

SIR JOHN ROSE CORMACK. By Professor Maclagan.

John Rose Cormack was born on 1st March 1815, on the classic banks of Gala Water, in the Manse of Stow, of which parish his father, the Rev. John Cormack, D.D., was minister. His mother belonged to the old northern clan of Rose, her brother, Sir John Rose of Holm, being a distinguished Indian officer.

Cormack's primary education, like that of so many Scotchmen who have risen to distinction, was got in the parish school; his secondary education at the High School of Edinburgh; and his professional education at the University of Edinburgh, in which he became a student of medicine. During his whole University career he was a hard-working student, and took the degree of M.D. on 1st August 1837, on which occasion he got a University gold medal for his thesis on the subject of Death from the Entry of Air into the Veins. On this subject subsequently, both in a surgical, obstetrical, and medico-legal aspect, he made some further observations in the years 1838 and 1850, and he again made it the subject of a thesis when he took the degree of M.D. of Paris in 1870.

This was not, however, his first attempt at authorship, for he had the year before his graduation gained the prize of the Harveian Society of Edinburgh for an essay on Creasote, which he subsequently published as a thin octavo. It is curious to note the affection which Cormack retained for his first scientific love, for Creasote figures not only in many of his prescriptions in future years, but we find that creasote water (cresylic acid) was used by him in his surgical experience during the siege of Paris in 1871, instead of the closely allied carbolic acid now so familiar to everybody.

Having taken his degree with gold medal honours in 1837, he went to Paris, where he followed out his professional studies, chiefly under Andral as regarded medicine, and Velpeau as regarded surgery. He then returned to Scotland, and determined to settle in practice in Edinburgh, and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh 2nd February 1841. Practice came scantily, but Cormack could not be idle. He became a lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence in the Extra Academical School, and then

he entered upon that course of medical journalism which was a leading characteristic of a great part of his subsequent life. In 1842, under the name of the *London and Edinburgh Medical Journal*, he started that monthly Journal of Medicine, which, under some changes of designation and varieties of editorship, continues to be an important vehicle of scientific and practical medicine; its 334th number being that for April 1883.

In 1842 he was appointed physician to the Fever Hospital in connection with the Royal Infirmary, and in this capacity he had a large experience of the remarkable epidemic of Relapsing Fever, which in 1843 occurred in Edinburgh and other towns in Scotland. The labour which he bestowed on his hospital work, and the accurate details which he preserved of his cases, are a striking character of the hard-working nature of the man. His observations were given to the profession in the form of a book on this epidemic, which had, up to that time, not been so fully and accurately described, and he subsequently published some additional remarks on the subject in the *London Medical Gazette* for April 1849.

Cormack's journalistic venture, and his work as a hospital physician, did not, however, bring him much in the way of practice, and accordingly he migrated to London, where he remained but a short while, settling in practice in its neighbourhood at Putney.

In the English metropolis his journalistic propensities again manifested themselves. Besides writing leaders and other unsigned articles in some of the London medical journals, he became editor of the *Association Medical Journal*, the organ of the Provincial Medical Association. But this he gave up in 1856. The journal was much improved under his management, and still exists as the *British Medical Journal*, the organ of that large and influential body the British Medical Association.

Cormack did not, however, succeed in practice at Putney. His journalism brought him much notoriety and some ill-will, but it was perhaps itself adverse to his success as a practitioner, and it was necessary for him to look to something which would add to the means of maintaining a rising family.

An elderly lady who resided at Tours in France required a British medical man to be always with her, and accordingly he went to France, with the life and language of which he was familiar.

This, however, was a source of income which could not be otherwise than temporary, and in the course of time his patient died, and he had once more to look for a field of practice. He went to Paris, and to enable him to practise there he took the degree of M.D. of Paris in 1870, using for the thesis which he was bound to present to the Faculty the old subject of the Entrance of Air into the Veins, with the addition of his further observations which have been already mentioned. The sun seemed at last to be shining on his side of the hedge. Sir Joseph Oliffe, then the leading English physician in Paris, was old, and soon died, and Cormack got into good practice among the English, and to some extent among the French community. He was appointed physician to the British Embassy, and all seemed to be getting on prosperously with him. But soon the Franco-German war broke out, and with it came the downfall of the Second Empire. Paris was besieged by the Germans, and after this disaster the Commune followed. Cormack's prospects of an easy-going practice were thrown to the winds, and, like every one in Paris, he felt how hard are the uses of adversity. But now it was in this dark hour of disaster that Cormack really came forth in great form and showed what was in the man. Amid the silent horrors of a severe winter, and the loud-sounding horrors of foreign invasion and civil war, he showed that he was a good man, by bringing out of his professional treasure things new and old. It was not now the work of a civil practitioner, but that of a military medical officer, that he had to undertake. If anything be needed to prove the propriety of every aspirant to the medical profession being ascertained, before he gets his degree, to be qualified, not only in one, but in all the practical branches of his profession, Cormack's case would supply it. His whole work hitherto had been essentially that of a physician, he now came out strongly as an operating surgeon, bringing to the front the surgical lessons he had in his youth received from Lister, Syme, and others in the surgical wards in the Edinburgh Infirmary, and some of his cases were really triumphant results of conservative surgery. It was in the *Ambulance Anglaise*, established near his then residence, and maintained entirely by Sir Richard Wallace, that he did his surgical work, and the writer of this notice saw one of his triumphs in the person of the Communist, Alphonse Brunet, whose arm he saved by resection

of the shoulder joint after it had been shattered by a rifle bullet. For his good and courageous work at this time he was rewarded both by the British and French Governments, being knighted by our Queen, and made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

Peace being at length restored, Cormack returned to his more usual work of physician, but now just as the sun of prosperity had begun to shine upon him, and when he had received honours of which any man might be proud, the end drew near. He had never fairly got over the effects of his exertions during the war. Although still looking fairly well, and in his usual good temper and spirits, he was a sufferer from bladder disease, and he died on 13th May 1882.

This was not the only bereavement which the Franco-German and Commune wars brought upon the Cormack family. In 1842 Cormack had married Miss Hine, the daughter of a merchant at Trelawney, Jamaica. She, too, was one of the victims of these times of political trouble. She never recovered from the effects of the privation and distress to which all Paris at that time had been more or less subjected. The inclemency of a hard snowy winter, the bursting of shells and the rattle of the fusillade, the crash of falling houses, the want of due supplies of food, and the necessity of waiting, sometimes for hours, in the *queue* of persons who had to go, single file, to the bakers' shops to get their loaf of bread, were not likely to leave unshattered the health of a lady born in the West Indies, and who had been the mother of eleven children, and no one therefore need be surprised to learn that in three months Lady Cormack followed her husband to the grave. She died on 19th July 1882.

Cormack had had eleven children, and among his trials of life was the mortality which occurred among them. Two died in childhood, of scarlet fever and typhoid respectively. One who was grown up died in Brazil, of phthisis after yellow fever. In 1876 death dealt heavy blows on Cormack. His daughter, Mrs Lyon, died in India soon after giving birth to a boy, who was a great solace to his grandfather in his last years; and within a week of this event in India he lost in Paris his son Bailey Cormack, who was a promising young member of the medical profession—his father's right hand man in his surgical work in the war time, and whose excellent qualities cannot be better recorded than they are in the

following preface to Sir John's account of his patient Brunet, whose case has already been alluded to :—

“ For nearly a year I had not seen him (Brunet) till we met on the 29th April 1876, at the funeral of my dear son John Rose Bailey Cormack. Weeping bitterly he grasped my hand, and said, ‘ I never liked any one so much as Dr Bailey : he did not know what fear was, but he was to me and all the other wounded kind as a brother and gentle as a woman.’ In justice to Brunet, I cannot refrain from here placing on record his tender appreciation and beautiful tribute to my late son—my skilful assistant in most trying circumstances—one who was the joy and hope of my life. It is pleasant to record that even men of ‘ Communistic type ’ are amenable to kindness, and can love as well as hate their fellow-men.”

Shortly after Bailey Cormack's death, his sister Margaret died of pleurisy, induced, it was thought, by nursing her brother.

Five of the family survive, one married and three unmarried daughters, and a son, Charles Edward, who, following his father's footsteps, is now a student of medicine.

Cormack was a voluminous writer, exclusive of what he did in the way of journalism. In 1876, under the title of *Clinical Studies*, he republished his various detached writings in two volumes. These embrace such a variety of subjects besides those already noticed, as cholera, scarlatina, granular kidney, several gynaecological matters, infantile convulsions, diphtheria, syphilis, concussion of the brain, and certain forms of insanity. It can by no means be said that all these are of equal clinical importance, but all of them manifest good observing power and determination to study the subject fully.

It was a considerable shock to many of Cormack's friends to learn after his death that he had left his family in straitened circumstances. It is revealing no secret to mention this, for it was prominently brought forward by the *British Medical Journal* in the very practical form of advocating a memorial subscription for the benefit of Lady Cormack and her family. The way in which this was responded to, showed that Cormack had had many friends who esteemed him highly. It did not surprise those, however, who knew, nor will it surprise any one who hears the narrative of his

chequered life, as stated in this notice. It is obvious that Cormack never got into that steady sort of practice which fills the purse. His journalistic work was an impediment rather than a help to him. It is not easy to see why he did not succeed in practice, especially at Putney, where he had a good opening. It was not want of professional knowledge; his writings show that this was full and extensive. It was nothing wrong with his *morale* or his relations with religion, for although he did not carry a broad phylactery, or enlarge the border of his garments, he was essentially a quietly and unobtrusively Christian man. It is neither pleasing nor profitable to pursue this theme, and one can only fall back upon the trite expression of the country of his adoption, that he wanted the "*Je ne sais quoi*," the absence of which has hindered the success of many a man as full of erudition and observing power as himself.

Cormack was a warm and steadfast friend, and the writer of these lines desires to record that this was the constant relation to himself of the subject of this obituary notice.

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SIR CHARLES WYVILLE THOMSON, F.R.SS. L. and E. By Peter Redfern, M.D. Lond.

Charles Wyville Thomson was born on the 5th of March 1830 at Bonyde, a small property in Linlithgowshire, which had long been in his family. His father was the late Mr Andrew Thomson, who spent most of his life abroad as a surgeon in the service of the Honourable East India Company. His mother was Sarah Ann Drummond, the only daughter of Dr Wyville Smith, Inspector of Military Hospitals. His grandfather was a distinguished Edinburgh clergyman, and his great-grandfather was "Principall Clerke of Chancery" at the time of the Rebellion of 1745. His father was rather a strict disciplinarian, and expected to see successive distinctions at school and college following in the wake of the admirable education which he placed at the command of his son.

These were stirring times for Scotland. Unembarrassed by troubles from without, her people were continually struggling for intellectual advancement. They furnished and maintained schools