A TRIBUTE

TO THE

MEMORY OF THE LATE J. WARBURTON
BEGBIE, M.D., F.R.C.P.Ed.*Being Remarks addressed to the Class of Practice of Medicine in the
University of Glasgow.*

By W. T. GAIRDNER, M.D.,

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SINCE we last met here, on Friday, I have lost a very dear friend, and the medical profession one of its most distinguished ornaments. You all know to whom I allude—Dr. Warburton Begbie—a man who had been recognised by all classes in Scotland, and beyond Scotland, as the ablest and kindest of physicians, and whose premature death is, with me, the sad ending of a friendship extending over more than a quarter of a century, as to which I can now say that nothing in it, save the sad ending, is fraught with any sorrow, but, on the contrary, with all the best associations and tenderest memories. I have tried in vain to put in writing, for your benefit, some indications of what Dr. Begbie was to me and to those who knew him best. Language fails; and feelings that cannot be fittingly expressed here rise up in the presence of so recent and so overwhelming a calamity. But these few words, spoken just as they arise to my mind, you will take as being the sincere, though inadequate, tribute of a warm personal friendship to one whose name was known to multitudes, and whose life was a lesson to all of us.

Dr. Begbie inherited from his father an apparently robust constitution, and a tall, graceful, and somewhat stately presence; to these, he added an exquisite charm of manner that was peculiarly his own, and which no one could or did resist, because it was so obviously founded on a quick sympathy and a genuine desire of doing good. He may be said also to have inherited, or, at least, derived from his father, the traditions and connections of a very successful family practice in Edinburgh, one which extended back in direct succession to the days of Abercrombie, and which brought with it a great deal of curious practical information in details, as well as valuable personal associations. But it was obvious, almost from the first, to those who knew him intimately, that the younger Begbie was destined for other things than family practice; and, though he did the duties of this, as he did everything, thoroughly and well, his heart was set upon hospital practice, and his aims were those of a consulting physician. I remember his father, not long after I left Edinburgh in 1862, telling me that Warburton did not really care to extend his family practice, but preferred his hospital and his lectures, with such chance of consulting practice as was then open to him. It was in 1855 that I was first brought into formal relations with him, on equal terms, in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, as physician; previously to that time, we had been just two years apart as students, and in most of our occupations separate, though much within sight of each other in the Infirmary and elsewhere. It fell to me, in 1855, as the senior physician willing to undertake the duty, to deliver the authorised extra-academical course of lectures on clinical medicine; and it at once occurred to me to make it, what it had never been before, a co-operative course, so that the efforts of all the physicians willing to teach might be engaged, and the students might have a larger field. Dr. Warburton Begbie and Dr. Keiller were thus associated with me from the first in clinical teaching, and the method then initiated prevails in Edinburgh to this day. From this time till 1862, my dear friend and I were always side by side, doing essentially the same work, and, to a considerable extent, teaching the same students, in hospital and elsewhere. It is with a sense of profound thankfulness that I tell you what is simply the fact, that no single occasion arose during all that time on which there was anything less than the most complete confidence and goodwill between us. He was a man with whom it was eminently safe to act as a colleague, because he was entirely above every kind of suspicion of taking any undue advantage. The same transparency of character, and freedom from everything like intrigue or *dodging* (to use a vulgar but expressive phrase), attended him in the practice of his profession; and I cannot doubt that it was the main

secret of the great confidence reposed in him by his professional brethren. Among his many contributions to medical literature, there is not one that can be said to be written with a view to exalt himself, or to obtrude unduly claims to success in treatment, or, indeed, any other kind of success. And yet his success, both as a teacher and as a physician, was most marked from the first, and it was founded on genuine thorough study of and sympathy with his work. He was a most laborious, as well as a most successful, hospital physician; indeed, I often thought at the time that he was overstraining his energies, even then, by the unmeasured way in which he gave his hours to work which was not directly remunerative, and which must have greatly invaded the time required for family practice, and for other occupations. But he had what appeared to be a just confidence in his strong, well-knit frame and vigorous mind, and he gave himself with all the enthusiasm of a finely touched nature to the work of his life, never resting in his desire to know all that could be known, and do all that could be done for the relief of disease. The first lesson of Dr. Begbie's life, undoubtedly, taken as a whole, is simplicity of aim and steadfastness of purpose. He knew well what he was fit for; knew, therefore, where his work lay, and he did it thoroughly with his whole heart and mind. This success, therefore, was a genuine success; not a factitious reputation, founded on a mere show of superficial acquisitions. And his success as a teacher and lecturer was not less real and genuine. Most people, indeed, regarded it as a great misfortune, when, in consequence of what I believe to have been a misunderstanding of his wishes, he was not reappointed to be Physician to the Royal Infirmary in 1865. His retirement as a lecturer followed soon afterwards; and the extraordinary increase of his consulting practice showed how well he had laid the foundation in the goodwill of his brethren. The second lesson of his life, therefore, is faithfulness and loyalty of personal character, which, added to severe and thorough study of his profession, and the personal gifts to which I have already alluded, made him what he was. There is one other lesson, which, perhaps, I ought not to insist upon here; but I will venture to allude to it, because, without it, my brief memorial would be incomplete. Dr. Begbie was not only an accomplished and a humane physician, he was also a religious man. Let me say exactly what I mean. He was a Free Churchman, as we all know; and he was so, as he was everything else, genuinely and conscientiously. But I do not think of him as a Free Churchman. His religion was not a special form, but an unseen influence; it was woven into the web and woof of his character, not displayed upon the surface of it, in patches. He did the work of Christ, and he did it in the spirit of Christ. I call him, therefore, much more than a Free Churchman—a Christian and a Christ-like man. Underneath all his outward acts, underneath even the feelings he showed to others, lay a great and abiding sense of responsibility. He used the talents committed to him unsparingly in the service of his fellow-men, but he used them also after the manner expressed by Milton, in one of the finest of his earlier poems: he did his work, from first to last

"As ever in the great Task-master's eye".

THERAPEUTIC MEMORANDA.

THE TREATMENT OF PSORIASIS.

To reply briefly to Dr. Mackey's inquiries, I scarcely consider a dose of two-and-a-half drops of liquor potassæ much of a complication in conjunction with five drops of tar. I think him quite right in supposing that neither tar (but certainly not internal tar) nor anything else will "secure" against relapse, or, as I should prefer to put it, a *future attack*; although it is both new and strange to me to hear that poverty is a special cause of psoriasis. I am glad to hear he has noted, as I often have myself, that lactation is an exciting cause of the disease. I will add to this, that I have noticed that, so long as it lasts, pregnancy is, as a rule, a complete temporary cure. (*For my paper on this subject in the Transactions of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society.*) As to the India-rubber clothing, the persons whose cases I cited have now worn it for a whole month without any inconvenience whatsoever. If Dr. Mackey will say what particular misfortune he expects to happen to them at the end of "six months", I will be on the look out for it. The daily soap-bath goes for something, I admit; but, if Dr. Mackey will try any two cases of psoriasis with the soap-bath alone, as against any two others with the soap-bath *plus* India-rubber under-clothing, I venture to say he will find, at the end of the first week, a very considerable difference in the relative condition of the two pairs of cases.

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