mysticum ejus sensum, quatenus ad pacta omnia et fœdera inter Deum et populum, Reges, Principes et subditos, et civilem hominum societatem, olim transferebatur declarans; ad originem institutionem et legis Salicæ rationes omnes intelligendas plurimum inserviens. Opus novum et a nullo hactenus excogitatum*" (12mo, Paris, 1641). This singular book is dedicated to the famous Cardinal Richelieu.

Between the year 1641, the time of the publication of this work, and 1660, the date of the one noticed immediately following, Davidson seems to have quitted Paris, and to have become physician and chemist to the King of Poland. While filling these offices he published his "*Commentationum in sublimis Philosophi et incomparabilis viri Petri Severini Dani Ideam Medicinæ philosophicæ prope diem proditorum Prodomus*," printed at the Hague in 1660, which may be considered his principal work. It contains, its author tells us, the result of the experience of forty years' practice, and seems to have cost him much labour. In the dedication of his book to Anthony Vallot, Counsellor of King Casimir of Poland, Davidson describes the stirring nature of the times in which he lived, and the difficulties under which it had been composed—amid the roar of cannon, the tumult of advancing and retreating armies, and all the miseries and dangers of war.

"*Tandem prodit opus cujus ante aliquot annos ideam vidisti ad Sequanam in amœnissimo Plantarum Medicinalium Horto Regis Parisiensi (cujus tunc temporis administrator et præfectus eram) inchoatum, in mediis oceani Germani undis, in maris Baltici procellis, ad Albin, Oderam, Buggum, Neisterum, Borysthenem, et Pontum Euxinum, inter peregrinationum incommoda, exercituum tumultus; tympanorum sonitus, timbalorum strepitus, tubarum clangores, tormentorum tonitrua omnes denique*

armorum generis collisiones, inter pestem et famem, cœli et elementarum injurias irrequietas incrementa sumpsit."

Although this work is styled by its author a *Prodromus*, it is more than double the size of the book of Severinus, on which it is a commentary, and it has been rather uncharitably suggested by some of his critics that he has augmented rather than diminished the obscurity he proposed to remove. Among the many topics treated of by the author, there are several allusions to his own circumstances, and to events at the time occurring in Scotland. In particular, he gives us the following piece of autobiography now translated from the Latin original:—

"My mother, of pious memory, and descended from one of the most illustrious and noble families of Scotland, when still a pupil, was deprived of both her parents, and left under the guardianship of a paternal uncle, with an ample inheritance. Meanwhile, this uncle, regardless of every principle of piety and Christian charity, by degrees defrauded her of the means to which she had succeeded, and which he appropriated to himself and his successors, contrary to all law, divine and human, in respect at that time there was nothing of what the jurists call a male feu in the family. After her marriage with my father, who also was born of a very ancient and noble family, an action of repetition was commenced at his instance in the law courts, which was attended with much expense and great loss of money and time, with the view of getting restitution of his wife's means from her uncle, who had acted as tutor and guardian to her; but when the case was on the point of being brought to a decision, my father died, and my mother was left with three sons, of whom the eldest was scarcely seven years old, and I was the youngest. In the meantime, when a good opportunity of a favourable issue presented itself, the uncle endeavoured to divert my unsuspecting mother from the prosecution of her design by professions of friendship, and leading her to hope that her property would be restored; but at the same time he was sending out emissaries who did all in their power to impair her means (although her pecuniary difficulties, owing to the expenditure on the lawsuit, were already sufficiently great), and to ruin the defenceless widow and children, and so compel them to desist from their judicial proceedings. But God, the protector of widows and orphans, raised up unexpected friends to us, who, by their counsels and patronage, rescued us from difficulties. Amongst these defenders of our family the first and foremost was the chief of the most illustrious and ancient family of the Leslies, John Leslie, the most illustrious Earl of Leslie, now on account of his great merits transferred to the Court of the Emperor of the

holy Roman Empire, who, with singular humanity and generosity sustained us, after we had been abandoned by our immediate relatives both on the father's and mother's side. By those on the father's side, because, on account of the danger of the family being merged into another with a different name, they were unwilling to espouse our cause; for such was the peculiar custom, though not sanctioned by law, among branches of the same name, that in order that those clans or families of the same surname, and descended from the same ancestors, all combining among themselves, may be the better enabled to repel injuries inflicted, or to protect themselves from the consequences of injuries inflicted by them on others, they endeavour to preserve the surname of the principal family in its various branches, by right or wrong, and with the same pertinacity as if struggling for their hearths and altars; and in order that this may be the more readily effected, they confer the same dignity, authority, and rights on the chiefs of the family which they owe to the king and the state, or rather which they to that extent withdraw from their king. To their chief they concede the power, right, and authority, paramount even to that of the king himself, of ruling, commanding, invading, and oppressing with a high hand; whence the feuds of so many different clans have for many centuries so devastated the country, that from their disputes and battles more seem to have fallen out of the various ranks and classes of their respective families than have perished either by plague or in foreign war; and these protracted family dissensions led for many generations to such fatal wars between the house of Gordon and that of Forbes, as to render our relatives by the mother's side (the Forbes family) powerless to protect our interests. And though these feuds seemed often brought to an amicable settlement by intermarriages between the families, yet they broke out afresh on the slightest occasion or pretext, as happened in the case of our grandfather, who, although he had married a lady, our grandmother, of the principal family of the Gordons, yet in the battle which was fought between the Gordons and the Forbeses, about a hundred and thirty years ago, at a place called Crabstein, about a mile distant from the famous city of Aberdeen, on the banks of the river Dee, about two thousand of the family of Forbes were computed to have been slain by the Gordons. Amongst those that fell on that occasion were four brothers of our maternal grandfather, the Baron of Pitsligo, whose wife's brother was the chief of the Gordons, and their commander in that war. So my mother being left without relatives either on the father's or mother's side to take her part, she was entrusted to the guardianship of one of her two surviving brothers, like a lamb to the charge of a wolf. This was the means of causing her to be ejected from her inheritance. In the meantime her tutor died, but left a son fatal to our family and bent on ruining it, who, although in illegal possession of our goods and heritage, and representing only the pretended heir to our fortune, gave

ample indications that he had succeeded to his father's malice and fraud, for if the father kept possession of our means by open injustice and a strong hand, the son, when he thought that the case was going against him, and that he was on the point of being non-suited, devised new subterfuges and wiles, and manufactured a title to himself based on a fictitious transaction with his pupil. Meanwhile, time passed on, and he placed his whole reliance on long possession, although challenged. Hence it happened that he had recourse to various stratagems and indirect means to accomplish our ruin while we were emerging from infancy, and especially as our mother had then died; but God, who is the protector of orphans, and the avenger of all fraud, malice, and tyranny, affected him with mental alienation of the gravest kind, and remorse of conscience for his past misdeeds so alarmed him that some time before his death, despairing to avert the wrath of God on account of the calamities he had brought upon us, he professed, not only with words, but even with sighs and tears, his desire and intention to be reconciled and to make restitution; but he was besieged by the artifices and instances of a paternal uncle, who was also the paternal uncle of our mother, for he employed every art that the son, still a pupil of the father, now despaired of, should be committed to his care and brought up with his own sons. And though God afforded ample opportunity to the miserable man before his death of making compensation, not only for the loss inflicted on us by withholding our mother's inheritance, but for the expenses and outlays with which he obliged us to dissipate our remaining means in a protracted litigation, his uncle, in the hope of possessing his estate, and of getting it transferred to his own family, always dreading that we might thwart his purposes, precluded us from access to the dying man, and gave us no opportunity of making our entreaties to him. This adversary having at length died, the law of pupils, which prevents any legal proceedings to be taken against them in the time of their minority, caused a long delay in the prosecution of our case; but a third heir having ultimately emerged from minority, my two elder brothers resuscitate the action, and carry it on for the space of ten years, I having left Scotland for the purpose of travelling among foreign nations, and being still resident abroad. I, to the best of my ability, exerted my influence with the ambassadors of the most serene King of Great Britain, accredited to the Court of France, under whose auspices I was then practising medicine, and to whom I acted as physician, and obtained through them that letters of the most serene king should be addressed to the Parliament of Scotland, requiring that the lawsuit should be pressed forward and brought to a conclusion without delay and without respect of persons. When, in consequence of this proceeding, our adversaries saw that the case was going against them, they invite my second eldest brother to an amicable settlement of the dispute—my eldest brother by this time being deceased. The illustrious Lord Innerpeffer and

Lord Balcomie,¹ two of the most illustrious senators in the high court of Parliament, were appointed arbiters, to whose judgment both parties should submit. But before the lawsuit was ended, my younger brother died, and this occasioned fresh delay. Meanwhile, intelligence having reached me respecting the progress of the suit and the death of my brother, God knows what anxiety I felt when I saw so just a cause without any one to take it up. Ultimately I obtained letters recommendatory from the king, addressed to the high court of Parliament, requiring them without delay to give a speedy and lawful judgment. Commissioners were also appointed, and in my absence I chose friends in whose hands I placed power of acting, and transacting or managing all business relating to the lawsuit. These were the most illustrious John Scott, Lord of Scotstarbet, and associated with him the illustrious Lord Lewis Stuart, Knight, patron of my brothers in this cause. With the latter were all the documents having reference directly or indirectly to that lawsuit. But strange to say, when everything by an amicable arrangement had been brought to a final stage, and nothing remained to be done but to affix the signatures, and when our adversary, who had just attained majority, desired nothing so much, according to every one's testimony, as to remedy evils caused by his father's oppression, and our expenses of litigation, he was carried off by sudden death, to our great loss, leaving behind him a son, recently born, against whom, by the law of the country, no action could be taken, as he was a minor. So frustrated of all hope of redress for the present, we lost both a friendly adversary and the power of proceeding farther till the termination of the minority of the new heir. I call him a friendly adversary, because, in addition to his being related to us by blood, he was pious and conscientious, and detested much the crimes of his father. For, on his father's death, he began to destroy many false documents, and stop many unjust proceedings by which his father had been used to harass defenceless people, his dependants and neighbours; but the young man having called the parties interested, ordered these documents to be burned in their presence, and the proceedings to be departed from, and restored every one to the position he occupied before such proceedings were taken. And he often declared in the presence of many that he intended to restore everything to us; and this he would certainly have done if God had prolonged his life for even ten days longer. He was good and pious, although the son of a wicked father. His mother, however, was a most religious person, who often begged with tears and on her bended knees her inexorable husband to show mercy to my mother, her father's sister, warning him to avoid bringing down the curse of God upon himself and his family.

“Meanwhile I was left alone, and having now for the last forty years resided in foreign countries, I wished to make publicly known this transplantation of

¹ Lords of Session.

our family, that it might serve with posterity in place of a formal declaration and protest, lest the rights which God and nature have given me and my successors, and which were derived from my mother's family through direct succession for the last five hundred years, should grow obsolete by oblivion and prescription.

“And what has most of all induced me is the confused and intricate state of Scottish affairs.”

Davidson here deploras at great length the rebellion against his patron, Charles I., and the king's execution, and justifies the institution of monarchy by various texts from Scripture. He continues—

“But leaving the tragedies and migrations of royal houses to the care of God and kings, and the guilty authors of such misfortunes to the punishment which shall infallibly at due time and occasion overtake them, I shall now proceed to demonstrate the truth of what I have stated as to the transplanting of my own family, and wish that all may be enabled to recognise the justice of my pretensions on this point. I therefore adduce the letters giving my pedigree, confirmed by the great seal of Scotland, and granted to me after due examination by commissioners, and although it may be considered that I have made choice of an unsuitable station in life, inasmuch as I, who am born of one of the most noble families of Scotland, have embraced the medical profession, yet it must be borne in mind—*first*, that amongst the Scottish professors of medicine were invested with such honour by the kings of Scotland that they enjoyed a title equal to that of earls, and it is certain that they enjoy such title to this day; *secondly*, that it was more desirable for me, a third son, to remain obscure, keep out of the way, and live industriously and honestly among foreigners, than to live in poverty and degradation amongst my countrymen and illustrious relatives. I shall perhaps leave children behind me who will raise themselves above the shortcomings which may attach to me, and the dignity which the father could not adequately preserve by the laurel, the sons may re-vindicate by war and illustrious deeds; and that this may be so I humbly pray the supreme and beneficent Deity. The truth of all this is attested by my letters of pedigree, originally granted to me by Parliament after due investigation by several noble neighbours on their attestation, and subsequently confirmed by the great seal of the kingdom. The original autograph of them is to be found in the general collection of charters and archives of the kingdom, corroborated by the seal, as in the case of the duplicate with me, which in time to come, as long as may be, shall be found with my successors.”¹

The last of the publications of W. Davidson is his “Plico-Mastix; seu

¹ Prodrumus Comment. p. 407.

Plicæ e numero morborum Apospasma." It was published at Dantzic in 1668 by its author, under the name of "Theophrastus Scotus." In this work Davidson denies the existence of the disease called *Plica Polonica*, and maintains that all the symptoms of it may be attributed to other maladies.

By medical writers this is acknowledged to be a remarkable production, and still deserving of attention.

The Society is indebted to Duncan Davidson of Tulloch for supplying the following extract from the "*Livre d'Or*" of France. It is a ratification by Louis XIV., king of France, dated 6th April 1669, in favour of William Davidson and his son Charles, of the certificate of nobility of birth granted by King Charles I. in 1629. In this document Davidson and his son are designated "*Maistres d'hostel du S^r Duc d'Anguein*," and there is granted to them and their descendants all privileges and exemptions enjoyed by gentlemen of France.

In support of the claim of Charles Davidson, this document recites his having produced certificates, first, of having been a page of honour to Charles I., and afterwards of having served under Colonel Douglas as lieutenant and captain in his regiment of infantry during eight campaigns. In it is also attested by Marshal Turenne and the *Sieur Dorgeval*, '*Intendant*' of the army of Picardy, that Charles Davidson had served in the Scottish Guard in France known as the "*Gendarmes Eccossois*." Complimentary letters from the King and Queen of Poland, and one from the widowed Queen of Charles I., had also been exhibited, showing that none but gentlemen were ever made pages to the king.

"ARRET DE MAINTENUE DE NOBLESSE POUR GUILLAUME ET CHARLES
DAVIDSON."

"9 *Avril* 1669.

"Sur la requête présentée au Roy en son Conseil par Guillaume Davissonne et Charles Davissonne, maistres d'hostel du S^r Duc d'Anguein, père et fils contenant qu'encore que leur qualité d'escuyer ne leur puisse estre contrestée, comme estans issus d'une famille des plus nobles d'Escosse, et qu'ils le justifient par une déclaration authentique du feu Roy d'Angleterre scellée du grand sceau qui contient la généalogie de leurs ancestres depuis six générations, et fait veoir qu'ils sont issus en ligne directe de Guillaume Davissonne seigneur Dakimkempert le cinquième ayeul sans qu'aucun d'eux ait jamais dérogé : Que le dit Charles, l'un

des supplians, ait esté eslevé page du Roy d'Angleterre à présent regnant ou ne sont admis que des enfans de qualité ; qu'estant revenu en France, il ait servi sa Majesté en qualité de lieutenant et de capitaine dans le regiment de Duglas, sans avoir manqué aucune occasion durant huit campagnes après lesquelles sa Majesté l'a honoré des charges de Guidon et d'enseigne dans la compagnie des gendarmes Ecossois, et mesme il a commandé toute la gendarmerie en plusieurs occasions. Neantmoins ils ont esté assignez par devant les S^{rs} Commissaires généraux deputez à la suite du Conseil pour la recherche des usurpateurs du titre de noblesse pour représenter les titres en vertu desquels ils ont prins la qualité d'Escuyer, et comme ils n'en scauroient représenter d'autres que la déclaration du dit feu Roy d'Angleterre et les certificats de leurs services, requeroient qu'il pleust à sa Majesté les descharger de la dite assignation, ce faisant les maintenir en leur ancienne noblesse et ordonner qu'ils jouiront, ensemble leurs successeurs, enfans ou postérité des privilèges et exemptions dont jouissent les autres gentilshommes du royaume, faire deffenses à M. Jacques Duret commis à la recherche des usurpateurs de titre de noblesse de l'eslection de Nemours de les y troubler ny empescher à peine de 11^m livres d'amande, des pens, dommages et interestz, et pour cet effect qu'ils seront employez dans le catalogue des gentilshommes qui sera arresté au Conseil.

Veü par le Roy en son Conseil la dite requeste communiquéé suivant l'ordonnance du dit Conseil du XI^e Mars dernier au dit Duret par exploit du 12^e du dit mois trois sommations faites au dit Duret de fournir de response à la dite requeste de 13^e, 14^e et 15^e du dit mois de Mars dernier 1669, lettres patentes du feu Roi d'Angleterre du 2^e Juillet 1629, par lesquelles il est porté que Guillaume Davissonne, docteur en medecine, est descendu d'une famille noble tant du costé paternel que maternel, deux certificats de Charles prince de la Grande Bretagne du 29^e Juin en la 24^e année du règne de son père qu'il avoit receu pour son page d'honneur Charles Davissonne fils du dit Guillaume, provisions données par le colonel Douglas de la charge de lieutenant en une compagnie de son regiment d'infanterie au dit Charles Davidsons du 14^e Janvier 1638, trois certificats et passeport du S^r Maréchal de Turenne, du S^r Dorgeval intendant de l'armée de Picardie, et du S^r Charpentier commissaire des guerres, par lesquels il paroist que le dit Davissonne estoit guidon de la compagnie des gendarmes Escossois de sa Majesté des 21^e May 1651, 10^e Janvier, 12^e Decembre 1652, contrat de vente de la charge d'enseigne des gendarmes Escossois de sa Majesté, faite par Charles Davissonne en faveur du S^r de Montlidar du 4^e Mars 1655, lettre de cachet du Roy de Pologne escrite au dit Charles Davissonne par laquelle il le charge de faire compliment de sa part au Roy d'Angleterre sur son établissement du vi^e Juillet 1660 ; autre lettre de cachet de la Roynne de Pologne par laquelle elle remercie le dit Davidsons des complimens qu'il a faits au Roy en conséquence de la sus dite lettre du 20^e

Novembre 1660 ; certificat de la Reyne mère du Roy d'Angleterre que le feu Roy d'Angleterre ny son fils regnant n'ont jamais pris de pages qui ne fussent gentilhommes du 16^e Fevrier 1669 ; et ouy le raport du Sr Daligre conseiller ordinaire de sa Majesté en ses Conseils et Directeur de ses finances, commissaire à ce Député, et tout considéré :

Le Roy estant en son conseil Royal des Finances, ayant égard à la dite requeste, a maintenu et maintient les dits Guillaume et Charles Davissonne père et fils en leur qualité de noble et d'escuyer, et a ordonné et ordonne qu'ils jouiront, ensemble leurs successeurs, enfans et postérité, nais et à naitre en légitime mariage, des privileges et exemptions dont jouissent les autres gentilhommes du Royaume tant qu'ils vivront noblement et ne feront aucun acte de derogance, fait sa Majesté deffenses au dit Duret et à tous autres de les y troubler ny empescher à peine de m^{ll} d'amande, des pens, dommages et interests, et pour cet effect qu'ils seront inscritz et employez dans l'estat et catalogue des gentilhommes qui sera arrêté au Conseil et envoyé dans les bailliages et eslections du Royaume en conséquence de l'arrêt du Conseil du 22 Mars 1666.

“ SEGUIER.

“ DALIGRE.

“ Du ix^e Avril 1669, Paris.”

The death of Dr William Davidson in all probability took place shortly after the year 1669, as he was then far advanced in years.

On the whole, Davidson was a remarkable man, and one who maintained the honour of his country on the Continent of Europe at a time when learning was at a low ebb in Scotland.

A copy of a fine print of him is preserved in the Advocates' Library. Another copy exists in the collections of Mr D. Laing, from which the accompanying photo-lithograph has been made. (See Plate VII.)

In a letter to Dr Stuart, Mr Davidson of Tulloch remarks :—“ When last in France I traced the descendants of the W. Davidson alluded to in the ‘Maintenue de Noblesse.’ All the male descendants who were settled in France are dead. I became acquainted with the descendant of the last female of the family—the Marquis de Beuvron.¹ His family were ruined at the Revolution, and the chateau of the Davidsons then was utterly destroyed. The name of the chateau was ‘Neuville,’ as to which I may be able to get some satisfactory information ere long.”

¹ Probably Le Vicomte Anatole de Beuvron.

