

3. Biographical Notice of Francis Deas. By the Hon.
Lord Neaves.

Another loss to our Society which we have to record and to deplore at this time, arises by the death of Mr FRANCIS DEAS. This loss forms a striking contrast to that of either of the members of whom I have already spoken. They retired from the scene not prematurely, but full of years and well-deserved honours, having attained or approached the longer limit to which human life in normal circumstances is considered to extend; they had played out their parts, and, as having done so, were entitled to their dismissal amidst the plaudits of those who had witnessed and benefited by their labours. Mr Deas, on the other hand, was cut off, first by failing health, and ultimately by death, before he had attained the meridian of life, or could carry out into execution the capacities which, under a more favourable fate, would assuredly have earned him high distinction.

Francis Deas, the eldest son of the Hon. Lord Deas, was born at Edinburgh on the 1st July 1839. He went through the usual curriculum of the Edinburgh Academy, which he quitted in July 1856, having held a good place in all his classes, and having gained in 1855 the Ferguson medal, and in 1856 the Mitchell medal, both of them for proficiency in mathematics. He then went through the usual course of study at the Edinburgh University, taking prizes in almost all his classes—mathematics, logic and metaphysics, civil law, Scots law, rhetoric, and belles lettres, and natural philosophy; but he did not confine his studies to the usual routine. He was a zealous student with Professor Balfour for two or more sessions in botany, and accompanied him in his pedestrian excursions. He attended Dr Stevenson Macadam for practical chemistry, Professor Allman for natural history, and Dr Maclagan for medical jurisprudence. He continued in after life to keep up an intimacy with many of the Professors whose instructions he had thus received.

In 1859, before he was twenty, he went to Berlin, principally in order to perfect himself in speaking German, with which he was otherwise well acquainted, as well as with French and Italian. He attended law and other classes at Berlin University in summer 1859.

In 1860 he became acquainted with Sir David Brewster, having met him at his daughter-in-law Mrs Macpherson's house in Lasswade, and an intimacy and friendship sprung up between them, remarkable in several respects, and particularly in this, that young Deas was then barely one-and-twenty, while Sir David was in his eightieth year. The friendship thus formed subsisted during their joint lives, and was, I believe, a source of great pleasure and satisfaction to both, and certainly of great benefit to the younger of the two, though I venture to think that the benefit was mutual, as no one, and not certainly a man of Sir David's years and peculiar character, could fail to derive advantage from the simple and sincere affection of a youth so amiable and intelligent as Mr Deas. Sir David said of him from the first, that he had a more thorough and a more comprehensive hold of scientific principles than any man of his acquaintance not professionally scientific, and that he had so rare a combination of the faculties necessary for scientific research, that he (Sir David) deeply regretted "he was crippled by a profession so jealous as the law." Of the intimacy that thus arose very pleasing traces are to be found in the interesting volume of Sir David's Home life, by his daughter. In 1866 Sir David was seized when at Belleville with an unseasonable attack of whooping cough, and his illness was so severe as to excite the greatest alarm in Lady Brewster and his friends, although his mind remained bright, clear, and active. "A favourite young scientific friend," Mrs Gordon states, "Mr Francis Deas, was staying in the house at the time, and after hours of fatigue and suffering it was positive enjoyment to the invalid to make the little preparations for his visit, which was quite the event of the day. Believing himself a fast dying man, he left many instructions with Mr Deas as to the arrangement of his scientific instruments, &c., and two years afterwards, when the call really came, it was to this gentleman that he confided the finishing and reading of a paper for the Royal Society, which weakness prevented him from completing. It was on the Motion, Equilibrium, and Forms of Liquid Films."

Mrs Gordon gives us at the same time an interesting letter, written by Mr Deas to Mrs Macpherson after Sir David's death, sending his reminiscences of the three weeks spent by them together at Belleville on the occasion above referred to, and in a letter

written by Sir David on his death-bed, he refers to Mr Deas as the friend to whom he had entrusted the final preparation of the paper on Films already mentioned.

I may add, that there was found in Mr Deas's repositories, after his death, a letter to him from Mrs Macpherson, Sir David's daughter-in-law, giving an account of his last moments, and referring to the scientific subject in question, on which, I believe, Mr Deas read a paper in this Society as requested. That letter will be found in an appendix to the notice I am now reading.

Mr Deas was admitted a member of the Royal Society in 1867.

He had previously passed advocate in May 1862. At a later period, he was the first to receive the new degree of LL.B. (instituted in 1862.) Upon that occasion he was presented for graduation by Professor Lorimer, with a well-merited tribute to his diligence and proficiency in law. He had thoroughly studied his profession, and continued to do so, extending his attention at the same time to various kindred branches of study, such as medical jurisprudence and anatomy.

He began now to contemplate the publication of some legal work that should be useful to him, and prior to 1870 was engaged in preparing a second edition of Mr Fraser's work on "Master and Servant," which appeared in January 1872. His laborious application however to that task, carried on in conjunction with the practice which he was obtaining at the bar, seems to have injuriously affected his health, and to have made the first encroachment that appeared upon his constitution, and in the summer of 1870 premonitory symptoms were observed of that tenderness of chest which ultimately proved fatal. By advice of his medical attendants he went abroad, in order to make what is called the Nile journey. He had twice before been abroad, and was thus not an inexperienced traveller. He much enjoyed the voyage up the Nile to the Second Cataract, and took an interest in all that he saw, visiting all the objects of celebrity within his reach. The atmospheric varieties of the country, and in particular the pure and inspiring air of the Desert, seem to have done him good, as well as to have afforded him pleasure. His journal consisting of memoranda during this voyage, of which I have seen a copy, is very interesting, particularly to those who knew him, and shows how his

scientific tastes and feelings of curiosity were elicited at every step. It seems to be uncertain whether his health truly profited by this experiment. He appears to have doubted it himself; yet on arriving in London in June 1871, he wrote that there had been a marked change for the better ever since he recrossed the Alps, and that he was now so well that he wished to resume business. He returned to Edinburgh accordingly, and did resume business, but without attending the Parliament House. Upon putting out of hand his book on "Master and Servant," Mr Deas had commenced another work of a still more arduous kind, on the "Law of Railways," and to this he now applied himself as a professional task.

In February 1872 he again, by advice, went abroad, spending his time partly at Florence, but chiefly at Rome, still attending to all objects of interest, but at the same time continuing even there the progress of his book on Railways. He returned home in June of that year, perseveringly completed his book, and published it in January 1873. He very fittingly dedicated the work to his father, Lord Deas, "alike as a token of filial regard, and as a tribute to his acknowledged eminence as a lawyer." The book was received with great approbation, it evinces a wonderful degree of industry and energy, and cannot fail to be eminently useful to the profession, as many competent judges have gladly acknowledged.

In the narrative given above I have not said much of Mr Deas's scientific tendencies; but these, from the first, were very strong and decided. I have mentioned the opinion of Sir David Brewster as to the combination of qualities, which seemed peculiarly to fit him for scientific research, and his application to scientific subjects was constantly kept up. His reading was extensive in all the best books on science, and he contributed papers which were considered valuable to the best scientific periodicals of the day. He devoted a good deal of time to the study of optics, and had considerable practice in the use of the telescope; but was still more interested in microscopic investigations, in connection with which he amassed an extensive collection of objects for that instrument, nearly all prepared by himself, and accumulated during many years, wherever he travelled or happened to be.

It is to me a pleasant thing to record, and it must have been to his friends a great consolation to know, that in the midst of these

scientific investigations, which were fearlessly and searchingly conducted, he never lost sight of those great principles that connect the works of the Deity with His personal existence and moral perfections. Many entries in his private memoranda show his fidelity to these feelings, and prove that he shared with his friend Brewster the reverence for a Supreme Power which that distinguished man always evinced in the prosecution of his varied inquiries. Mr Deas's reading on sacred subjects seems to have been much in the Book of Psalms, a book which has proved a treasure and a favourite study with all the devout admirers of nature; and he often expresses in his memoranda how much the admiration felt by the authors of that book for the works of the Creator would have been exalted and enhanced, instead of being deadened or destroyed, by the new wonders revealed through the aid of scientific instruments.

It was not only to professional and scientific subjects that he directed his attention. He had, I think, a genius for music, and performed on the pianoforte with perfect taste and with a degree of skill that was scarcely to be expected from an amateur who had so many other avocations and pursuits of a more urgent and engrossing nature. He was also fond of sculpture and painting, and his friend, Sir Noel Paton, seemed to have pleasure in sending him his paintings before they were despatched to London, at a time when Mr Deas was, from illness, unable to leave the house.

After what I have said, I think I may confidently claim your sympathy with me in this tribute to the memory of a young man for whom, when he was in life, I felt a strong esteem and regard, in whose sad fate I saw a great private and public loss, and whose memory, I think, is entitled to our affectionate remembrance. Looking to his natural talents and tastes, to the assiduous cultivation that he bestowed upon them, to the variety of subjects to which his studies extended, and to the high and sound principles with which his mind was imbued, I venture to say, that I know of *no* young man who, if he had lived and had preserved a sufficient measure of health, was more likely to extend the range and maintain the dignity of science, as well as of mental culture generally, while at the same time I cannot help adding, and there is a satisfaction even in this feeling, that I know of no one who, from the innocence of his character and from the purity of

his feelings, as well as from the religious emotions which he carried into scientific investigations, was better prepared to be early removed from this temporary scene, seeing that such was the lot appointed for him. The loss of such a youth, who was doing so well, and promising so much more to be still done, must be a great affliction to all who knew him, and a very grievous one to those most nearly connected with him; but of such characters it is the privilege of survivors to speak, as good men have often done, that the memory of the departed is a treasure that cannot be outweighed even by present blessings.

A P P E N D I X.

Letter referred to on page 463, from Mrs Brewster Macpherson, found in Mr Deas's repositories, dated Allerley, Monday, February 10th, 1868.

“You will, I know, be intensely anxious to hear of dear, dear papa. Sir James Simpson says he cannot live over the night. We got a train straight on to Melrose on Saturday, so I gave my note to a porter to post for me. I hope you got it. We found Sir David much stronger and better than I had expected, so much so that I could not believe he was dying. He slept all that night, and up to twelve on Sunday. I could not believe he was dying, then he sank very rapidly. His perfect trust in the love of God, and in the finished righteousness of the Saviour, is wonderful. He has no wish to live—no fear of death—absolutely none. His faith is pure and childlike. His mind is perfectly clear. He expressed a wish twice to me that you should finish a paper which he had begun on Soap-bubbles, and read it for him at the Royal Society. He expressed the same wish to Sir James Simpson last night, and he has left a paper for you with instructions about it. Lady Brewster wrote at his request on Friday. He has spoken of you repeatedly to me with such kindness. Oh! Frank, it was awfully solemn all yesterday, and how much more so to-day—one of the great lights of the world going out.”