
Memoir of Sir James Y. Simpson ...

Duns John

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Author: Duns John

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Henry Dougall



J. S. Simpson



MEMOIR

OF

SIR JAMES Y. SIMPSON, BART.

M.D., D.C.L. OXON.

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S PHYSICIANS FOR SCOTLAND,
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AND MIDWIFERY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,
FOREIGN MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIES OF MEDICINE OF FRANCE,
BELGIUM, AND NEW YORK,
ETC. ETC.

BY

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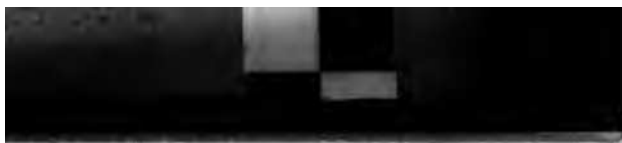
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1873.

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN asked by the family and trustees of Sir James Simpson to write his Life, I agreed with much reluctance. The retrospect of many years' close friendship and familiarity with Sir James inclined me to the task. But it also deepened my sense of its importance and difficulty. It seemed to me almost impossible to describe his devotion to his profession, his large-hearted philanthropy, and great attainments in literature and science, so that the description might become a mirror in which, without injustice to him, the image of even my own ideal of his inner life and public work might be seen by others. The attempt has been made to sketch, at least in full and unbroken outline, the life of a remarkable man. Having undertaken the work, it is useless to apologize to the reader for its imperfections, or even to deprecate criticism on the plea of its difficulty. I have, however, an oppressive sense of anxiety, lest the biographer's shortcomings have in any way marred the faithfulness of the

portrait he has lovingly and truthfully tried to produce. Had this Preface been written before the work was begun, it would have been stated that any opinion or judgment of my own relative to the incidents recorded in the narrative would be irrelevant. But, as the work progressed, it was found impossible to avoid this, because in several instances I did not agree with Sir James's estimate of some of his distinguished fellow-workers, or of the merits of certain controversies. It has always seemed to me unfair to expect a biographer to conceal his own opinions, in deference to artificial and arbitrary canons held to limit his liberty in writings of this sort.

A persistent effort has been made to let Sir James be, in a great measure, his own biographer. I have contented myself with piecing illustrative documents together, and leaving them to tell their own tale. The materials put into my hand were so abundant that selection has been a formidable difficulty. Few communications to Sir James from practitioners or patients, friends or distinguished men, were destroyed. Copies were generally kept of his own letters on important private or public affairs. His letters to his elder brother, and, when from home, to his family circle, were numerous. They were nearly all preserved. The other letters, thousands in number, were

put up in bundles, without respect to date or subject, and stowed away. It has been necessary to glance at them singly, because, in the unavoidable haste to overtake the work laid to his hand or forced upon him, Sir James often thrust two or three notes into one envelope, and, not unfrequently, very interesting and important letters found a place with others containing only very commonplace details of

"Man's love of life, his weakness, and his pains."

In some instances, notes of no value in themselves have had a place assigned to them in the narrative, because they help to indicate Sir James's relations to men or circumstances that had important bearings on his character and work.

My own training and studies enable me in some degree to understand and appreciate Sir James's work as a physician and man of science, but I have of purpose avoided details in this department. They would have been out of place in a biography intended for general reading.

It seemed to me in the outset that the narrative of Sir James's Christian life would be the easiest part of my task. But this has not been the case. After 1861 it became his highest aim and ambition to commend to others, in public and in private, the Saviour in whom he had found joy, peace, and all

good hope. And, in describing Sir James's religious history, I have had a constant fear lest it should be presented in any way calculated to repel fellow-workers in science, or men of general culture, from the careful consideration of that "birth of the Spirit," and that "sacrifice of reasonable service unto God," into which he earnestly longed to lead all.

NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH,
May 1873.



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