

CHAPTER III

A STUDENT OF MEDICINE

I HAD reached my fourteenth year, when the question arose, what was I to be? We were a large and growing family, and every one of us must do something, and eventually work for our own living.

Adolphus Trollope, in his *Recollections*, mentions the case of a boy who was asked what he would like to be when he grew up? The boy's answer was, "I should like to be a giant or a retired stockbroker!" I was not so ambitious as this; but when my mother asked me, "What would you like to be, Sam?" I answered, "I would like to be a painter"—I meant an artist. I had a taste for drawing and colour, and many years after illustrated one of my own books.

I had perhaps been inspired by the art of my cousin Yellowlees, who painted the portraits of my father and mother; and I greatly admired the drawings of the Union and Mail coaches, which he rapidly threw off. But my mother thought that I wished to be a *house-painter*. "Oh no!" said she, "that is a dirty business." I did not answer; and the matter slept for a time.

On a future day, she again asked me, "Would you no like to be a minister?" "Oh, no!" I said decidedly, "I'll no be a minister." "What for no?"

I could not very well explain then, but I can now. We children were surfeited with preaching and ministering. Sunday, the "day of rest," was to us the most exhausting and unpleasant of the week. Our preacher was a combative man. He preached the narrowest Calvinism, and there was far more fear than love in his sermons.

We had to work very hard on the so-called day of rest. In the morning, after prayers, we had to learn the "carritch" and a "paraphrase." Then we went to the kirk, and after singing and prayers, we listened to a sermon often more than an hour long, and got out at one. After refreshment, we went to kirk again at two; heard another sermon, and were dismissed at four. Then we had to say our catechism and paraphrase. There was actually a *third* sermon at six o'clock; we got home at eight, and said our catechism and paraphrase. We had no sort of recreation on Sundays. Walking, except to the kirk, was forbidden. Books were interdicted, excepting the Bible, the Catechism, and the Secession Magazine, or perhaps some book of Evangelical sermons.

I have no doubt it was all intended for our good; but I never in my youth had any agreeable recollections of Sundays. Our minister was a good and hard-working man. He, no doubt, gave us all that he had to give; but he was wearisome and unsympathetic; and his doctrines, though intended to frighten us into goodness, had perhaps the very reverse effect. There was no wonder, therefore, that I should not wish to be a minister.

The next question put to me by my mother was this: "Would you no like to be a doctor?" The question was rather startling at first. There were many prejudices about doctors in my younger days.

Our servants used to tell the trembling children about the "black doctors" that were ready to clap a plaster over our mouths, and carry us away no one knew whither. Then, a regular watch and ward was held over the parish burying-ground, to prevent the "doctors" rifling the graves, for the purposes of the dissecting-rooms at Edinburgh. I remember going with my father, when he was on the watch, to take the first turn with him round the churchyard. There were three or four men, I think, one of whom was elected the foreman. They were supplied with some old muskets, mounted with bayonets, to give the resurrectionists a warm reception. This frightful state of things culminated a few years later, in the murders by Burke and Hare of living "subjects" for Dr Knox's anatomy class at Edinburgh.

But doctors were necessary for many reasons. It so happened that I fell down a hatchway, and tore open my groin, very near the femoral artery. The doctor was sent for, and put in two stitches, and I was soon well again. This doctor was Robert Lewins, a very pleasant, kindly man, full of anecdote. His partner was Dr Robert Lorimer, eldest son of the minister of the Parish Church, also an excellent person. When I was recovering from my wound, my mother asked Dr Lewins if he could take me as an apprentice. "Yes," he answered, "my apprentice, James Dorward, is just leaving me for Edinburgh, to attend the classes there; so that I have an opening for your son." It was arranged accordingly; and on the 6th November 1826, I was bound apprentice to Drs Lewins and Lorimer for five years.

There was not much to be done in my new vocation. I had to learn the nature and the qualities of drugs, and how to make up prescriptions, pills,

mixtures, potions, ointments, blisters, infusions, tinctures, and such like. In course of time, I learnt the arts of bleeding and bandaging. I had to assist in attending the poorer class of patients. I also went on with my own education. There were plenty of libraries in the town, and I used them freely. There was the Town's Library—a collection of books that had been made over to the burgh by the Rev. John Gray, together with an endowment, about a hundred and fifty years before. Most of the books were theological, but some of the recent additions were valuable. But I did not make much use of the library. Patrick Hardie, the master of the English School, was the librarian; and when I took out Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, he havered a bit to me, in his dictatorial way, as to how I was to read it. I did not like this, and went to other libraries.

There was another popular collection of books, called "Begbie's Library," left by some native of the town for general use, together with a small salary for the person who kept it and gave out the books. But the library that I made the most use of was the East Lothian Itinerating Library, founded and worked by that most excellent man, the late Samuel Brown. Having been laid up by illness, he derived great consolation, during his protracted recovery, from the perusal of good and entertaining books. It occurred to him that he might help to give the same consolation to others, who were less able to provide it. It seems that a number of "balances of militia insurance" remained in his hands, for which he could find no claimants. With part of these balances he procured two hundred select volumes, some of which were of a moral and religious tendency, and the others books of travels, agriculture,

the mechanical arts, and general science. He divided these into four assorted sets of fifty volumes each, and stationed them in four large villages, under the superintendence of gratuitous librarians. After the books had remained there for a certain time, they were removed to other districts. The interest of the readers was thus kept alive in these itinerating books; and the habit of reading was developed and fostered.

In order to maintain and extend the libraries, subscriptions were invited. The newly-purchased books were kept for two years in the three principal towns of the county, for the use of the annual subscribers of five shillings; after which they were merged in the general circulation. In this manner, after some twenty years of well-sustained devotion to his enterprise, and by dint of much personal sacrifice, Samuel Brown had set forty-seven excellent libraries in circulatory motion through the county; and there was scarcely an inhabitant who was not within a mile and a half from one of these institutions. As Haddington was the centre of the movement, I had the advantage of perusing all the new books as they came out; and in this way I greatly added to my store of knowledge.

There were other libraries in the town, besides these: the Subscription Library, to which I did not then belong; and two circulating libraries—Tait's and Niell's—from which all the novels and miscellaneous works of the day might be obtained. There was thus no want of reading, for those who might be disposed to dip into the vast stores of accumulated knowledge, poetry, literature, fiction, and theology.

There was another excellent institution that Samuel Brown was mainly instrumental in founding: and that was the "Haddington School of

Arts," which very shortly followed the formation of a similar school at Edinburgh. My master and friend, Dr Robert Lorimer, was one of the first to give lectures to the members, on the principles of Mechanics, and on Chemistry. The lectures were well attended by the leading mechanics of the town. I remember three of them, who worked as carpenters for the Messrs Scoular of Sunnybank. They made carts, ploughs, and agricultural implements. Two of these men saved money enough during the summer to pay for their class instruction at Edinburgh University during the winter. One became the minister of a Presbyterian congregation at Blackburn; another became master of a large public school at Hull; and the third, who remained a mechanic, rose higher than the others. His name was Andrew Lamb. He was an enthusiastic student at the School of Arts. I remember him well, for he used to attend the committee meeting of the Juvenile Missionary Society, for which I was a rather irregular collector. He shortly after left Haddington; but many years after, he called upon me at the London Bridge Station. He was then General Manager of the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, and the dispenser of considerable political power at Southampton, where he then resided.

Dr Lorimer gave several courses of Lectures on Chemistry and the Arts at Haddington and Dunbar during the time that I was under him; and he did me the honour to select me as his assistant. He was a most kind man, and instructed me faithfully, giving me much good advice. He put me in the way of preparing all kinds of gases for the lectures; and while he was absent visiting his patients, I went on with the work. There was both interest and in-

struction in all this ; and it helped me much in my future studies. Dr Lewins was also very kind. I had access to his library. He had a finely assorted stock of the old English novelists—Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett ; and I fear I paid more attention to these than to the scientific works which his library contained. Yet it was well to know what had been done by the great men who lived before us.

I once witnessed the doctor in the throes of literary composition. It was a tremendous business. We went into a back bedroom in the furthest corner of the house, so as not to be disturbed by the noises in the kitchen. The doctor dressed himself in his long, hanging shawl-gown ; strode about the floor, and dictated. The product was an article on Infantile Remittent Fever. I knew it thoroughly, for I wrote it over three or four times. It was full of rather long words, such as “intromittent,” “exacerbations,” and so on. The paper appeared a few years later in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*.

I went on with my education at the same time. For this purpose, I attended Mr Johnstone, master of the Parish School, in the evening. I took instructions from him in Mathematics, French, and Latin. Johnstone was a most accomplished man, full of accumulated knowledge ; he was a good linguist, a good mathematician, and stored with information, which ebbed out in every word of his discourses. I did not know at the time, but I afterwards ascertained, that he was an intimate friend and correspondent of Thomas Carlyle. It came out in this way. Many years after (in 1882), when Carlyle’s name had become distinguished, Mr Johnstone’s daughter—then living at Lockerby, in Dumfriesshire—sent me a large number of letters from Carlyle to

her father ; asking me to edit them, and give them to the public. As I knew that Mr Froude was then busy with *Carlyle's Life*, I recommended her to send them to him, for the purpose of being included in the biography. But I presume she did not take my advice, as, at the time at which I write, they have not yet been published.

Perhaps they scarcely merited a separate publication. They consisted principally of letters written by Carlyle to Johnstone, after the former had left Ecclefechan (where Johnstone's father was the burgher minister) for Edinburgh, down to the period of Johnstone's becoming the parish teacher at Haddington. The letters are written in an ordinary English style, and not in the Carlylese language which was afterwards invented. The first letter was the best : it described Carlyle's journey by coach to Edinburgh in the midst of a snowstorm.

In one of the later letters, after Johnstone had intimated his intention of applying for the office of parish teacher at Haddington, Carlyle recommended his friend to visit Miss Jeanie Welsh, and secure her influence. Miss Welsh knew a Mr Gilbert Burns, brother of the poet, who had considerable influence with the "heritors" of the parish, who elected the teacher. Gilbert Burns had first come into the neighbourhood as steward for Mr Dunlop of West Morham, whose wife, Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, in Ayrshire, was an intimate friend and correspondent of Robert Burns in 1786-96. Some of Burns' most powerful letters were addressed to that amiable and accomplished lady. After the estate in East Lothian had been sold by her son, Captain Dunlop, Gilbert Burns was appointed factor of Lord Blantyre's estate of Lennoxton (formerly Lethington), and removed to

Grantsbraes, where he resided till his death in 1827. The result of the application to Gilbert Burns, through Jeanie Welsh, proved successful. Johnstone was appointed parish school teacher, and I became his pupil. Miss Welsh shortly after married the modern Jeremiah. It was thought that she might have done better. Her friends were of opinion that she had thrown herself away "upon a dominie"! Carlyle had been a teacher, with Irving, at Kirkcaldy.

At the end of the third year of my apprenticeship, Dr Lewins removed to Leith, for the purpose of succeeding Dr Kellie, his former master. He took me with him, and I then began to attend the medical classes in the University of Edinburgh. I matriculated in November, 1829, and attended the lectures of Dr Duncan for *Materia Medica*, Dr Hope for Chemistry, and Mr Lizars for Anatomy. The lectures began at 9 A.M., and I walked up from Leith to Edinburgh—a distance of about three miles. In the dead of winter, I used to breakfast in the dark, and then push up the hill in time to be present at the beginning of the lecture. Chemistry followed, then Anatomy. I returned to Leith by midday, to give such assistance as I could to Dr Lewins.

My life then was very pleasant. There was the bustle of the seaport, the scenery by the seaside, the daily walks to and from the College, the picturesque beauty of Edinburgh, which never tires, and the friends and acquaintances I made—all of these made life very agreeable and enjoyable. One of my most treasured friends was Adam Hope—a most active, energetic, and sensible fellow—the brother of George Hope. He was then learning his business at the extensive engineering works and sawmills of Burstall

& Co. He afterwards went out to Canada, where he founded a town, and made a reputation.

In the following year, I took lodgings in Edinburgh, near the College, and went on with my studies—more especially in Anatomy. I also attended the lectures of Liston on Surgery and Dr Fletcher on the Institutions of Medicine. Both were very able men. The first was perhaps the most dexterous surgeon of his time; the other was a most profound lecturer on his branch of science. He was an extensive reader, and brought the science of all Europe to bear upon his subject. When the works of Darwin afterwards came out, I felt that Fletcher had long before expounded very much the same views; or, at all events, had heralded his approach. After his death, which happened a few years later, Dr Lewins, who was his intimate friend, edited his Lectures, which fully show the calibre and genius of the man.

One of my friends, a fellow-attendant at Dr Fletcher's lectures, was John Brown—afterwards the celebrated author of *Rab and his Friends*. He was then in a jacket, a fellow of infinite humour, though very shy. It was some time before one could get into his nature. But when once there, it was impossible not to love him. I knew his cousin Samuel better than himself. Samuel Brown was a native of my own town, and I had much controversy and correspondence with him. He represented Shelley's ideal character—"a pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift." Even when a boy, he was full of theories—not always well grounded. He was rapid and impetuous, and came to his conclusions in too sudden a manner. I shall return to him later on.