

OBITUARY.

GEORGE SKENE KEITH, M.D., F.R.C.P., LL.D.

GEORGE KEITH died at his residence, Moidart Cottage, Currie, on 12th January 1910, in his 91st year.

To most of the younger and middle-aged of the profession his name will not convey much, and indeed many thought that he had already joined the majority. All his old friends are dead. Even Sir Henry Littlejohn felt out of touch with him owing to the lapse of years. But in many aspects he was a great man, and a notice of him may recall some of the salient points in a great character. He was born in 1819 at the manse of St. Cyrus, and had a good heredity. His father was also a remarkable man—stern, self-reliant, the author of a strong work, now mostly forgotten, upon the evidences of Christianity.

George, after an education at the village school, went on to Aberdeen and eventually to Edinburgh, where he was Gold Medallist in Professor Simpson's class, and was one of that famous party that inhaled chloroform round Professor Simpson's table and showed the world its capabilities. Of that famous party he was the last medical survivor. One lady still lives. Simpson formed a high opinion of his talents, and for a time they worked together. Keith then settled in Edinburgh, and soon built up a very large practice. His patients swore by him, and those who were not his patients swore at him and abused him—the whole principles of his practice differed so much from the routine work of his age. Most doctors gave plenty of medicine and also plenty of sustaining food. Warm rooms and no open windows in sickness were really the fashion. Keith gave very little medicine and less food, plenty of fresh air and plenty of hot water. The overloaded stomach soon benefited by the change, and Keith's patients knew their mercies. Of course he may have occasionally overdone it and ridden his hobby too far, but the main points were all of progress. A kind-hearted, clever doctor called Keith in consultation; he was giving his patient very little food—only beef-tea and soup. However, Keith would have none of them. Fulth—fulth in his broadest Doric—and hot water it had to be. His brother Thomas, the ovariotomist, most beautiful of delicate men, was his coadjutor, and between them their practice was enormous. Thomas, after a lifetime of suffering, excitement, speculation, and worry, died a comparatively young man. George gradually got out of practice by his own desire, migrated to Moidart, saw his old patients when required, and carried on many cases by correspondence. His active brain began to write books, and his *Plea for a Simpler Life*

and *Fads of an Old Physician* have been most successful and useful to many.

His life was a many-sided one, full of variety and exercise of all kinds. In his early middle age he shared a yacht with one of his patients. The writer of this notice had many a nice cruise as a boy in the *Chameleon* in the Firth of Forth. He was a great traveller in the Holy Land, many parts of Europe, and when quite an old man he travelled to Burmah. A long, gaunt, half-starved looking man, he did not magnify by his own looks the perils of his practice. He had awful headaches at times, but still he lived in much comfort and good health till he was 91.

A powerful, just, and determined man, absolutely true and honest, he lived the life of an ancient philosopher in degenerate days.

J. B.
