

OBITUARY NOTICES.

George Barclay. By Dr George A. Berry.

(Read March 20, 1911.)

GEORGE BARCLAY was born in 1820 and died on November 24, 1910, having nearly completed the first half of his ninety-first year. For the last seventy years his associations had been entirely with Edinburgh, where he came to reside from his native Aberdeenshire.

In Aberdeenshire the name of Barclay is one of the oldest in the county. George Barclay's grandfather was the lineal representative of the Barclays of Tollie. His father, Dr George Barclay, attained great distinction in his profession. Though only twenty-seven at the time of his death, which occurred some months before his son George's birth, he was the recognised authority on surgery in the north of Scotland, and the first to occupy the post of Lecturer on Surgery in the Aberdeen University. William Macgillivray, the naturalist, published for private circulation a long elegiac poem on the death of his friend and teacher, the cutting short of whose brilliant career was looked upon in Aberdeen as a public calamity.

George Barclay retained a vivid recollection of the old customs and school fights at the ancient Grammar School of Aberdeen. There he was a pupil of the famous Melvin and a class-fellow of the late William Garden Blaikie. With Blaikie he not only divided the first Greek prize and won the coveted "silver pen," but shared the distinction of obtaining the first place on leaving Marischal College with its degree of M.A.

In 1848, after some years spent in Belgium and Germany, and before settling down as a partner in the business firm of his uncle in Leith, Barclay undertook a journey to the Holy Land—somewhat of an enterprise at that time, and, as his experience showed, attended with some risk. The homeward journey led him through Rome, where in those turbulent days—the year of the revolution—he narrowly escaped imprisonment, or worse, through the prank of a companion, who set the great bell of the Capitol tolling, a bell which was never heard except on occasion of great public emergency. He often subsequently visited Rome, in whose historical and artistic associations he, as an accomplished linguist and scholar, took the deepest interest. Equally at home in France and Germany, his sojourns

abroad were enlivened by many interesting companionships among men of culture of his own and other nationalities, who were attracted by his broad-minded views and the charm of his conversation.

Barclay combined with his knowledge of languages a high critical appreciation of good literature. A great reader and endowed with a retentive memory, he enjoyed the friendship of many literary men. His interests, however, were not confined to *belles-lettres*. There were few sciences of which he had not some grasp of an order more intimate than what could be called merely popular, and amongst whose votaries he could not count friends—Janssen the distinguished French astronomer, Agassiz, Tait, Wyville Thomson, and many other fellows of the Royal Society. One great and constant interest to him was the work of the late Sir Wyville Thomson and Sir John Murray in connection with the *Challenger* expedition. Professor Tait dedicated to him, along with the late Thomas Stevenson, his book on *Recent Advances in Physical Science*, which was published in recognition of their wish to have the latest theories on that subject disseminated more widely by being presented in a popular form, and so brought within the reach of those who did not lay claim to be scientific men. Barclay's attitude to science may be gathered from a characteristic rejoinder of Tait's, who, when somebody asked him if Mr Barclay was a man of science, replied, "Mr Barclay is *not* a man of science; he is a man *intelligently interested in science*." His connection with the Royal Society arose partly from this "intelligent interest" in science and partly from his special taste for marine zoology, to which for some years he devoted much of his spare time. This pursuit, which entailed much work with the microscope and the making of very delicate drawings, he was reluctantly obliged to give up, as it led to an affection of sight which eventually caused the total loss of one eye.

Barclay enjoyed for over thirty years the closest friendship with Dr John Brown, an intimacy which brought him into contact with other famous writers. Foremost among these were Thackeray, whose outstanding genius he had recognised from the first, and Ruskin. In the note to Dr Brown's paper on "Thackeray's Death" it is George Barclay who is referred to as the friend with whose help the eighty half-crowns were collected to buy the silver Punch inkstand inscribed "Grati et gratæ Edinensis" which Thackeray said was his very first testimonial. He, too, it was who brought to his friend's notice the brief story of a child's life which Dr Brown amplified and embellished in the exquisite story of *Pet Marjory*.

During his business connection with Leith, George Barclay's name was associated with all that was most honourable and public-spirited.

He was chosen as a representative of the Treasury on the Harbour and Dock Commission under its old constitution, and was a governor of Wat Hospital.

In Edinburgh he held, among other important directorships, that of the Bank of Scotland; and on the death of the manager, David Davidson—Fellow of the Royal Society—he contributed an obituary notice of him to the Society's *Proceedings*.

As a citizen of Edinburgh he never spared himself time or trouble for the common good. Reference need only be made here to one of the many charities with which he was associated. In the minutes of our Sick Children's Hospital his part in its creation is thus recorded:

“When in 1859 a scheme was set on foot for the founding of a Sick Children's Hospital no one threw himself more earnestly into the proposal than Mr Barclay. He supported the claims of such an hospital to sympathy and support by admirable letters to the press, and by a very handsome donation he became its *first contributor*.”

In 1850 he married his cousin Elizabeth Berry, a woman of strong character and boundless hospitality, who predeceased him in 1896.

To the last day of his life George Barclay retained his balanced judgment, his warmth of feeling, and his keen sense of humour, even as he retained unaltered the virile ring of his sympathetic voice.

Those who knew him will remember him as a delightful companion, a wise counsellor, a loyal friend, a just man.