

**Dr. Sylvester Rattray, author of the treatise on sympathy and antipathy,
Glasgow, 1658 / by James Finlayson.**

Contributors

Finlayson, James, 1840-1906.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

[Amsterdam] : [publisher not identified], [1900]

Persistent URL

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

Provider

Royal College of Surgeons

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. The copyright of this item has not been evaluated. Please refer to the original publisher/creator of this item for more information. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. See rightsstatements.org for more information.



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

(13)

JAMES FINLAYSON.

**Dr. Sylvester Rattray, Author of the treatise
on Sympathy and Antipathy, Glasgow, 1658.**

JANUS

Archives internationales pour l'Histoire de la Médecine et la Géographie Médicale.

Rédacteur en chef: Dr. H. F. A. PEYPERS.

Amsterdam, Parkweg 212.

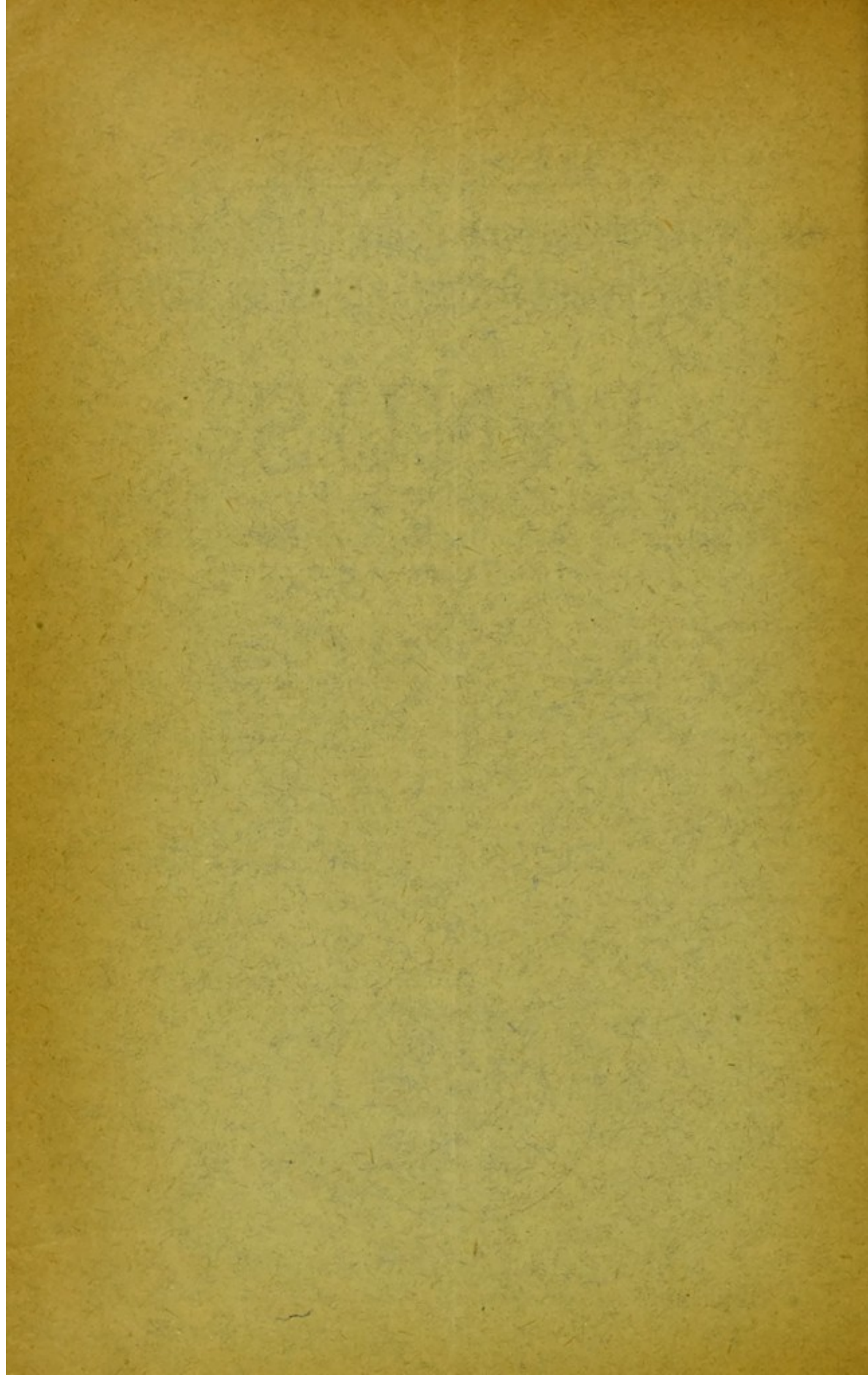
REDACTEURS

Dr. AOYAMA, Prof., Tokyo; Dr. A. BORDIER, Prof., Grenoble; Dr. D. ANGEL FERNANDEZ-CARO Y NOUVILAS, Sénateur, Directeur du Boletín de medicina naval, Madrid; Dr. A. CALMETTE, Dir. de l'Institut Pasteur, Lille; Dr. CH. CREIGHTON, Londres; Dr. C. E. DANIELS, Amsterdam; Prof. Dr. A. DAVIDSON, Edinbourg; Dr. C. DENEFFE, Prof., Gand; Dr. P. DORVEAUX, Bibliothécaire, Paris; Surgeon-General Sir Jos. FAYRER Bart., Londres; Dr. MODESTINO DEL GAIZO, Prof., Naples; Dr. A. JOHANNESSEN, Prof., Christiania; Prof. Dr. H. KIRCHNER, Conseiller au Min. du Culte, Berlin; Prof. Dr. KITASATO, Tokyo; Dr. R. KOBERT, Prof., Rostock; Dr. A. LAVERAN, Paris; Prof. Dr. PATRICK MANSON, Londres; Dr. J. E. MONJARAS, Saint-Louis-Potosi, Mexique; Dr. J. L. PAGEL, Prof., Berlin; Dr. J. F. PAYNE, Londres; Dr. JUL. PETERSEN, Prof., Copenhague; Dr. L. ROGERS, Muktesar, Ind-Angl.; Dr. W. P. RUYCH, Conseiller, la Haye; Sanitätsrath Dr. B. SCHEUBE, Greiz; Dr. PROSPERO SONSINO, Prof. Pise; Dr. C. STEKOULIS, Délégué des Pays-Bas au Conseil International de Santé, Constantinople; Surgeon-General Dr. GEO. M. STERNBERG, Washington; Dr. B. J. STOKVIS, Prof., Amsterdam; Dr. K. SUDHOFF, Hochdahl (p/d Düsseldorf); Dr. J. W. R. TILANUS, Prof. Em., Amsterdam; Dr. G. TREILLE, Insp. E. R. du Serv. Méd. des Colonies, Vichy; Dr. G. C. VORDERMAN, Batavia.



Extrait de JANUS.

CINQUIÈME ANNÉE. LIVRAISONS XI, XII, Novembre—Décembre, 1900.



DR. SYLVESTER RATTRAY, AUTHOR OF THE TREATISE
ON SYMPATHY AND ANTIPATHY, GLASGOW, 1658.

By JAMES FINLAYSON, M.D., LL.D.,
President of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow.

If we were to discuss the curious subject of Sympathetic Medicine or the Powder of Sympathy, we would require to go back to the mystical doctrines of Paracelsus. He taught the inter-relationship of all things in the heaven above and the earth beneath — plants, animals, minerals, constellations, planets — and he aimed at keeping in view the bearing of all this on human diseases and their cure. We would, likewise, require to deal with his doctrine of the “Mumia”, and the possibility of inflicting pain or injury on human beings by pricking or mutilating images representing certain personages, — practices closely allied to witchcraft. The present paper, however, is concerned chiefly with Sylvester Rattray of Glasgow.

Some indication of the wonderful doctrines and practices with which his name is associated may be useful for those readers who have not dipped into this part of medical history or who have forgotten its mysteries. This purpose may be served by giving three extracts: 1) from the writings of a dramatist, 2) of a physician, and 3) of a philosopher: these extracts serve to show how the subject was regarded about Rattray’s time.

The first extract is from Dryden’s version of the *Tempest*, for in those days the work of Shakespeare was supposed to require emendations and improvements!

“*Ariel.* . . . Anoint the sword which pierced him with this weapon-salve,
And wrap it close from air till I have time
To visit him again.”

Dryden’s *Tempest*, Act. V. I.

Mir. I am come to ease you.

[She unwraps the sword.

Hip. Alas! I feel the cold air come to me;
My wound shoots worse than ever.

[She wipes, and anoints the sword.

Mir. Does it still grieve you?

Hip. Now, methinks, there’s something
Laid just upon it.

Mir. Do you find no ease?

Hip. Yes, Yes, upon the sudden, all the pain
Is leaving me: Sweet heaven, how I am eased!"

Dryden's *Tempest*, Act. V. 2.

The next extract, from a celebrated physician of his time, gives very circumstantial details of the marvellous influence on wounds exerted by the Powder of Sympathy applied to the patient's garter. The extract is from Sir Kenelm Digby, *Of the Sympathetic Powder. A discourse in a solemn assembly at Montpellier*. London, 1669, pp. 145—149.

[*A certain Mr. Howel had been cut in his hand by a sword and the wound bound by his garter.*] "I ask'd him, then, for anything that had the blood upon it; so he presently sent for his Garter, wherewith his hand was first bound; and as I call'd for a Basin of water, as if I would wash my hands, I took a handful of Powder of *Vitriol* [Iron Sulphate] which I had in my Study, and presently dissolv'd it. As soon as the bloody Garter was brought me, I put it in the Basin, observing the while what Mr. *Howel* did; who stood talking with a Gentleman in a corner of my Chamber, not regarding at all what I was doing: But he started suddenly as if he had found some strange alteration in himself. I ask'd him what he all'd? I know not what ails me, said he, but I find, that I feel no more pain: methinks, a pleasing kind of freshness, as it were a wet cold napkin spread itself over my hand: which hath taken away the inflammation that tormented me before. I reply'd, since then you feel already so good an effect of my medicament I advise you to cast away all your plaisters; only keep the wound clean, and in a moderate temper 'twixt heat and cold. After dinner, I took the Garter out of the water, and put it to dry before a great fire. It was scarce dry, but Mr. *Howel's* servant came running, to tell me that his Master felt as much burning as ever he had done, if not more; for the heat was such, as if his hand were betwixt coales of fire.... I put again the Garter into the water: thereupon, he found his Master without any pain at all. To be brief, there was no sense of pain afterward: but, within five or six days the wounds were cicatrized, and entirely healed."

The third extract is from no less a philosopher than Lord Bacon, who details from experience in his own person, this sympathetic treatment as applied to warts with which he was affected, the remarkable success still remaining in his mind after many years.

"I had from my childhood a wart upon one of my fingers; afterwards, when I was about sixteen years old, being then at Paris, there grew upon both my hands a number of warts, at least a hundred in a month's space. The English ambassador's lady, who was a woman far from superstition, told me one day, she would help me away with my warts; where

upon she got a piece of lard with the skin on, and rubbed the warts all over with the fat side; and amongst the rest, that wart which I had had from my childhood: then she nailed the piece of lard, with the fat towards the sun, upon a post of her chamber, which was to the south. The success was, that within five weeks space all the warts went quite away; and also that wart which I had so long endured. But at the rest I did little marvel, because they came in a short time and might go away in a short time again; but the going away of that which stayed so long doth yet stick with me." (*The Works of Francis Bacon*, New Edition in 10 volumes. London, 1826. Vol. 2, p. 72. Century X, 997. Nat. History or *Sylva Sylvarum*.)

Absurd as such things seem in modern times, we must remember that for many centuries the applications thought necessary for wounds were often of the most extraordinary character; not a little of the success following applications to a sword or to a garter instead of to the wound, may have been due to the absence of irritation from the local remedies which would otherwise have been deemed essential. A hint of this is given in the above quotation from Digby. "Cast away all your plaisters: only keep the wound clean and in a moderate temper 'twixt heat and cold." KEEP THE WOUND CLEAN AND FREE FROM IRRITATING APPLICATIONS: is not this the Aseptic or modern treatment of wounds? If the human mind requires more fussing activity than this implies, then let it be directed to a sword or to a garter instead of to the tender wound!

Another element of the success of Sympathetic Medicine was, no doubt, FAITH, — aided by the sight of something being done. This ever-potent influence is glorified in our days under the name of "Faith-healing", while the methods of "Hypnotism" with "Suggestion", of which we hear so much, are closely allied to the old Sympathetic plans.

But who was Sylvester Rattray who attained European fame as an exponent of the philosophy of Sympathetic Medicine? Evidently he *had* attained a great reputation, for we find his treatise put in the place of honour, as the first item, in the collection entitled "*Theatrum Sympatheticum*", published in Nuremberg in 1662.

Rattray's treatise, however, had been previously published in 1658, in Glasgow, where he was practising as a physician, and this book has some local interest in Glasgow as the first medical work printed there: indeed, it was one of the first books, of any kind, printed in that city. The title of the little duodecimo runs:

Aditus Novus / Ad occultas / Sympathiæ / Et / Antipathiæ / Causas inveniendas: / Per / Principia Philosophiæ naturalis, ex Fermentorum / artificiosâ Anatomia hausta, / Patefactus. / A Sylvestro Rattray, / Med. Doct. Glasguensi Scoto. / Natura est arcanorum suorum interpres fidesima, nam quæ in uno aliquo genere obscurius exhibet, ea luculentius in alio explicat. / Glasguæ, / Excudebat Andreas Anderson, / Anno Dom. 1658. [12 pp. not numbered, pp. 135].

The dedication of the book is to a celebrated patron of letters in his time. It reads:

Clarissimo, / Amplissimo, / ac / Consultissimo Viro, / D. D. Ioanni Scoto, / Scototarvatio, / Nobili Musarum Maecenati, / amico suo submissè colendo, / Sylvester Rattray, M. D. / S. P. D.

The date of the Dedication is Feby. 10. 1658.

This treatise was soon reprinted on the continent, appearing in Tübingen in 1660; and, as already stated, it occupies the first place in the new edition of the collection on this subject, appearing in Nuremberg in 1662:

"Theatrum Sympatheticum auctum, exhibens variores authores de Pulvere Sympathetico, quidem Digbæum, Straussium, Papinum et Mohyem de unguento verò armario.... Praemittitur his Sylvestri Rattray, Aditus ad Sympathiam et Antipathiam. Norimbergæ, 1662." 4to.

The explanation of the precedence thus given to Rattray's little work was, evidently, because of its aiming at a philosophical exposition of the whole subject of "Sympathia" and "Antipathia" rather than at furnishing a therapeutical application of his doctrine; this he reserved for another occasion which never came.

He begins by putting his facts in tabulated form; thus we have lists headed "Vegetabilium Antipathia"; "Animalium Antipathia"; "Mineralium Antipathia"; "Vegetabilium Sympathia" &c. he then goes on to expound an obscure Metaphysical theory which would have little interest for present-day readers even if it could be stated briefly. ¹⁾

The personality of Sylvester Rattray is rather shadowy, but perhaps

¹⁾ Some of his so-called facts are given by Dr. A. Duncan in his *Memorials of the Glasgow Faculty*, Glasgow, 1896, p. 201. The pages in the Glasgow edition are those quoted. These extracts may serve to keep the reader from desiring more! If such are the "facts" Rattray founded on, the stability of his metaphysical edifice built thereon, may be imagined.

"The smoking (fumigatio) of the lung of an ass in a house kills worms, serpents and all poisonous things", p. 19. "Clothes which have been at a funeral are never attacked by moths", p. 20. "If we often make use of the shorter lived fruits and the animals which feed upon them, they shorten life", p. 16. "Should the feathers of the tail of a peacock come into contact with a haemorrhage from accident or blow, it cannot be stopped unless these are removed", p. 12.

further details may be forthcoming if a little attention is directed to him. The first trace of his presence in Glasgow occurs in the Minutes of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow. This body had powers, by their Charter, to examine all those practising as Surgeons, within their bounds; but as regards Physicians, the Faculty had only the right to secure that those who practised in this way, had "ane testimonial of ane famous universitie quhair medicine be taught". In 1657 a committee of the Faculty was appointed "to goe to doctour Rotraye and crave a sight of his letters of graduation, and if he refuis that they may have a sight thereof, To report". (Duncan's *Memorials of the Faculty*, Glasgow, 1896, p. 237.) He was admitted shortly afterwards, so the documents were evidently in order. The place of his graduation in *medicine* is unknown. He does not appear in any of the lists of the Scottish Universities, nor do the Leyden lists bear his name. This seemed a likely place to find a notice of him, because his son, as we shall see, seems to have been a student there.

At the University of St. Andrews the records give the name of "Sylvester Rattray" as a matriculated student of Philosophy or Arts in St. Salvator's college 4th Feb. 1641, his regent being Mr. George Martine. He received the degree of Master of Arts there in 1644.¹⁾ This entry in all probability refers to the subject of this memoir.

The name Sylvester²⁾ was not uncommon in the Forfarshire branches of the Rattray family; the Glasgow physician was from that part of Scotland — "ane Angus man borne" — for we have a record of his marriage,—

"1652, May. Mr. Sylvester Rattray, a doctor of physicke, ane "Angus man borne, married Ingells, Kynggaskes daughter;

1) Ms. Communication from Mr. J. Maitland Anderson, Librarian St. Andrews University.

2) The following note has been furnished by David Murray Esq., LL.D., the well-known lawyer and archaeologist in Glasgow.

"In 1487 there was a Sylvester Rattray, elder and younger of Rattray, who owned lands "in Forfarshire, Perthshire, and Fifeshire. In 1491 the elder had become a knight. Towards "the middle of the sixteenth century we meet with Sylvester Rattray of Craighall, and at "the beginning of the seventeenth century there was another Sylvester Rattray of Craighall "and another of Persie. In 1582 Sylvester Rattray second son of David Rattray of Craighall "was lauréat at the University of St. Andrews, and in 1591 became minister of the parish "of Rattray. He died on 30th. Jan. 1623, aged 67. This Sylvester was succeeded in the "parish of Rattray by his son John, who graduated M. A. at St. Andrews in 1618 and "died in Jan. 1678."

The subject of our memoir may have been related to (grandson?) Sylvester Rattray, the minister, who died 1623.

For some information as to the Rattray family, see also *The Scottish Nation*, by William Anderson, Edinburgh, 1863, in the Supplement.

"the marriage feast stood in Cuper of Fyfe, at her father's house there". (*Lamont's Diary*, p. 42, Edinburgh, 1830.)

The dates given look as if they must all refer to the same person;

Entered St. Salvator's College, St. Andrews . . .	1641
Graduated as Master of Arts, St. Andrews . . .	1644
Married, (when "a doctor of physicke") . . .	1652
In practice in Glasgow as a Physician . . .	1657
"Aditus novus" published in Glasgow . . .	1658

The period following his graduation in Arts at St. Andrews may have been partly spent at some of the continental Universities, where many of his fellow countrymen studied medicine, graduating there before their return to Scotland, but the place of his study and graduation in medicine, have not yet been ascertained.

It is probable also that immediately before his appearance in Glasgow, he may have been resident in Edinburgh. The name of Sylvester Rattray appears in a list of doctors of medicine who were agitating for the establishment of a College of Physicians in Edinburgh. This College was actually established in 1681; but there was an attempt in this direction, which was almost successful, in Cromwell's time. The date of this movement was 1656 and it was dropped the following year, on account of serious opposition from various other bodies; owing to Cromwell's death, in 1658, this movement lapsed completely.¹⁾

Sylvester Rattray's name appears in this list of doctors, (*Analecta Scotica*, II, pp. 127, 129); unfortunately, no date is there given; but from his association with others known to be then active, we can identify the movement with that of Cromwell's time.²⁾

Rattray must have been working at his treatise on Sympathy and Antipathy before he went to Glasgow, as the dedication is dated February 1658, a few months after he was interviewed by the Glasgow Faculty. In May of the same year (1658) and about the time of the publication of his treatise, we find Sylvester Rattray's name as one of the physicians consulted by Principal Baillie of Glasgow University regarding the fatal illness of his son; but there are no medical details given. (*Baillie's Letters*, III, p. 373.)

¹⁾ See A. Duncan's *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians & Surgeons*, Glasgow, 1896, pp. 69, 70; and R. Peel Ritchie's *Early days of the Royal Colledge of Phisitians, Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1899, pp. 46—48.

²⁾ Amongst the names associated with Sylvester Rattray is that of Dr. Purves who seems to have been the leading spirit in the unsuccessful attempt in 1656. (See Dr. John Gairdner's *Sketch of the Early History of the Medical Profession in Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1864, p. 21, foot note.) This fixes the date.

The next notice of Sylvester Rattray in Glasgow is the issue of another book, in duodecimo form, published and printed there in 1666. In the list of errata it is intimated that the author was absent from Glasgow at the time of printing. The title runs:—

Prognosis / Medica, / ad usum praxeos facili / methodo digesta. / A Sylvestro Rattræo, Med. / Doct. Glasguensi Scoto. / Nullum est præceptum adeo inviolabile, ut / limitationem non admittat. / Glasguæ, / Excudebat Robertus Sanders, / Typographus Urbis. / M.DC.LXVI. [pp. 10 not numbered, pp. 247].

This work is dedicated to Sir John Wedderburn:

Clarissimo / Ac Excellentissimo Viro, / D. Joanni / Wedderburno, / Medico Regio Equiti / Aurato, / Syl. Ratt. M.D. S.P.D.

This treatise on Prognosis professes to be chiefly for "tirones", or as an aid to the memory of those whom he terms "proveciores". Referring to the celebrated Hippocratic treatise on Prognostics, he apologises for appearing "Iliada post Homerum contexere".

The treatise is, as it professes to be, a compendium or bringing together of the dicta of ancient authors on Prognosis, with the addition of some of the more recent views also. Under such headings as The Urine and The Tongue, recent views are adduced more fully; but he specially claims to have drawn fully "ex limpidissimo Hippocratico fonte". Although writing at the very time when Harvey's great discoveries were changing the most fundamental notions in medicine he boldly claims that these leave the basis of prognostics unaffected (p. 230); and it must be confessed that this may often be the case.

In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, under the entry "Sylvester Rattray", it is stated that "on the title-page of the second book [Prognosis] he is credited with a theological degree as well as with that of M.D." This is a mistake, as will be seen on looking at the full copy of title page given above, where no such thing appears. Possibly "S.P.D." (Salutem Plurimam Dicit), in the *Dedication*, may have been misread as meaning Sanctae Theologiae Professor (or Doctor), the letters S.T.P. (or S.T.D.) being frequently used as a contraction for this title. In the same article, it is stated that "the Sylvester under notice graduated in medicine at Glasgow University"; this, also, is a mistake; his name does not appear in the *Munimenta* of the University; the letters M.D. on title page being followed by "Glasguensi Scoto", may have misled the author of the article; these words indicate his place of residence not the place of graduation.

Sylvester Rattray would seem to have had a son of the same name, as we find in the Munimenta of Glasgow University, Sylvester Rattray entered as a student of the 4th Class Feb. 1, 1680. No doubt it is the same person who appears in the *Album studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae 1575—1875*, Hagae, 1875; he is entered as a student of Medicine there; "1689 Mar. 19. Sylvester Rattray, Scotus, 24. M."

No indication can be found of the date of death of the subject of this memoir.
