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Rev. John Gibson Macvicar,
LL.D., D.D., Minister of
Moffat

Rev. John M'Murtrie M.A.

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Dr Scott was highly esteemed, and he was, from his geniality of temper and disposition, a general favourite with all classes in the public service and with his numerous friends.

On the death of a maternal uncle he inherited the estate of Ashtrees in Roxburghshire, and took the additional name of Scott. He was a Commissioner of Supply and Justice of Peace for the county; and, being fond of archæological pursuits, was associated with Sir Walter Elliot of Wolfelee in the investigation of old county records. Dr Scott had from his youth an ardent attachment to natural history, especially to botany and ornithology. In 1858 he became a member of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, and to its *Transactions* he occasionally contributed. In 1873 he was appointed its President, and delivered the Annual Address at Kelso in the following year.

Dr Robson Scott was elected a member of the Scottish Meteorological Society in 1865, and was for many years an active member of the Council of that Society. He joined our Society in 1875, and was a member of Council at his decease.

He died, after a very brief illness, at his brother's house, Newton, near Jedburgh, on the 22nd of September 1883, and was buried in Hownam Churchyard, where many of his forefathers sleep. Dr Scott is survived by his widow, two married daughters, and one son, an officer in the 3rd Hussars.

Rev. John Gibson Macvicar, LL.D., D.D., Minister of Moffat. By the Rev. JOHN M'MURTRIE, M.A.

(Read 12th June 1884.)

It is fitting that notice should be here taken of a member of this Society, who, throughout a long and useful life, devoted much of his attention to scientific pursuits—the late Dr MACVICAR, who died in the Manse of Moffat on 12th February 1884. He was the second son of Dr Patrick Macvicar, minister of St Paul's, Dundee, and was born in March 1801, so that at the time of his death he had nearly completed his 83rd year. He was educated at the grammar school, Dundee, and it is on record that from

the age of twelve he showed the bent of his mind, for "as soon as school hours were over he was always in some workshop or other, constructing some kind of philosophical instrument."* He took his Arts course at St Andrews University, and graduated M.A. The remainder of his course was taken in the University of Edinburgh, where he not only attended the usual classes in the Divinity Hall, but studied with enthusiasm in the classes of chemistry, anatomy, physiology (taught extra-murally by Dr Knox), and especially natural history under Professor Jameson. His first essay on a botanical subject appears to have been a paper "On the Germination of Ferns," which appeared in MS. in vol. x. of the *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh*, now in the library of the Royal Physical Society. To this time belongs an anecdote which we have from his son-in-law, the Rev. Mr Weir of Dumfries. His old friend, Dr W. A. F. Browne, tells how Dr Macvicar, then a young man, announced that he would lecture on botany in Edinburgh. There was, however, no demand for what he had to supply, and at the opening lecture there were present only two students—Dr Browne and the late Professor Balfour. But thus began a friendship of the three men which was always afterwards kept up.

Another who appreciated his qualifications to lecture on science was Dr Chalmers, then Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of St Andrews. He proposed and carried a motion for instituting in that university a lectureship on Natural History, and Mr Macvicar, in 1827, was the first appointed to the lectureship. He lectured there for several years on a wide range of scientific subjects, and at the same time aided in founding the Museum of Natural History in St Andrews. In intervals of leisure he visited Northern Germany and Denmark, forming at Copenhagen an intimacy with Hans C. Oersted, the Danish physicist. At a later period he was much in France and Italy, studying art as well as science, and he also made a tour in Canada and the United States.

* Quoted in *Moffat Times* of 16th February 1884, from a manuscript sketch of his life, written (we believe) by Mr Samuel Neil, ex-rector of Moffat Academy.

In his native town of Dundee he promoted the founding of the Watt Institution, where he was a most popular lecturer. We have before us a Report of that Institution for 1838-39, containing a list of twenty-one lectures delivered by him to an average attendance of 500. They include not only (1) Vegetable Anatomy and Physiology, (2) Systematic Botany, (3) Geographical Distribution and Economic Uses of Plants, but also Mollusca, the Solar System, the Steam-Engine, the Chemical Constitution of the Atmosphere, and many other subjects.

In regard to Dr Macvicar's original investigations in chemistry, to which he himself attached considerable importance, the present compiler does not feel competent to form an opinion. But Dr Macvicar's old friend Sir Lyon Playfair has written to his widow a letter which we are permitted to quote. In this letter, after speaking of the Doctor as one of those who first turned his thoughts to science, Sir Lyon remarks that his views on Chemistry, published many years ago, are now much more in accordance with what is commonly received than they were when first promulgated.

It may here be added, that so early as 1828 he edited the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, and in 1866 he received a silver medal from the Scottish Arboricultural Society for an essay on the "Philosophy of Arboriculture."

A complete list of Dr Macvicar's publications, and contributions to Journals and the Transactions of Societies, would be long, and would display unusual variety as to subjects. The *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, for which he often wrote, has in its number for March 1884 the titles of his principal papers. Among his larger publications are *An Inquiry into Human Nature*, and a treatise on the *Philosophy of the Beautiful*, which was first delivered as a lecture to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution.

We have before us a paper on Vegetable Morphology, which was communicated to our Society on 12th July 1860, and appears in the *Transactions* for that year. In this paper he argues that the hollow sphere is the form towards which vegetable growth tends. In a large work published by him in parts (Part IV., was published in 1874) and which under the title *A Sketch of a Philo-*

sophy, contained his mature speculations, we find this article reprinted and commented on.

This is not the place to deal with Dr Macvicar's career as a clergyman, further than to say that probably his scientific tastes and attainments delayed for a time his professional advancement. And this not merely because he found congenial work elsewhere—for he was a gifted and earnest preacher; but also because during his early manhood the ecclesiastical atmosphere of Scotland was hot and stormy. A deeply religious man, his spirit was calmed and strengthened by scientific pursuits; and he felt little disposed to engage on either side in that partisan warfare which was to a great extent the road to ecclesiastical or even (in the case of a clergyman) academical preferment. His best contribution to the religious necessities of those times was a treatise intended to be an Eirenikon, and entitled *The Catholic Spirit of True Religion*. He gave it to the Church, as he was about to sail to Ceylon in 1839, as the ordained minister of the Scotch Church there. Returning in 1852, he was inducted to Moffat in 1853, where, amidst universal esteem and regret he has now ended a long and beautiful life of faithful service.

He would doubtless have enhanced his scientific reputation, and might have done more for some particular department of knowledge, in these days of subdivision of labour, if he had concentrated his energies on a narrower field. But in that case he would, not unlikely, have been a less complete man, and his life might have been less full and happy. As it is, his aid to scientific progress was of the nature of a general impulse. His theories, always ingenious and beautiful, often show a remarkable power of intuition. Some of his speculations have been superseded; but in others he was in advance of his time, anticipating subsequent discovery and the recent course of scientific thought.

He married in 1840 Miss Jessie R. Macdonald of Kinloch Moidart, a grand-daughter of Dr Robertson the historian, and is survived by her and by eight of their children. Originally a member of the Wernerian Natural History, he became one of our members at its amalgamation with the Botanical Society.