ILLUSTRIOUS PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS IN
IRELAND.

No. III.

DAVID MACBRIDE, M. D.,

With a Portrait.

IT is much to be regretted that very scanty memorials of the many eminent physicians and surgeons who practised in Ireland, in the latter part of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth century, have been preserved; yet, being desirous to promote the object which has been already set forth in the memoirs of Sir Patrick Dun and Dr. Bartholomew Mosse, we have been induced to attempt the compilation of the following memoir of one of the most eminent practitioners in Dublin during the last century, and whose published works contributed in no small degree to extend the fame of Irish scientific literature both in England and on the Continent^(a).

David Macbride was descended from an ancient family of that name in the shire of Galloway, in Scotland; his grandfather came to Ireland about the end of the seventeenth century, and officiated at Belfast to a congregation of Presbyterians. His father was also a Presbyterian clergyman, and married the daughter of Mr. Boyd, of Killabeg, in the county of Down; he was minister of Ballymoney, near Coleraine, in the county of Antrim, where David was born on the 26th of April, 1726.

He was educated at the public school of Ballymoney, and, after serving an apprenticeship to a surgeon in that place, he entered the Royal Navy; where having served for some time as mate in an hospital-ship, he was subsequently advanced to the rank of surgeon, in which capacity he remained until the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.

A seafaring life having afforded him many opportunities of observing scurvy in all its stages, it was about this time he first turned his attention towards the discovery of a remedy for that disease, the investigation of which he carried on for several years, and made many ingenious experiments, which resulted in the publication of his *Essays*, to be noticed presently.

Subsequent to the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, Mr. Macbride went to Edinburgh, where he studied anatomy under Monro, and afterwards to London, where he studied midwifery under Doctors Hunter and Smellie; he also attended the lectures of other distinguished teachers on the different branches of medicine, but did not take a medical degree.

(a) For the materials of this memoir we are indebted to our esteemed friend and learned contributor, Dr. Aquilla Smith, who has already thrown so much light upon the history of medicine in Ireland.

In the year 1749 he settled in Ballymoney, and in 1751 he removed from thence to Dublin, and commenced practice as a surgeon and accoucheur in the twenty-sixth year of his age; but, being young and remarkably bashful, his practice for several years was very limited. His abilities were then only known to his family connexions and a circle of select friends. These, however, were captivated with his company, not only from his being possessed of agreeable manners and a pleasing disposition, but for his general knowledge in painting, music, and of many of the branches of polite literature.

Mr. Macbride was a member of the Medico-Philosophical Society, established in Dublin in 1756 (an account of which was given in the preface to the first volume of the present series of our periodical^(a)), and filled the office of secretary after the death of Dr. Charles Smith, in 1762.

To this "little society^(b)," which, at its first institution, consisted of only seven members, who met "once a fortnight for their mutual improvement," he first communicated his ideas respecting the treatment of scurvy, and many of the experiments detailed in his "Experimental Essays,—I. on the Fermentation of Alimentary Mixtures,—II. on the Nature and Properties of Fixed Air,—III. on the respective Powers, and Manner of acting, of the different Kinds of Antiseptics,—IV. on the Scurvy; with a Proposal for trying new Methods to prevent or cure the same, at Sea,—V. on the dissolvent Power of Quick-Lime,"—which were first published in London in 1764, 8vo. pp. 267.

These soon attracted the attention of philosophers and physicians, and were shortly after translated into different languages; and on

(a) See preface to the first Number of this Journal, p. xxix.

(b) It appears that it was customary, at the meetings of the Medico-Philosophical Society, for the members not only to read original papers, but also to make communications in the form of reviews of new or rare books, and reports on recent discoveries, &c. Thus we find among the papers of this body contained in "The Repository," now in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, a notice of Dr. Macbride's, detailing the contents of "Gooch's Practical Remarks on Surgery," in 1758, and giving therein some short commentary of his own on each section; likewise extracts and translations from the Memoirs of the Parisian Academy of Surgery, on M. Rocolin's essay on the utility of uterine injections, and Leveret's treatise on the method of delivering the placenta, and others of a like nature. In the same year he made a most interesting communication to the Society, shewing that Hippocrates recommended the use of emetics in the treatment of uterine discharges. As this paper is one not only of interest, but of practical value, even in the present day, we shall, at some future period, publish it entire in our Medical Miscellany, as well as other communications from the pages of the manuscript work just referred to. In 1761 he gave an account of Astruc's theory of menstruation.

At the meeting of this Society on the 16th of October, 1764, Dr. Rutty gave a general analysis and commentary upon the first four of Dr. Macbride's Experimental Essays, and spoke in highly commendatory terms of their universal influence on practical medicine.

the 27th of November, 1764, the University of Glasgow testified their approval of the work, by conferring the degree of Doctor of Physic on the author.

A "second edition, enlarged and corrected," was published in London, in 1767, 8vo. pp. 296, and in the same year a tract of thirty-eight pages, giving "an historical Account of a new Method of treating the Scurvy at Sea, containing ten Cases, which shew that this destructive Disease may be easily and effectually cured without the aid of fresh vegetable Diet."

In the first three essays, which are preliminary to the fourth, we do not find any thing which calls for particular notice. In forming our estimate of the value of chemical experiments made about the middle of the last century, we should endeavour to forget the more exact knowledge of our own times, and place ourselves in the position of a contemporary with the author; for, though instances might be quoted in which the inferences drawn from the experiments are erroneous, yet the facts detailed in the experiments will ever remain as evidences of the ability and patience with which the investigations were pursued.

The following extracts from the fourth essay, will put the reader in possession of Dr. Macbride's theory, and the mode of treatment proposed by him for the cure of scurvy :

"For some time, even before I engaged in the course of experiments which have been set forth in the three preceding essays, I was firmly of opinion, that the cure of the *sea scurvy* depended chiefly, if not altogether, on the *fermentative quality* of the *fresh* vegetables; which are found, by experience, to be the only things that, with certainty, conquer this destructive disease. And in consequence of this persuasion, it occurred to me, that as there are vegetable substances, which, though not perfectly recent, are yet capable of fermentation, such in particular as *common malt*; that this, if taken in the way of medicine, would, in all probability, produce effects similar to those produced by green vegetables, and consequently cure the scurvy; and as *malt* can be preserved sound, for a considerable length of time, it might be carried to sea, and there kept, in order to make *wort* occasionally as it might be wanted; and thus prove a remedy, always in readiness, against that fatal disease."—*Second Ed.* p. 167.

"The method in which it is proposed to prepare the *wort*, is, to take *one* measure of the *ground malt*, and pour on it *three* measures of boiling water; stir them well, and let the mixture stand, close covered up for three or four hours, after which strain off the liquor."—*Ibid.* p. 194.

The mode of administration proposed, is, to boil the *wort* "into a *panado*, with sea biscuit, and some of the dried fruits that are usually carried to sea; the patient to make at least two meals a day on this palatable mess, and to drink a quart or more of the *fresh infusion*, in the course of the twenty-four hours."—*Ibid.* p. 189.

About the beginning of the year 1762 Dr. Macbride communicated his views on the treatment of scurvy, in the form of a letter,

to his friend, Dr. George Cleghorn, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Dublin, by whom copies were transmitted to Dr. Wm. Hunter, and to Henry Tom, Esq., one of the Commissioners for taking care of Sick and Wounded Seamen. Through their influence, the Lords of the Admiralty, in May, 1762, gave orders to have the *wort* tried in the naval hospitals at Portsmouth and Plymouth. The Doctor also acknowledges his obligations to Vice-admiral Sir Charles Saunders, by dedicating to him the second edition of the Essays, published in 1767.

Notwithstanding all this powerful influence, Dr. Macbride, writing on the 12th of December, 1766, is compelled to say: "I take it for granted that nothing has been done in consequence of that order, nor any report ever made."—*Second Edit.* p. 171, *note*.

In a postscript appended to the second edition of the Essays, there is "An extract from a medical journal kept by Mr. Alexander Young, surgeon to His Majesty's ship Jason," of which Captain *John Macbride*, only brother to the Doctor, was commander, in which journal is given an account of the successful treatment of four cases of scurvy by wort, which, with the cases detailed in the "Historical Account" published in 1767, and some particulars in the chapter on scurvy in Macbride's "Practice of Medicine," comprise all the evidence collected by the author, who, in 1777, intimated his intention to publish all the letters and reports which had been communicated to him, but he did not live to carry his intention into effect.

The fifth essay, the title of which is, "On the Dissolvent Power of Quick-Lime," contains a number of miscellaneous experiments and observations, all tending to a further proof of what had been advanced in the four preceeding essays.

After giving a summary of Dr. Black's theory of the constitution of calcareous earth, Dr. Macbride adds: "But it occurred to me, that it might possibly be still further proved, and that in a way which would afford an ocular demonstration;" and with this object the first experiment was devised. Into a filtered solution of lime-water fixed air (carbonic acid gas) was passed by means of an ingeniously-contrived apparatus, of which a figure is given; "and it was highly pleasing to see the particles of quick-lime, which, but two or three minutes before, were quite invisible, and dissolved in the water, all running together and falling to the bottom;" the precipitate, when collected, "effervesced violently with spirits of vitriol (sulphuric acid), and thus was the theory of Dr. Black placed beyond the reach of contradiction."—*Second Ed.* p. 229.

Having determined, "in three different instances, that the lime is precipitated from lime-water by restoring to it the fixed air," he adds, "may not lime-water, therefore, upon this principle, be used as a *test* to try whether or not bodies contain *fixed air*?"

In the seventeenth experiment, he proved the truth of his conjecture, by shewing that the "*perspirable matter*," as emitted from the lungs, contains fixed air or carbonic acid. "Three ounces of filtered lime-water being put into a phial, and a funnel fixed close into the neck of it," he says, "I blew in my breath through the funnel; and

by the time I continued so doing for ten or twelve minutes, I found the water growing turbid, and the lime becoming visible." He also determined the existence of carbonic acid in the sweat and in the atmosphere, and states that when carbonic acid is evolved in the stomach, from effervescent mixtures, "it often operates like a charm in restraining vomitings."

He also proved that saliva does not contain fixed air, but that it absorbs it rapidly.

The solvent power of lime-water on vegetable matter was the subject of many of his experiments; and, of Peruvian bark infused in it, he says: "I can venture to assure the reader, from repeated experience, that the bark, given in this manner, will scarce ever fail; particularly with regard to the uterine discharges, when they proceed from mere relaxation or weakness."^(a)

From the success of the first experiment, Dr. Macbride began to think that the sulphur in the natural sulphureous waters might also be rendered visible as well as lime. He therefore instituted experiments, the result of which was that they "pointed out a method of making a pure solution of sulphur, which, being diluted to the proper degree, gives an artificial sulphureous water, perfectly resembling the natural as to taste, smell, transparency, and want of colour, and not liable to grow turbid on the addition of acids, which all other artificial solutions of sulphur, hitherto known, constantly do."

Dr. Thomson, in his History of Chemistry, justly says, that previous to Mr. Cavendish's investigations, "Dr. Macbride had already ascertained that vegetable and animal substances yield fixed air by putrefaction and fermentation."—Vol. i. p. 343.

But the extracts which we have made from Dr. Macbride's essays shew that he was entitled to more credit for his discoveries in pneumatic chemistry than has been hitherto awarded to him. The following statement of Dr. Thompson is not reconcileable with the fact of the publication of Macbride's essays in 1764:

"Pneumatic chemistry *had been begun* by Mr. Cavendish, in his valuable paper on carbonic acid and hydrogen gases, published in the Philosophical Transactions for 1766."—*Hist. of Chemistry*, vol. ii., p. 18.

About this time Dr. Macbride's practice rapidly increased, (being upwards of £500 a year); and, feeling assured that his abilities were appreciated, and that he was now in a position to insure success, he set up a carriage in November, 1767^(b).

(a) Besides the ordinary mode of administering bark in effervescence with carbonate of ammonia, our distinguished contributor, Mr. Donovan, has lately succeeded in charging a solution of the syrup of bark with carbonic acid gas, which makes an agreeable and exceedingly efficacious draught.

(b) It may be interesting to state that in three years after (1770), Dr. Macbride's professional receipts amounted to £1069 18s. 5d. The fee at that period was usually a guinea (£1 2s. 9d.) On the fifth year following, his income from fees amounted to £1564 19s. 1½d. In 1777 he made nearly £1800. We have extracted those particulars from Dr. Macbride's fee-book, kindly placed at our disposal by Dr. Evory Kennedy.

In the December following he proposed a new process of tanning leather, which is noticed as follows in the Proceedings of the Dublin Society for March 31st, 1768:

"It appearing by the testimony of three eminent tanners of this city, viz., Mr. William Laban, Mr. Samuel Henderson, and Mr. Robert Hutton, that a calf's skin (the same being exhibited) which was tanned after a new method, lately discovered by Dr. David Macbride, was well and sufficiently tanned; and it further appearing by Mr. Laban's testimony, who tanned the said skin, that the same was completely done within the space of four weeks, whereas it would have taken from four to six months to tan the same skin as perfectly, after the method of tanning hitherto, and usually practised; Mr. Laban also testifying that the method of tanning lately discovered by Dr. Macbride is in every respect much easier and cheaper to the tanner than the common method of tanning, and that very great advantages must accrue therefrom to this manufacture:—Dr. David Macbride, in consideration of his important and ingenious discovery, was unanimously elected an Honorary Member of this Society."

It was also proposed, "That a silver medal be presented to Dr. Macbride, as a further mark of honour to him from this Society," which was agreed to at the meeting, on Thursday, 14th of April.

He subsequently received a gold medal from the Society of Arts and Commerce in London, as a mark of that body's appreciation of his useful discovery.

On the 14th of November, 1769, a petition from Dr. Macbride was presented to the Irish House of Commons, setting forth that he had "invented a method of tanning, founded on chemical principles, whereby leather is improved in its quality, tanned in one-third of the time required by the process hitherto known and practised, and with the saving of one-fourth in the expense of tanning materials, particularly of oak bark;" and, "That the petitioner is ready to disclose his secret, and instruct the tanners of Ireland in general, on such consideration as the House shall deem adequate to the importance of his discovery, and think a recompence sufficient, for giving up the profits which may be secured to him by the usual privilege of an exclusive patent."

A committee was appointed, which, on the 18th of November, brought up their report, concluding with the resolution, "That it is the opinion of the Committee, that the petitioner deserves the aid of Parliament." It does not appear that any further steps were taken by the House, or that the promised aid was ever conferred on the discoverer.

The improvement which was sanctioned by the Dublin Society, and for which compensation was sought for from the House of Commons, consisted in substituting lime-water for common water, in preparing "ooze," as it is termed by the tanners.

In September, 1772, Dr. Macbride communicated to Dr. William Hunter "An Account of two extraordinary Cases after delivery,"

which were published in 1776, in the fifth volume of the Medical Observations and Inquiries.

For some years after he obtained a medical degree, he employed part of his time in the duties of a medical teacher. In the winter of 1766 he delivered at his own house his first course of lectures, which in 1772 were published in London, in one volume quarto, under the title of "A methodical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Physic." From an entry in his fee-book, we learn that he received from pupils, for his first course of lectures, twenty-four guineas, or £27 6s. Irish.

In 1774 these lectures were translated into Latin, and published at Utrecht, in two volumes octavo.

"The second edition, enlarged and corrected," was published in Dublin, in 1777, in two volumes octavo, under the title of "A methodical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of the Art of Medicine." The Publisher, at the same time, announced as "Preparing for the Press,—Medical Journals, kept by the Surgeons of His Majesty's Ships employed in exploring the Southern Hemisphere: being a necessary Appendix to Hawkesworth, Cook, and Foster. To which are added Letters, and Observations, shewing the most effectual ways of preventing and curing the Scurvy, and other Diseases commonly incident to Seamen in long voyages."

This work, which contains the substance of the course of lectures commenced in 1766, professes to give a "General View of the Theory and Practice of Physic," and is divided into two parts. The first consists of six books, and explains the principles on which the art of medicine is founded; the second or practical part was intended to consist of twelve books, of which nine only were published; and as to the three books in which the author proposed to treat of *local*, *sexual*, and *infantile* diseases, he never accomplished them.

The author modestly styles his work a compilation, chiefly designed for the use of students; it contains, however, many original observations, and gives a good summary of the rules of practice adopted by the most skilful physicians of the last century.

In the second edition he has published the first description of a disease which he named "morbus vesicularis," and which bears a close resemblance to the "chronic pemphigus," or "pompholyx diutinus," of Bateman.

Dr. Macbride's success in practice may be dated from the publication of the second edition of his essays, in 1767, in which year his receipts were nearly double the amount received in any of the preceding sixteen years. His great abilities being universally known, the public seemed now desirous to make amends for having overlooked him so long, the consequence of which was, that his numerous engagements, particularly as an accoucheur(a), having for a long time kept him in a state of agitation, both of body and mind, at last induced a total incapacity for sleep; still, however, he retained his

(a) From a memorandum in his fee book, we learn that he attended 1065 midwifery cases, from 1767 to 1777, both years included.

usual good spirits, and continued to practise up to the 16th of December, 1778, when an accidental cold brought on a fever, of which he died, in the fifty-third year of his age, at his house in Cavendish-row, on the 28th of December, 1778, and was buried in St. Audoen's Church(a).

During the twenty-five years of Dr. Macbride's professional career, he was the contemporary of some of the most distinguished physicians and surgeons of the last century; among whom we may enumerate, Rutty, O'Halloran, Mosse, Fielding Ould, Purcell, Wetherall, Clossy, Pringle, Hanly, Morris, and the elder Dease, whom he assisted in the experiments which he made on the various lithotropics about the year 1775(b).

The portrait prefixed to this memoir has been reduced by Mr. Connolly from a large print, published in London in 1797, and engraved by J. T. Smith, after the original picture by Reynolds, of Dublin. The glass jar inverted in water, alludes to the Doctor's discoveries in pneumatic chemistry. We cannot say in whose possession the original picture is, but hope that this notice may lead to its discovery.

Dr. Macbride was married first to Miss Margaret Armstrong, on the 20th of November, 1753, at St. Audoen's Church, Dublin; and on the 5th of June, 1762, he was married in the same church to his second wife, Dorcas Evory(c), widow of George Cumming, Esq., of Bride-street, Dublin, merchant. He died without issue, and had

(a) Dr. Macbride was a subscriber, for four copies, to Pool and Cash's "Views of Dublin," published in 1760. In a note at page v. the account of his death is copied *verbatim* from Walker's Hibernian Magazine, with the addition that he "died in January, 1779." The following extract from Saunders' News-letter of the 29th December, 1778, is, however, conclusive: "Died yesterday, of a fever, at his house in Cavendish-row, in the fifty-second year of his age, David Macbride, M.D., universally and most deservedly lamented." &c.

(b) From Mr. Dease's graphic dedication of his work on the Hydrocele to Mr. Morris, then the most distinguished surgeon in this city, we learn that about this period, and even so late as 1782, the only public and authorized lectures given here were those in the University, on Anatomy, Chemistry, and Botany. Those on the other branches of medical science—on the foundation of Sir Patrick Dun, and directed, according to the wording of his will, to be delivered in Latin,—do not, at this time, appear to have been available to the students in Dublin, who then amounted to about 300; for Mr. Dease says: "Which circumstance" (their being delivered in Latin), "I have heard sometimes mentioned as an apology for not giving them at all." See A Comparison of the different Methods of cutting for the Stone, with some Remarks on the Medicines generally used as Solvents, &c., by W. Dease. Dublin: Williams, 1782—p.144.

(c) Dr. Macbride, shortly after he settled in Dublin, paid his addresses to Miss Evory, and succeeded in engaging her affections; but the proposed alliance not meeting with the approbation of the young lady's father, she yielded to parental authority, and married Mr. Cumming. In the course of a few years Mr. Cumming died, and left his widow with an only son. The Doctor, not calculating on the death of his own wife, evinced his anxiety for the welfare of his "first love" by using all his influence to induce his friend, Dr. George Clegghorn, to take the widow. Of the lady's wishes on this occasion we are not informed; but we have it on good authority that Dr. Clegghorn's reply to his friend was, "Oh! no, Davy, that's not in my way!"

an only sister, Mary, and a brother, John, a captain in the Royal Navy.

In a curious and rare little book, "The Medical Review, a Poem, being a Panegyrick on the Faculty of Dublin, by John Gilborne, M. D., Dublin" [1775], the subject of this memoir is lauded in the following unpretending verses:

"A celebrated writer is Macbride,
Great is his merit, moderate his pride;
Cures all diseases that mankind befall,
Relieves the fair by rules obstetrical;
Prescriptions elegant his sense declare,
The sick retrieve by his auspicious care."

The following record of his death is taken from Walker's *Hibernian Magazine* for January, 1779: "Of a fever, at his house in Cavendish-row, in the fifty-second [fifty-third] year of his age, most sincerely and deservedly regretted by a numerous acquaintance, David Macbride, Esq., M. D. His amiable manners procured him the love and affection of all ranks of people, and his ingenious essays in physic and philosophy raised his reputation very high in the learned world. He was an honorary member of the Dublin Society, and one of the Governors of the Lying-in Hospital."

Dr. Houlton, of Dublin, in the same *Magazine*, paid his tribute to the memory of Dr. Macbride, in an elegy of fourteen stanzas, of four lines each.

Having pointed out the only sources from which we can now form an opinion of the subject of this memoir as a man of science, we shall conclude with the summary of his character in all the relations of life, so feelingly described in the following lines, reprinted from Walker's *Hibernian Magazine*:—

"On the Death of David Macbride, Esq., M. D. By a Lady."

"Accept these lines, tho' unadorn'd by art,
The genuine dictates of a sorrowing heart.
Mac Bride's no more—all earth and nature cries:
I have lost my friend—the hope of weeping eyes.
Farewell—he's gone, removed from anxious care,
From busy life, from arduous thoughts, afar;
From the relief of mortals here below,
To sooth their sorrow, mitigate their woe.
No selfish views e're lurk'd within his breast,
Nought there but noble thoughts could ever rest.
Why should I tell what virtues graced his mind,
An honour to his country and mankind.
With boundless knowledge and extensive skill,
A heart unbounded by a generous will;
His sympathetic soul felt others' woe;
Was virtue's friend—to vice a mortal foe.

"Thou cruel, envious, and rapacious grave,
You've got a victim which no art could save.
I know the stroke was from the hand divine,
To whom I may complain, but not repine.
Oh may thy greatness and immortal fame,
To distant ages signalize thy name!"

Jan. 6, 1779.

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Dr. Breen, in an address delivered at a meeting of the Obstetrical Society, on the 27th of November, 1839, in which he has given an interesting account of the progress of midwifery in Dublin, justly speaks of Dr. Macbride as having "attained great eminence as a practitioner of midwifery in this city," and adds, "he had the high distinction of attending the Countess of Mornington, at the birth of the hero of Waterloo;" in support of which statement he concludes with the following narrative:

"At a contested election, when the then Arthur Wellesley was elected member for the borough of Trim, a petition was presented against the return, on the ground that the returned member was not one-and-twenty; some difficulty at the moment occurred in proving his age, and the late Dr. Evory, who possessed Dr. Macbride's fee-books, attended as a witness before a committee of the Irish House of Commons, with Dr. Macbride's entry of the birth of this distinguished individual, and, in addition to other evidence, the age was admitted legally proved by the Committee."—*Dub. Journ. of Med. Science*, vol. xvi., p. 528.

As every circumstance relative to the illustrious hero of Waterloo, will, in course of time, engage public attention, we felt anxious to confirm Dr. Breen's statement by reference to the fee-book of Dr. Macbride, now in the possession of Dr. Evory Kennedy, the inheritor of the late Dr. Evory's library.

Dr. Kennedy having kindly permitted us to examine the fee-book, which comprises an accurate account of Dr. Macbride's professional receipts, with the names of his patients, from the first of January, 1767, to the 16th of December, 1778, we were surprised and disappointed at not finding any corroboration of the statement made on the authority of Dr. Evory. The Countess of Mornington does not appear to have been at any time a patient of Dr. Macbride, while the names of many of the highest nobility frequently occur.

Colonel Gurwood, in his Despatches of the Duke of Wellington, gives the date of his birth as the 1st of May, 1769.

In 1790, The Hon. *Arthur Wesley* (as he is called in the Journals of the Irish House of Commons) was elected one of the representatives for the borough of Trim. The election commenced on Thursday, the 29th of April, and the poll continued four days, consequently the honourable member attained his majority while the election was pending. Dr. Breen's account is correct in every other particular.