

Monday, 5th December 1881.

THE RIGHT HON. LORD MONCREIFF, President,
in the Chair.

The President read Obituary Notices of Dr John Hill Burton, Rev. Dr Cumming, Dr P. D. Handyside, Professor Sanders, Dr Andrew Wood—deceased Fellows of the Society.

OBITUARY NOTICES.

JOHN HILL BURTON. By James Gordon, *Asst. Librarian.*

JOHN HILL BURTON, one of the most eminent men of letters that Scotland has produced, was born on the 22nd of August 1809, at Aberdeen. While he was still young, his father, an officer in the 94th regiment, died; but his mother, who was the daughter of an Aberdeenshire laird, though left, on her husband's decease, with very slender means, successfully exerted herself to give her children an education befitting their social position. He had the advantage of being taught by Melvin, the famous scholar and schoolmaster; and on leaving school, continued his studies at Marischal College. He ever afterwards gratefully acknowledged his obligations to his Alma Mater. In the course of his education at Aberdeen, he laid the foundations of that extensive acquaintance with English literature for which he was afterwards so notable, and also acquired a familiar knowledge of the Latin language. Sir Theodore Martin mentions that Burton used always to carry about with him in his pocket a small edition of Horace. Among his associates at school and college were several young men afterwards destined to distinguish themselves by their contributions to the history of their country, and whose predilections for this department of literature doubtless influenced his future literary career. These fellow-students were, Joseph Robertson, the historical antiquary; Dr John Stuart, the author of the splendid volume *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland*; Canon Robertson, the ecclesiastical historian; Dr Grub, the author of the *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*; Professor Cosmo Innes; and Dr John Cumming, of whom an obituary notice

will be read to-night. In conjunction with some of these, Burton, while still at college, contributed several articles to the *Aberdeen Magazine*.

At the close of his college career he took the degree of M.A., and was apprenticed to a solicitor in his native town. Conscious, however, of an ability for higher work than the drudgery of a provincial solicitor's office, he resolved to abandon it for the higher grade of the legal profession, and was admitted to the Scottish bar in 1831. It was fortunate for the prosecution of his plans of extensive study that he now settled in Edinburgh, and was only a visitor to the great metropolis of the south, for had he resided permanently there, his experience might have been like that of Bishop Thirlwall, who said that the want of time for reading is the great misery of London life. As an advocate, Burton never got practice, but he wrote two legal works of value in their day, one on *Bankruptcy*, and the other a *Manual of the Law of Scotland*, whilst his legal training and knowledge were of immense use to him in his historical works.

In 1833 he began to contribute articles to the *Westminster*, and afterwards to the *Edinburgh* and *North British Reviews*. During recent years he wrote numerous articles—literary, antiquarian, and topographical—for *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Burton's contributions to literature are too many and varied to be enumerated here, but it should be noted as an epoch in his career, that in 1846 he made his first appearance in independent authorship, when he published his *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*. This is universally admitted to be one of the best biographies ever written. In this work details of much literary and antiquarian interest, calculated to throw light on the career of the great Scottish philosopher, are gleaned from sources multitudinous and recondite, and evince such a profound and extensive acquaintance with the literature of the last century, as only one who was not merely a book-hunter, but an indefatigable reader of books, could have brought to bear on the subject. Noticeable, also, is his little work, published in 1849, entitled *Political and Social Economy : its Practical Application*, which is considered to be remarkable, not only for the soundness of its teaching, but for the grace of its style.

His appointment in 1854 as Secretary of the Scottish Prison Board gave him a secure income, independent of literature, and he faithfully discharged the duties of that office, which were somewhat lessened in 1860, when the chief control of prisons in Scotland was assumed by the Home Office. In 1877 he resigned the secretaryship, but continued his connection with this department as a commissioner of prisons till his death. He was accustomed to lay stress on the advantage a historian derives from acquaintance with the machinery of government, and the conduct of affairs in the present, as enabling him to judge more fairly of institutions and men of the past.

He commenced his *History of Scotland* by the publication in 1853 of two volumes, treating of the period from 1688 to 1748, and completed it by seven volumes from Agricola's invasion to 1688. Of this work an anonymous biographer says—"The *History of Scotland* is undoubtedly the work that will carry Hill Burton's name to posterity. At the present day it is recognised as pre-eminently the history of Scotland, and it is one of the few books of the multitude which this age has produced which are likely to live by reason of their enduring merit. He investigated every point for himself, and his *History* is therefore the result of a vast amount of patient and honest work. He possessed in a rare degree the historian's faculty—the power, that is to say, which leads the student of men and events to seize as if by an intuition on those features of character and those currents of opinion which stamp an epoch and the men who moulded it." Professor Æneas Mackay thus refers to it:—"In this *History* he has given us, in a sober style, an eminently plain and truthful account of the main facts in the career of a nation which, in spite of the smallness of its territory, preserved its independence, and when permanently united to England, contributed some new and valuable elements to the British character." He was appointed by the Government Historiographer-royal for Scotland.

His *History of the Reign of Queen Anne*, recently published, though possessing great merit, is considered to be a less successful effort than his *History of Scotland*.

The *Scot Abroad* and *The Book-hunter* have both been very popular. Indeed the latter could not but be popular, abounding

as it does in interesting notices of curious books and their collectors. It tells, in a pleasant and graceful style, of the characteristics, it may possibly be the blunders, that have made certain editions prized by collectors—for even certain editions of the Bible have been largely increased in value by some strange accidental error of the printer. In short, it is a thesaurus of the curiosities of bibliography, and of the eccentricities of bibliomaniacs. It has long been out of print, but a new edition will shortly appear, which will contain a memoir of the author written by Mrs. Hill Burton.

The following allusions to his personal habits may not be uninteresting. It is stated by those who knew him that in pedestrian excursions he had walked over the greater part of Scotland, and as he was a geologist as well as an antiquary and a lover of the picturesque, he found varied sources of interest in the course of his rambles. His library did not mean a particular room; it wandered over his whole house. The principal rooms were all filled or covered with books. The shelves were put up with his own hands, and the books were so arranged that he knew where to find any of them even in the dark. He used to mention that the pecuniary value of the works he had received as presents from contemporary authors amounted to upwards of £400, and this is a proof that he was on the most friendly terms with other literary men.

One who knew him well says,—“He was very hospitably inclined, and very kind of heart, although his blunt manner often wronged him in the eyes of strangers. His varied knowledge, his fund of anecdote, and his quaint humour made him a delightful companion.” More than most hardworking men, he felt a positive pleasure in his unceasing intellectual activity, and like our former president, Sir Walter Scott, considered “the capacity to labour as part of the happiness he had enjoyed.” It was doubtless owing to this peculiarity of temperament that to the last he preserved much of the freshness of youth, as evinced by an unfailing buoyancy of spirit, and the lively intellectual interest he took in a vast variety of subjects; for as Burton’s friend, Sir Theodore Martin, observed in his rectorial address at St Andrews—“It is no paradox to say that there is nothing like work for maintaining the elasticity of mind, and preparing it for what we should all aim at—the carrying on

the spirit of youth, the freshness of enjoyment into riper years, and even into old age."

He was elected a Fellow of this Society on 1st February 1847, and was also a member of the Geological and Antiquarian Societies. He received the degree of LL.D. from the University of Aberdeen. He was also a D.C.L. of Oxford. He died on 10th August 1881, at Morton House, near Edinburgh.

REV. JOHN CUMMING, D.D. By the Rev. Professor Flint.

THE REV. DR. JOHN CUMMING, who died at Chiswick on the 4th of last July, was elected a Fellow of this Society on 21st February 1853. The deceased was born in Aberdeen on 10th November 1810. He was educated in the Grammar School of his native city, and afterwards in King's College, of which he became a graduate.

At the early age of twenty-three he was called to the pastorate of the Scottish Church, Crown Court, Covent Garden, London, and the duties of this office he discharged for almost fifty years. The attractiveness of his preaching, his zealous opposition to Roman Catholicism, High Churchism, and Rationalism, and the popularity of the religious writings which flowed in rapid succession from his pen, not only gathered round him a large and influential congregation, but gained him a multitude of admirers in all parts of the kingdom; while, at a somewhat later period, the definiteness and singularity of the conclusions to which he was led by his study of prophecy made him, perhaps, more talked about than any other man in the clerical world.

The Hammersmith discussion of 1839 showed his readiness and skill in public debate. As early as 1840, in the preface to his edition of John Knox's Book of Common Order, he advocated nearly the same changes in the public worship of the Church of Scotland for which Dr. Robert Lee contended in Presbytery and Assembly about twenty years later. It was about 1846 that he began to attempt to unfold the course of unfulfilled prophecy, and from about 1860 that his interpretations became startlingly definite and particular. The year 1868 was fixed on as that in which very marvellous events were to occur. It was not an uneventful year, yet when Dr. Cumming sought to show in 1870 that every incident