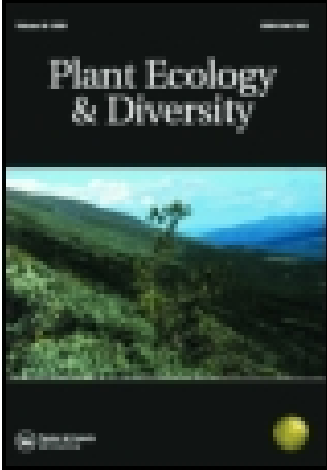


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Obituary Notice Of Dr. Thomas Alexander Goldie Balfour, M.D., F.R.C.P.E., F.R.S.E.

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OBITUARY NOTICE OF DR. THOMAS ALEXANDER GOLDIE BALFOUR, M.D., F.R.C.P.E., F.R.S.E. By ANDREW TAYLOR.

The announcement that this loved physician had suddenly succumbed on 10th March, during the phenomenally severe weather of the early days of 1895, sent a wave of sorrow through Edinburgh circles—medical and general. The members of the Botanical Society, besides his patients and members of his private circle of friends, felt how one whose cheery presence, wit, and warm sympathy did so much to enliven social intercourse was now lost to them.

St. John's Hill, Pleasance, where the subject of this notice was born in 1825, was built by Hutton, the geologist. Really situated in the Queen's Park, and till those later years having all the surroundings of a mountain home, far from the crowded city's ceaseless roar, it was in the early decades of this century the home of a family of naturalists. The fame of John Hutton Balfour, the eldest, is European. If the exigencies of a crowded professional life prevented the youngest from climbing to like heights on the rung of the scientific ladder, the few papers by Thomas A. G. Balfour in our "Transactions" show what he might have done had he followed a strictly scientific career.

Though John Hutton Balfour removed to Dundas Street in 1834, his influence was paramount at St. John's Hill. The large section of garden ground, of the half acre now so well cultivated by the venerable survivor of a happy company of eleven, the Rev. Dr. William Balfour, specially set apart for the growth of wild plants by the future Queen's botanist, still remained. The herborisings first begun by the father in the King's Park had extended, under Professor Graham, into Sutherlandshire and like far off parts of Scotland, and the help of all the family group, male or female, was called in for the nurture of such new plant finds. Here, indeed, began our Botanical Society, which was formed some two years after, and it was the better of this private garden. Standing near the spot, and pointing to the jagged outlines of Salisbury Crags, the

venerable pastor occupying Holyrood Free Manse exclaimed, "Who could not help being a naturalist in such surroundings?" So the boy Thomas Balfour caught the family enthusiasm, and became a botanist, though he did not appear as an attender of our meetings till late in life. Other surroundings of his home affected him. He became a zealous collector of insects, rare species of which used to abound in the neighbouring hill, and doubtless scrambles up its Cat's Nick, and like celebrated habitats, gave him that taste for minerals which stuck to him through life, the monument of which remains in his little work, "God's Jewels."

Dr. Thomas Balfour did not remove from the old paternal home to George Square till about five years after taking his degree of M.D., which he did in 1851, at the time twenty-eight years of age, thus more matured than brother graduates. Hutton's Chemical Laboratory, an out-lying building to the family home, had not yet been taken down, so a taste for chemistry was incited, as shown by his graduation thesis on "Alcohol as an Etiological Agent," which was commended, and a prospective career as lecturer on *Materia Medica*. As it was, he spent three years of his student course with Messrs. Duncan, Flockhart, & Co., an experience which he found invaluable whilst writing out physician prescriptions. This came also to be of service when he succeeded Professor Fraser in 1874 as Curator of the Museum of the Royal College of Physicians. Here his knowledge of plants and minerals found ample scope. Till the end he was zealous in keeping up to date this great collection which the College purchased from Dr. Martius, of Erlangen, "a unique one in this country, being an almost complete collection of the '*Medicamina Simplicia*' of the *Materia Medica* as it stood at the time of its purchase." The second brother, then the Rev. William Balfour, imbibing Dr. Chalmers', his preceptor's, enthusiasm, had devoted his life to working out Home Missions on the territorial principle, and the young doctor thus began that attendance on the forlorn inhabitants of Edinburgh's wynds and closes which was his life habit. Besides, the late Professor Pulteney Alison, his professor, became his *beau idéal* as a Christian physician. So it came about

that busy medical practice outruled scientific tendencies, which asserted themselves, however, during immense practical activity in the publication of a much esteemed little book, — “The Typical Character of Nature.”

Dr. T. A. G. Balfour joined our Society in 1868. He became President, in succession to Sir Robert Christison, in session 1877–78, and continued to occupy the chair for the next term. He afterwards served the Society for many sessions, either as Vice-President or Councillor. A list of papers, the result of much patient labour in the laboratory of the Royal Botanic Garden, chiefly experiments on *Dionæa Muscipula* (Venus' Fly-Trap), is given at the close of this notice. They were highly valued by experts. But, beyond such contributions of work, his ready wit, urbanity, patience, and warmth of heart contributed much to the success of the meetings over which he presided.

Dr. Balfour contributed also many valuable professional papers both to the Medico-Chirurgical and Obstetrical Societies. He became a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1867, rising to the Fellowship in 1869. He joined the ranks of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1870.

When death suddenly came to the busy worker—he had just entered his seventieth year—professors, reverend doctors of divinity, and over a hundred working men and women joined the funeral procession.

LIST OF DR. T. A. G. BALFOUR'S BOTANICAL PAPERS.

1. Observations on Mr. Darwin's Views of Climbing Plants.—Trans. Bot. Soc. Edin., vol. xii. p. 451–477.
2. Experiments on *Dionæa Muscipula* (Venus' Fly-trap).—Ibid. vol. xii. p. 334–369.
3. Presidential Remarks.—Ibid. vol. xiii. p. 165–171.
4. Note on the Effects of Soot on some Coniferæ.—Ibid. p. 343–351.
5. Presidential Address: On *Dionæa Muscipula* (Venus' Fly-trap).—Ibid. 353–389.
6. Presidential Address.—Ibid. vol. xiv. p. 49.
7. Obituary Notice of Dr. James Gilchrist, Dumfries.—Ibid. vol. xvii. p. 2.