

# GLASGOW MEDICAL MEN AND LITERATURE.

By W. STEWART.

THE printing press did not reach Glasgow till 1638. For many years thereafter almost all the books sent out from it were prescriptions for the healing of souls ("Therapeutica Sacra" was the title of one of them): the bodies were left in the care of their un-instructed owners, backed by the skill, when they cared to employ it, of the members of Peter Lowe's Faculty, or of the ignorant pretenders whom it was Peter's function in life to exterminate. It is significant that the collector of Glasgow books bases his library upon "The Last Battell of the Soule in Death," a book not printed in Glasgow, but written by a famous minister of the city, who was to write many more. The first piece of Glasgow printing was a "Protestation" by the General Assembly of the Church in 1638, which abolished Episcopacy; and at least seven-eighths of the output onward to the end of the seventeenth century were ecclesiastical or theological in character. Even Peter Lowe's "Discourse of the Whole Art of Chyrurgerie," which went into several editions up till as late as 1654, was never once printed here.

Many valuable contributions to medical literature have been made by members of the profession associ-

ated with Glasgow; but of these works it is not for a layman to speak. What he can do, however, is to call attention to doctors of medicine who have brought fame to themselves and to the city by their labours in connection with the production of books and literature.

About 1740 a young doctor, Alexander Wilson, went from St. Andrews to London, where he became interested in typefounding—an art upon which, as then practised, he thought he could improve. He returned to his native city and set up a foundry. This venture proved so successful that he was compelled to remove to Glasgow for the convenience of an Irish trade that had grown up, and which ultimately fell by lot to his partner, who removed to Dublin. Wilson thus became sole proprietor of the foundry at Camlachie, and in time he produced there types of the highest excellence. These were turned to the finest account by the brothers Foulis, the famous printers, in books which still mark the highest point in Scottish typography. These books, as was the fashion of the time, were chiefly the works of classical authors, edited by professors of the University; they circulated all over the Continent, and so *types écossois* gained fame among the scholars of Europe and their printers. Dr. Wilson latterly became Professor of Astronomy in the University, and carried on his foundry within the college walls.

A member of the profession who had an astonishing career, and who left as his memorial a great work in bookish history, was Robert Watt. A farmer's drudge at eleven, later a quarryman's assistant, and at nineteen a working joiner, Watt bequeathed to the

world when he died in 1819, at the early age of forty-five, not only medical writings of real importance at the time, but an unpublished work of immense bibliographical value, the "Bibliotheca Britannica." This work represented a new method in the presentation of bibliographical lore, and it is still authoritative. The late Dr. James Finlayson made both the profession and local historians his debtors by his monographs, at once minutely accurate and tactfully sympathetic, on Dr. Watt and Maister Peter Lowe.

But the medical man of Glasgow connection whose literary fame is of the widest range and most enduring quality is Tobias Smollett, whose failure in medicine made him the greatest rival to Fielding in fiction. Born in 1721 in the Vale of Leven, he served apprenticeship to a famous Glasgow surgeon, and afterwards proceeded to London carrying in his pocket a tragedy with a *motif* that has inspired many poets to dramatic utterance—the assassination of James I. of Scotland. He found theatrical producers as shy then as now; and Smollett became surgeon's mate in the Cumberland 80-gun ship of war. In this capacity he took part in the disastrous expedition against Carthagera, of which a description forms a notable part of his first novel, "Roderick Random." Abandoning the navy, Smollett tried medicine in London and at Bath, but without success, so he settled down at Chelsea to become, in Thackeray's words, "reviewer and historian, critic, medical writer, poet, and pamphleteer." Thackeray's enumeration of rôles was incomplete, for Smollett was greatest of all as novelist. "Roderick Random," "Peregrine

Pickle," "Ferdinand Count Fathom," and "Humphrey Clinker" are his most important contributions to the fiction of the English language, and they are of enduring quality.

It cannot be often in the history of literature that one man in any profession has had among his apprentices two youths who have made themselves famous as novelists. Yet this was the fortune of John Gordon, a Glasgow surgeon, who acted as training master to Tobias Smollett (whom he once spoke of with dubious admiration as "my ain bubbly-nosed callant"), and John Moore, whose third son made a bigger splash in the unlettered world as the hero of Corunna and of the burial ode that thrilled our juvenility by telling how

We buried him darkly at dead of night,  
The sods with our bayonets turning,  
By the struggling moonbeams' misty light  
And the lanterns dimly burning.

Dr. John Moore, whose literary fame depends mainly on "Zeluco," took to the army as the medium of practising his profession, served in the hospitals in the Low Countries, and afterwards practised in Paris, where he had been household surgeon to the British Ambassador. He returned to Glasgow on his former employer's invitation to take a partnership in the business, and, unlike Smollett, succeeded in his original profession, and made only a moderate show in literature. Later he travelled with the young Duke of Hamilton on the Continent, and at the end of the tour settled down in London, where he had a successful practice. "Zeluco," his most important book, is now forgotten by

all but the literary historian, and his other writings even by that patient toiler; but Dr. John Moore will live in the history of letters as the man who drew from Robert Burns the autobiographical letter that forms the starting point of every "life" of the poet. Burns, who sometimes allowed his enthusiasm to outrun his excellent critical capacity, thought so highly of his friend's novel that he contemplated "a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. Original strokes," he tells Dr. Moore, "that strongly depict the human heart is your and Fielding's province beyond any other novelist I have perused. Richardson, indeed, might perhaps be excepted; but, unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of some other world." It cannot be said that posterity has accepted Burns's view. Curiously, Burns's official biographer was a member of the profession, James Currie, of Liverpool, who took his degree of M.D. at Glasgow College. Useful additions, too, have been made to Burnsiana in "Burns's Chloris: A Reminiscence," by James Adams, M.D., who had little need to plead "in deprecation of criticism" of his little book that his exercise in writing had been "restricted to dry professional and scientific monographs"; and in "Robert Burns and the Medical Profession," by William Findlay, M.D. Both these writers practised their art in this city.

The famous brothers, John and William Hunter, both students of surgery at Glasgow, both writers of books on professional subjects, though not in general literature, were both collectors, and both

perpetuated their name to the vulgar by bequeathing their collections to institutions that have ensured their preservation. To Glasgow—thanks to Government indifference to an offer of the gift to London—came the wonderful collection of coins, books, pictures, &c., of William Hunter; and these are now housed in our University. The coin cabinet has been partially described in magnificent volumes by Dr. George Macdonald; the manuscripts in the Hunterian Library have also been described in a catalogue begun by John Young, M.D., a former curator of the Museum, and completed after his death as a memorial to the compiler; the books in the collection will soon have a similar guide—it is well forward. Dr. Young, who was a crisp and caustic writer, made the Library the subject of an address to the subscribers to Stirling's Library in Glasgow; and that address has been included with others to form a minor memorial volume of Dr. Young. William Hunter was many years in advance of his time as a collector, or he would not have been able to bring together—probably at what would now be an insignificant expense for such treasures—the coins or books that we know. Dr. Young roughly estimated the books belonging to the various periods as 381 works (not volumes) dated prior to 1500—incunabula, as the experts call them; 249 between the century and 1525; 1715 published in the next seventy-five years; and 1486 of the following century. In addition there are in round figures some 7000 volumes of professional books and general literature. “Everything was preserved: endless controversies and squibs regarding

a notable fraud of the day, the rabbit-woman of Godalming, vaccination and inoculation, a charming gathering of all the objurgatory language that medical men were (perhaps are) capable of applying to each other when crossed in debate or anticipated in discovery." These, however, were but the trivia of the Library: thirteen Caxtons and numerous works coveted by the bibliophiles of to-day provide a substantial balance to lesser things, however interesting in themselves. Dr. Young could and did rhapsodise over his treasures and the "judicious lavishness" of the collector; he could also permit himself to anathematise fools, as when he avers that "we cannot wish well to the soul of the man who carefully washed out the name of the former owner of the French *Roman de la Rose* for the sake of recording his own insignificance." We in our day can be grateful for Dr. Young's enthusiasm in both these forms of expression. But the vigorous curator was not the only medical man inspired by the Hunters, for another one, George R. Mather, M.D., became the biographer of the two brothers. Dr. Mather was an East End practitioner, much loved in his own district, a man of fine literary taste, and one of the founders of the Glasgow Sir Walter Scott Club. A niece of the Hunters, though not in medicine—as, indeed, she could not then be—yet living in a professional atmosphere, her brother being Matthew Baillie, M.D., had great fame as a poet in her day. Now Joanna Baillie must be written down as one of the "inheritors of unfulfilled renown."

Another writer who had a doctor of medicine for

biographer was Thomas Campbell, the greatest of the numerous poets of Glasgow, whose place in literary history should, in the opinion of excellent judges, stand higher than it does to-day. Not only as a poet, but as a maker of phrases that are household words, Campbell should be remembered. It was he who told us that "coming events cast their shadows before," that "'tis distance lends enchantment to the view," that "to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die," that "broken hearts die slow," and gave us many another such jewelled generality. Like Ossian, he, in Wordsworth's phrase,

Sang of battles and the breath  
Of stormy war and violent death ;

and Hohenlinden and the Battle of the Baltic live in the public memory because he wrote of them in vivid and breathlessly rhythmic verse. And he, too, as some one has said, is secure of an "immortality of quotation." Though more than eighty years have elapsed since Campbell's biography by William Beattie, M.D., was published, the work is still authoritative. But if some other medical man cares to undertake a new "life" of the poet he will find, if not a great deal of new material, not available in Beattie's day, at least a new critical standard in the appraisal of poetry.

Thomas Campbell was three times Lord Rector of Glasgow University—a prophet with honour in his own house—and in celebration of the third election his enthusiastic supporters formed a Campbell Club. In writing about a deputation from the Club that waited upon him when he was on a visit to Glasgow, he says—



“ Among the invitations which I much regret being unable to accept is one from Samuel H——, editor of the *Glasgow Argus*, a flaming *Tory*, but a most original, honest fellow, whom the very Radicals like. Sam is a sort of Falstaff, without either his knavery or his drunkenness. His facetiousness is a godsend in relieving the fudge of a public dinner. . . . Tory as he is, he supported me in my election to the Rectorship, and when some waggish enemy published that my mother had been a ‘washerwoman in the Goose-dubs of Glasgow,’ Samuel’s zeal to repel the calumny was perfectly amusing.”

Samuel H—— was Samuel Hunter, who for thirty-four years was editor, not of the *Argus*, a Radical newspaper, but of the *Glasgow Herald*, and the greatest of the city’s public characters, socially and politically, of his day. He, too, was a medical man, and had served as an army surgeon in Ireland during the ’98. Glasgow had, indeed, the distinction of having two doctors of medicine as newspaper editors during the first half of the nineteenth century, for James M’Conechy, M.D., was for twenty-three years editor of the *Glasgow Courier*. In addition to editing a number of books, he was the biographer and editor of William Motherwell, poet and literary antiquary, who had preceded him in the editorship of the *Courier*.

Of Thomas Garnett, M.D., who was a professor at Anderson’s College here, it will suffice to say that he was the author of a “Tour through Scotland.” Some local topographers assert that he gave his name to the region of the city known as Garnethill; but

I am not prepared to invite controversy by putting that forward as my own view.

If David Patoun, physician in Glasgow, did not himself write, he provided, in the person of his son, the subject for Lockhart's delightful elegiac ballad, the "Lament for Captain Paton," which is still "said or sung" by lovers of Old Glasgow, and which one eminent obstetrician of to-day has been heard to recite in public.

Recent writers of great attraction in their separate ways were William Findlay, M.D. (whose pen-name was "George UMBER"), and William Gemmell, M.B. Dr. Findlay—already mentioned as a contributor to Burns literature—was rather rated beyond his merits when an ardent admirer characterised him as the Scottish Charles Lamb; but his "In My City Garden" is full of delightful touches and of intense sympathy with struggling humanity—characteristics that pervaded the verse which he used to read to the Glasgow Ballad Club and to print in the newspapers. Dr. Gemmell's tastes took an antiquarian turn, and the results of his careful research were given to the public in his notes on the "Early Views of Glasgow"—drawings and engravings executed in the Foulis Academy of Art which was founded in the University of Glasgow in 1754, exactly fourteen years before the institution of the Royal Academy in London—and in his erudite little volume, "The Oldest House in Glasgow." This is the history of the building known as Provand's Lordship, which now houses a society concerned with the maintenance of Scottish history and tradition—and rights. A sad loss to local history and

literature was caused by the death, in 1918, on service, of Hugh A. M'Lean, M.B. A few papers on local matters attest his interest in and knowledge of bygone Glasgow, and his potentialities as a bibliographer are evidenced by his work on "Robert Urie, Printer in Glasgow," a telling example of how laborious work intelligently directed can produce attractive results even in what appear to the ordinary man the unattractive fields of bibliography.

In this brief, and doubtless incomplete, story of what members of the medical profession have done for intellectual culture in work associated with Glasgow no mention has been made of those whose writings have dealt with professional or scientific subjects: that is the task of a member of the Faculty. But, such as it is, this account may serve to show that the disciples of *Æsculapius* connected with our city and University have been not unworthy—in a more humble way, perhaps—of a profession that numbered in its ranks Sir Thomas Browne, John Brown of "Rab and His Friends," and Oliver Wendell Holmes.