

In memoriam of the late William Williamson, A.M., M.D., Senior Physician to the Royal Infirmary of Aberdeen, etc. : an address delivered in the Royal Infirmary of Aberdeen, February 20, 1865 / by Alexander Harvey.

Contributors

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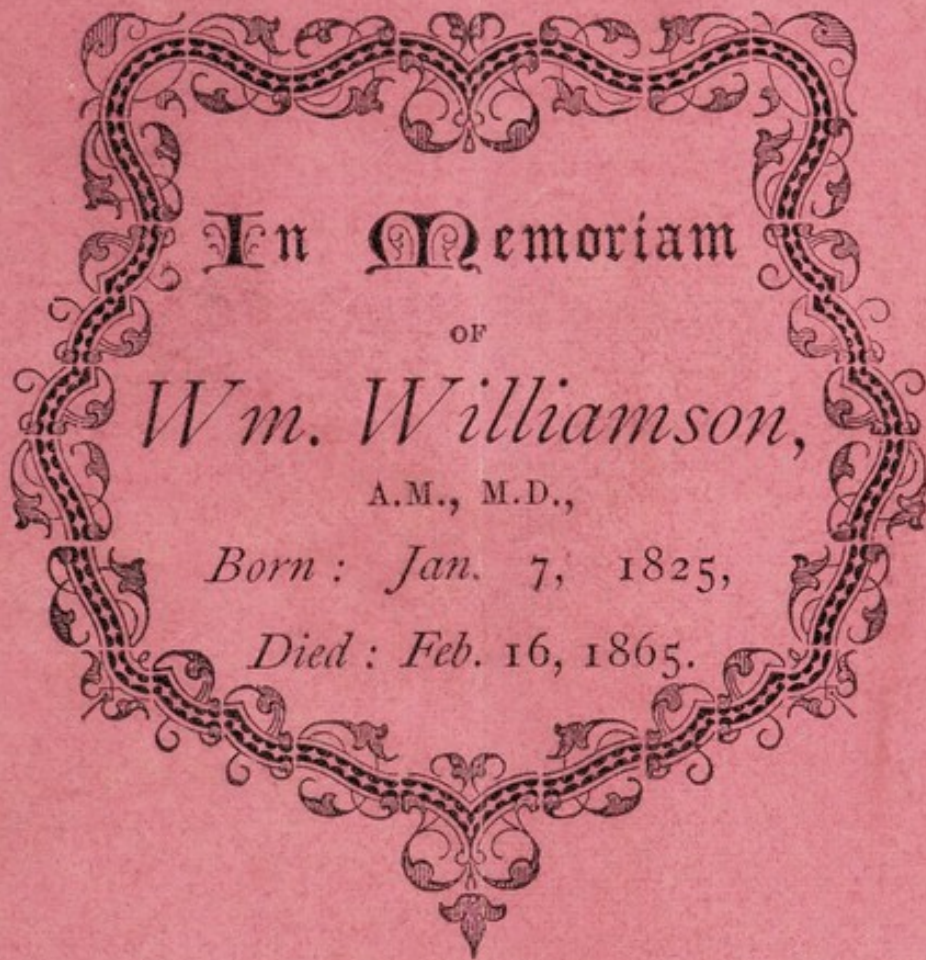
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183 Euston Road
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T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
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In Memoriam

OF

Wm. Williamson,

A.M., M.D.,

Born : Jan. 7, 1825,

Died : Feb. 16, 1865.



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In Memoriam

OF THE LATE

WILLIAM WILLIAMSON,

A.M., M.D.,

*Senior Physician to the Royal Infirmary of Aberdeen,
etc., etc., etc.*

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE ROYAL INFIRMARY OF ABERDEEN,
FEBRUARY 20, 1865.

BY

ALEXANDER HARVEY, M.D.,

Physician to the Royal Infirmary; Conjoint-Lecturer there on Clinical Medicine;
and Professor of Materia Medica in the University of Aberdeen.

A B E R D E E N :

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

1865.

THIS Address is printed by the gentlemen attending the Class of *Clinical Medicine*, as a Memorial of their late much esteemed Teacher—Dr. WILLIAMSON.

The Author could not but accede to their request to allow them to print it for such a purpose. Yet he would bespeak their kind consideration for many faults in it, both of omission and commission. And he would plead that it was written hurriedly—written impulsively, with his feelings deeply stirred by the occasion;—and that it was written for their ear only—not for their eye.

ROYAL INFIRMARY,
Aberdeen, February 28, 1865.



In Memoriam.

GENTLEMEN,

IT is fitting that of one who was my Colleague, as Physician to this Hospital, and who was also joint-occupant with me of this Chair, I should say something—to-day. Let me, however, at once avow how inadequate I feel to the occasion ; how difficult I find it to say what shall be worthy of him, and yet not over-strained ; just and true of him, and yet void of what he above all things disliked—fulsome adulation.

It is hard, indeed, to realize the fact that Dr. WILLIAMSON is gone ! It is not three weeks since he was among us, and now he is numbered with the dead ! He was at this Hospital but last Thursday fortnight, doing his duty as he ever did it, with his whole heart and soul. He will not be here again. That day he saw with me, and it was, I believe, his last act of Hospital duty, one of your number—a student under my care in St. Nicholas Ward, ill of that very disease that was so soon to lay him prostrate, and under which he was himself, in fact, at that moment labouring. He told me he was ailing, and that he should be unable to

come back that evening to see the invalid student, or to attend the usual monthly meeting of the Medical Society, to be held that night. He said he wished, if practicable, to remain within doors. I fancied it was merely a cold he had. I little thought it was fever. As little had he that idea himself. Yet such it proved to be. He was already stricken of it.

Once and again,—many times indeed, during the last eighteen months that Typhus has been epidemic among us, did he and I congratulate ourselves on our having already had it, and on our being now secure against it! It had laid hold of, almost on his first coming in contact with it here, and it had carried off, one of the physicians, Dr. Carr; and more recently it had seized another, Dr. Reith. But Dr. Williamson and I deemed ourselves proof against it. Vain, as regards him, that fancied immunity proved! I have no doubt—indeed I know, that that persuasion made him less careful of himself in the fever Wards than otherwise he would have been. For he was not fool-hardy in the devotedness with which he gave himself to his work. As far as he could, he took due care of himself. He was aware of an inherent delicacy of lung; and he took suitable precautions against cold and wet. But he deemed himself proof against Typhus; and he took no thought of it in his intercourse with those sick of it. As an instance, and in illustration of this, I may mention, that, during the past winter, and in the very dead of winter, with the snow lying deep on the ground, he came here

with me every morning, for ten or twelve days together, before breakfast, to see one of you, then seriously ill of Typhus ; violating thereby a well-understood rule in the hygiene of fever—a rule he would not have disregarded had he thought he incurred any risk. I remonstrated with him on the subject, and suggested that the morning visit should be deferred till after breakfast. But it was to no purpose. He believed himself secure against a second attack of that disease, the case was one of much anxiety, and nothing would induce him to postpone the time of visit. I do not say, and I should not wish it to go abroad that I think, that Dr. Williamson's life might have been spared had he acted under a different persuasion. I merely mention the fact that he believed himself to be virtually proof against the prevailing epidemic ; and so believing, that he did not take those precautions he might have done against imbibing the poison. This he could not by any possibility have avoided absolutely—otherwise than by resigning his Hospital appointment ; and it is not given us to know what the circumstances were under which he actually imbibed it. All we can say is, that it pleased ALMIGHTY GOD that he should be seized of it and cut off by it. That he contracted it in this Hospital, however, there can be no doubt whatever.

Alas ! for his family and his many friends, for us, for this Hospital and the University, and for the community, that it should be so ! His death has carried grief and mourning into many a household besides his

own. It has cast a gloom over this house, over the entire body of the profession, over the whole town.

The name of WILLIAMSON has been a Household word in Aberdeen for half a century and more. The reputation attaching to it earned by the father, was fully sustained by the son. For a time, at least, the name will, as a professional name, cease to be more than a memory. But it is a memory that will live long, and be long cherished in this town and county. The reputation they made for themselves—father and son—combined all the best qualities of the physician—knowledge, tact, skill,—the *knowing* and the *doing*, not the knowing *only*, but the doing *also*, what is right and fitting to be done in the business of professional life. And, withal, in both father and son, there was *that* in their personal character which at once and permanently attached their patients to them,—a genuine, unaffected reality of character that inspired confidence,—and an artless winning manner and a sympathetic kindness, that engaged the heart and the affections.

Of the father I will say no more than this—that, familiar with him from my childhood, I had the honour and the happiness of his intimate acquaintance as long as he lived ; and that, while I live, I will not cease to cherish his memory.

Of Dr. WILLIAM WILLIAMSON, my late colleague and friend,—and your much esteemed teacher, let me say *emphatically*—We shall not soon look upon his like again. He had a sound head, and a good heart. He

knew his profession well ; and he knew human nature well ; and in his intercourse with the sick, and with his professional brethren, and with society, he acted well his part. Altogether, he had a singularly well-balanced character. And if you were to ask the nurses or the sick poor, now or formerly in his Wards, what struck them most about him, they would say, I am sure,—it was the uniformly kind, quiet, gentle way he went in and out among them. I have myself often been struck with this trait, in going round his wards with him. But, indeed, every one that had to do with him saw it and acknowledged it.

As a professional man, he had advantages his father never enjoyed. His medical education, conducted under his father's and Dr. Ogston's more immediate auspices, was wanting in nothing that could fit him for high distinction as a physician. It was begun, and for some years carried on at this University, but completed at the University of Edinburgh (where he graduated in 1847), under Alison, and Christison, and Syme, and Simpson, and Goodsir. Circumstances—his father's failing health particularly, prevented him studying on the Continent ; and almost as soon as he had taken his degree, he began practice in this city. His own personal merits, quite as much as his father's personal influence, gave him at once a firm footing as a professional man ; and, notwithstanding his father's death—within a very few years thereafter, and his own repeated attacks of illness, compelling him from time

to time to intermit his labours and recruit his health, his career was one of steady progress upwards. In 1852, while still young, yet not too young to be entrusted with an office of so much responsibility, he was appointed one of the physicians of this Hospital. Discharging the duties that devolved upon him, in that capacity, with untiring zeal and the utmost conscientiousness, he turned the advantages he enjoyed in connection with it to the best account. He was justly proud of the name and the position his father had made for himself; and it was all along his honourable ambition to maintain the one and to attain the other. In this Hospital, he had the scope he needed for the exercise of that ambition. Nor were his efforts fruitless. As Mr. Carnie, our Treasurer, justly said, in his admirable obituary notice of him in Friday's *Free Press*, Dr. Williamson 'was, without exception, the most rising medical man in the north.' Had his life been spared, he would, in due time, have come to occupy the place his father long occupied—as the head of the profession in the north—a place now filled, and most worthily filled by Dr. Kilgour—whom God long preserve to hold it. This notion—this anticipation, was, I am persuaded, the general feeling of the profession—a feeling, too, entertained without a single ingredient of jealousy. No one grudged William Williamson either his position or his prospects. He knew, as I have said, his profession well. He knew it scientifically, and he knew it practically. He always kept himself abreast of it on both

sides. He was no book-worm ; but he was ever an earnest student. He read much ; but his reading was select, and he knew how to turn to account what he acquired from books. And then he was always bringing what he thus acquired to bear on his own large Clinical experience, here and elsewhere. Thus working—unremittingly and intelligently—he had made that mastery of his profession which, with the sterling qualities of head and heart he possessed, could not fail eventually, had it pleased God to spare him and to give him health, to have placed him at the head of the profession in this town. His brethren placed the highest confidence in him,—in his skill, in his integrity, and in his honour ; and jealous as we are said to be of one another as a profession, we had, as I have said, no jealousy of him. He was a gentleman in the truest sense of the term. As such he practised his profession ; as such he acquitted himself on all occasions towards his brethren.

His untimely death—for he had only reached the age of forty—is in every point of view to be deplored. His own family apart—by whom he was adored as a son and as a brother—the community at large, this Hospital, and the University, have lost in him one that could ill be spared, and whose place it will not be easy to fill. The town has lost in him one who, had he been spared, gave promise of great public usefulness as a physician for many years to come. The suffering inmates of this Hospital are now deprived of that skill which heretofore they have had in him,—and than which the rich

nowhere could have better anywhere. To you, gentlemen, and to your successors here, his loss will, I fear, be irreparable. 'Twas but the other day he entered on a new career in this Hospital—that of a teacher. Not, indeed, that he was not a teacher before—for such he was from the day he joined it as a physician—but that he became a teacher *in form*. On Dr. Kilgour's retiring from the joint-office of Physician to the Hospital and of Lecturer in it on Clinical Medicine, Dr. Williamson was the person whom, in the first instance, we all looked to, to take up the department of Clinical instruction. For my own part, I was well content that he should undertake it exclusively. I did not aspire to the office. I had at the University as much work in the way of teaching as I cared to engage in. It was Dr. Williamson's own wish, however, that I should be associated with him in the Clinical teaching; and this arrangement I acquiesced in, when finally determined on by the Managers of the Hospital. The work was new to both of us; and during this our first session, we both felt that we were but serving an apprenticeship to it. Let me bear my testimony to the high sense of responsibility which I know he entertained in taking upon him the office of a Clinical teacher—and to the zeal with which he laboured in it. I know that he over-worked himself in it. I believe he injured his health by sitting up late, night after night, that he might not come short in his duty towards you. Peradventure, he thereby made himself an easier prey to the disease that

carried him off. God knows. But let me say to you, that during the two or three days I saw him at home, in the early part of his short illness, his Clinical work was what he mostly talked to me about. It was giving him no small concern. Even after he was fairly laid down of fever—after he knew he was ill of it—it was this Clinical business that most of all gave him anxiety. He was troubled that he was absent from his post, and that he should be so long absent from it, as of necessity he knew he must, even should it please God to raise him up again from his bed of sickness. And my last words to him, on parting from him, were about this very thing. I besought him to give himself no thought about it,—assuring him that I would charge myself meanwhile with the whole of it, and do the best I could.

Nor will his loss pass unfelt by the University. He there held the office of Examiner in Medicine; and had he lived he would sometime have come to hold a Chair in it—worthily maintaining the reputation of our Medical School. This cannot now be! Yet, it is but due to his memory that I should say, that as Assessor-Examiner of Candidates for Degrees there, he realized the highest expectations that were formed of him prior to his appointment. He did his duty in it to the public; and he was at once the Students' friend, and the Professors' highly-valued coadjutor. The students confided in him as one who, mixing daily with them at the Infirmary, knew them even more intimately than their Professors did, and who had a

kindly feeling towards them ; while the Professors felt that in him they had their own fidelity as Examiners guaranteed. Let me add, that I but express the sentiments of my colleagues in the Medical Faculty of the University, when I say, that we deeply deplore the loss of him.

And the Medico-Chirurgical Society of this City loses in him one of its most efficient members. He, more than any one of late, was the very life and soul of it. He was unremitting in his attendance at its meetings ; he took a leading part in its business ; and he had its prosperity most warmly at heart.

Alas ! that he should be gone—gone from us for ever ! Sad it is to think that he should have succumbed at what now appears to be the *close* of the present epidemic of Typhus. That terrible disease laid hold of, at the very onset of it in this city, and it cut off, one of the most rising of the medical staff of this Hospital—one who gave ample promise of being the successor, had he lived, of Dr. Williamson, and of Dr. Kilgour. I mean Dr. GEORGE CARR. But it spared Dr. Williamson till near the end. These eighteen months past, he had daily been doing battle with it. Several hundred persons smitten of it had passed through his hands, and been most assiduously tended by him in it. And now that it has well nigh done its worst, and is about to disappear—probably for many years to come, it *exact*s his life !—the life of all others of our medical staff that was the most valuable to the community.

Strange, too, it is, that fever-work was his last work of professional duty ! The last patient he saw in this Hospital, was, as I told you before, a fever-patient, a medical student. His last piece of literary effort was a communication to the *Lancet* on fever ! It was completed and despatched last Saturday fortnight—himself ill of fever at the time ; and it will probably appear in the next issue of that journal. On the Friday evening before, he sent for his friend Dr. Rattray, to advise with him respecting some points in it. And Dr. Rattray tells me, that so anxious was Dr. Williamson to avoid even the appearance of injustice to others, that a certain passage which seemed to him to convey, in some degree, a reflection on one whom he had occasion to name in it, he struck out and recast.

Dr. Williamson, indeed, died as he lived—at the post of duty. His death was worthy of his life. He gave himself to the service of the public, and he sacrificed his life in its service. He may not have those honours in memory of his services that are often awarded to the soldier dying in battle. But his death was as glorious as that of the soldier. Such deaths as his, and let me add, as Dr. Carr's and Dr. Philip's—all cut off of fever, contracted, during the present epidemic, in the faithful discharge of professional duty, reflect at least honour on our calling ; and they should incite us to maintain the honour of it. And how noble a calling ! A calling it is, which has for its high—its holy aim to cure disease and to prevent it, to remove suffering or to

allay it, to aid women labouring of child, to ward off death or disarm death of its agony. A calling it is—moreover, a service—that has been specially enobled of Him who, eighteen hundred years ago, came down from heaven to earth and took our nature upon him ;—became man that He might lift us men from the foul gutter of sin and sorrow into which we were fallen, that he might free us degraded bondsmen, led captive of the devil, from the thralldom in which we were held, that He might raise us, rebel and outcast children of His Father, of new to the rank and to the dignity of true and loyal sons : And who, as He journeyed on foot through the cities, and villages, and hamlets of Judea,—weary of foot often, anhungered and athrist often, with no where He could call His own to lay His head—preaching, indeed, everywhere, that blessed gospel of the grace of God, which he was to ratify with His own most precious Blood—yet went about, also, continually healing all manner of sickness, and curing all manner of disease among the people,—making the blind to see, and the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk,—cleansing the leper,—giving back to them that were sick of the palsy, the use of their limbs ; doing, in short, the *work* of the *Physician*, and so shedding a lustre and a sacredness over it ; doing this work day by day—doing it especially (so it would seem from the Evangelic records) of choice, and by preference, on that day which by the Law was commanded to be kept holy, and in which no manner of work

might be done ; as if to indicate, not merely, nor alone (the Commandment notwithstanding), that it was lawful to do good on that day, but also, and still further, that the Ministry of Healing is equally and alike—alike at least, if not equally, with that of the Sanctuary, a Holy Ministry.

What profession can be more honourable—than this Ministry of Healing? What service nobler for one to labour in, and, if need he, to give up one's life in? In this service, our dear departed friend, Dr. Williamson, was an able—as he was a reverent fellow-worker with his Divine Master ; and in it he has fallen.

To-morrow his remains are to be consigned to their last resting place. And I am requested by his family to state, that it will afford them a melancholy gratification if you will all of you—all the Students of this Hospital—accompany those remains thither. In doing so—in committing his body to the grave—let us say—

‘ Receive him, Earth, unto thy harbouring shrine ;
In thy soft, tranquil bosom let him rest ;
These limbs of his we to thy care consign,
And trust the noble fragments to thy breast.

‘ This house was once the mansion of a soul
Brought into life by its Creator's breath ;
Wisdom did once this living mass control ;
And Christ was there enshrined, who conquers death.

‘ Cover this body, to thy care consign'd ;
Its Maker shall not leave it in the grave ;
But His own lineaments shall bear in mind,
And shall recall the image which He gave.’

And can you not fancy you may hear this echo from
that grave—

‘My Lord is Life, He’ll raise
My dust again—even mine.

Sweet truth to me !
I shall arise,
And with these eyes
My Saviour see.

‘My peaceful grave shall keep
My bones till that sweet day
I wake from my long sleep,
And leave my bed of clay.

‘My Lord His angels shall
Their golden trumpets sound,
At whose most welcome call
My grave shall be unbound.

‘I said sometimes, with tears,
Ah me ! I’m loth to die !
Lord, silence Thou these fears :
My life’s with Thee on high.

‘What means my trembling heart,
To be thus shy of death ?
My Life and I shan’t part,
Though I resign my breath.

‘Then welcome, harmless grave !
By thee to heaven I’ll go :
My Lord His death shall save
Me from the flames below.

‘Sweet truth to me !
I shall arise,
And with these eyes
My Saviour see.’