

*Name*      *Designation*      *February*      *Place of Interment*  
*The Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson*  
*Minister of St. Georges Church*  
*died 9 February 1831 Aged 57 years*      *9 15 In his own Tomb City Grounds*

# **NEMOIR OF THE LATE REV. DR. ANDREW THOMSON.**

*Virtutem incoluntem odium, Solum ex oculis quoniam invidi.*—HON.

Dr. Thomson was born in the year 1778, at Banquhar, in Dumfriesshire. His father, Dr. John Thomson, who was minister of that place, but afterwards translated successively to Markinch and to Edinburgh, where he died in 1823, was a man of great worth and respectability. The subject of this short sketch, therefore, enjoyed from his earliest years, the advantages of education which the example and instruction of such a parent could impart. He was early destined for the church; and he accordingly followed the course of study which that sacred profession requires. At school, and at College, he was more remarkable for acuteness and versatility of mind and boldness of thought than for very profound or exact scholarship: in which respect, however, his attainments were by no means deficient. He was, we understand, a member of some of those Debating Societies formed by the students of our University; and he there first displayed the discrimination, eloquence, and love of truth, which were afterwards exhibited on a more lofty arena. While at College, he numbered among his intimate associates some who in after life rose to the highest eminence in the various departments either of public life or of literature: of whom at present we shall only mention Lord Brougham, a man of congenial character, and who, since Dr. Thomson's death, has testified how highly he valued his early friend. Having finished the requisite course of study, he was admitted a licentiate of the church in 1801; and on the 11th of March of the following year, was ordained minister of the parish of Sprouton, in the presbytery of Kelso. He entered on his sacred duties with a deep sense of their paramount importance, and of the great responsibility that attached to him as a minister of the gospel; and his pulpit appearances, as well as his private ministrations among his people, afforded the highest promise of his future eminence. It was here that he first came before the public as an author, his "Sacramental Catechism" having appeared in 1807. This judicious little work has experienced an extent of circulation quite unprecedented, no less than 100,000 copies having been sold; and the demand for it is daily increasing.

We may here mention, that on the 26th of April 1803, six weeks after his induction to Sprouton, Dr. Thomson entered into the marriage state; an event which, during life, was to him the source of the greatest happiness. Mrs. Thomson survives him, with seven children, of whom two are sons who give promise to do honour to their father's name.

Dr. Thomson's character had now become too well known to allow him to remain in the remote parish of Sprouton. He was translated to the East Church of Perth in April 1808; and it may here be mentioned as an interesting fact, that, three weeks subsequently, his elder brother, who had been settled in the parish of Dalziel, was inducted to the Middle Church of the same town. Perth opened up a wider field to the subject of this memoir for the more effectual exercise of his zeal and talents; but as his character developed itself, it became evident he would not be permitted to remain long even in the respectable situation to which he was now raised. Accordingly, a vacancy having occurred in one of the churches of Edinburgh, he was translated to that city as minister of the New Grey Friars, on the 16th of May 1810; a preferment which he owed chiefly to the honourable exertions of a respectable gentleman, then a member of the Town Council, who, we believe, had been his schoolfellow. This was a new era in his life; and assuredly he did not fail to avail himself of all the advantages which it secured to him. No longer confining himself to his pulpit labours, or to his week-day professional duties, he commenced the publication of the "Christian Instructor," a few months after he became a city minister. This work was originated and founded solely by himself; and he continued the editor of it till his death, a period of more than twenty years. We know of no similar periodical that was ever conducted with equal ability, or which presents in the same space a greater portion of learned, ingenious, and varied discussion than this miscellany embraces. All the important doctrines of our Church and of Christianity, as also the great questions of religious toleration, liberty of conscience, and the consequent emancipation of our Catholic brethren, and the abolition of slavery, were there advocated and illustrated with peculiar zeal and talent. And while the editor laboured to advance and establish truth, he exerted himself no less strenuously in resisting and exposing error. His love of the one, and his hatred of the other, sometimes, we confess, imparted to his pen a violence foreign to the kindness of his nature. St. Paul's advice to Titus, "rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith," he sometimes acted upon to an extent which he afterwards regretted. But let it not be forgotten (as stated by Dr. Mc) the admirable sketch of his character which appears in a recent number of this paper, and which is now reprinted at the end of this memoir; that the most obnoxious article of this kind was neither written nor seen by him till it was printed and published; and as from circumstances which have not yet been fully stated, he preferred bearing the obloquy of it rather than betray the name of the real author, this fact, in justice to his memory, cannot be stated too strongly, or brought forward too prominently.

A higher step in his profession yet awaited him. When St. George's church was erected in 1814, which, situated in the most fashionable district of the New Town, it was supposed would, and really did become, the most influential charge in the city, Dr. Thomson was removed to it on the 16th of June of that year. This appointment was peculiarly fortunate. It forms, indeed, a remarkable epoch in the religious history of this city. Not merely was his church filled, but it was filled with people of the highest rank and talents; and religion, owing to his ministrations, became a matter of paramount importance in the eyes of many who had not before thought seriously on the subject.

He had, meanwhile, become not less eminent as a member of our ecclesiastical judicatories than as an able and eloquent preacher of the gospel. He had early turned his attention to the study of ecclesiastical law. In this respect he derived great advantages from having enjoyed the intimate friendship and benefit of the mature experience of the late Sir Henry Moncreiff; and when that distinguished jurist became unable from old age to attend to his business, his place was honourably supplied by

philanthropists of his age. The various charitable and religious institutions and associations in this city have, by his death, been deprived of their most enlightened and zealous patron; and, when occasion required, their most eloquent advocate. In the cause of education he took the deepest interest. An account of his early connection with the Bessie School of Edinburgh, and of the time and labour he devoted to promote its success, has already been laid before the public. The countenance he gave to the various seminaries of learning in the city, and his activity and usefulness as a member of the Assembly's Committee for planting schools in the Highlands and Islands, are also well known. But there are other facts on this head of a most important nature, which require to be minutely stated. In his own parish, for many years, he devoted a portion of the interval between sermons every Sabbath to the religious improvement of the youth belonging to his congregation; and he so accommodated his instructions to their youthful minds; and his manner was so bland and affectionate, that he gained their hearts while he improved their understandings; and not a few of them will retain a lasting impression of the unparalleled kindness of the teacher as well as of the salutary importance of the lessons he taught. In the welfare of the children of the lower orders of his congregation, he felt it possible a deeper interest. In conjunction with his respectable Session, he originated a subscription for the erection and establishment of a school for the parish of St. George's, designed for the children of the middle and lower classes of the inhabitants; and the success that attended his exertions in this respect was worthy of the noble cause to which they were subservient. This seminary has been in active operation for several years; the most enlightened mode of education has been introduced, and we have no hesitation in characterizing it as one of the most efficient schools known to us. During the first two years of its institution, Dr. Thomson himself attended two or three hours daily, and submitted to discharge the ordinary duties of a teacher.

His philanthropic exertions in the cause of education were not limited either to his own parish or to one class of children. To him the Circus School owes its origin; a seminary designed for the children of the higher classes, and which can boast, we understand, of an attendance, sometimes, of above 300 scholars. The plan pursued here is similar to that adopted in St. George's School, and has been equally successful; and it may be stated, that there are probably no institutions in this city likely to exercise so great an effect on the moral and religious character of the rising generation as the two seminaries in question.

Nor did Dr. Thomson's labours in this department terminate here. Though a man of the greatest activity and originality of mind, and of the most multifarious engagements, he submitted to the drudgery of composing a set of school books, from the most elementary up to the highest used in ordinary schools; works so judicious, and blending religious instruction so happily with the more common routine of a school, that they have been generally introduced throughout Scotland. These facts are of extreme interest; and we know of no individual to whom any statement so honourable can be applied.

But Dr. Thomson's philanthropy was of a yet more extensive and lofty kind than has yet been mentioned. We need scarcely say that we refer, in particular, to the noble efforts he made in favour of pure Bible circulation; in opposition to the practice of the British and Foreign Bible Society; and of the immediate abolition of slavery in our West India colonies. With regard to the first of these questions, his exertions were more vigilant and unremitting than perhaps have ever been exemplified under any circumstances. In this cause he was ready to sacrifice private friendships, and every personal consideration, to truth, and to the purity of the divine record. And such sacrifices he actually did make. His health, too, first began to fail him while engaged in this contest. He toiled day and night; he maintained epistolary communications on the subject with persons in every quarter of the kingdom; he travelled into the most remote corners of Scotland; he made several expeditions into England in this sacred warfare. Much and zealously he wrote in the cause. Indeed, some of his publications on this subject, such as the "Second and Third Statements of the Committee of the Edinburgh Bible Society," and his "Letter to Lord Bexley," have been characterized as among the ablest controversial works that have appeared for upwards of a century. Nor were his labours and his sacrifices made in vain. His success was not great in the sister kingdom; but, with most trifling exception, he turned all Scotland; and, along with worthy coadjutors, he established the Edinburgh Bible Society as a parent and independent association, which appeals solely "to the Law and the Testimony," and the success of which in circulating the pure Word of God at home and abroad has exceeded the most sanguine expectations of all. The splendid orations which he delivered at the successive annual meetings of this Society are known to every reader.

Dr. Thomson had, from its commencement, been a member of the Anti-Slavery Society of Edinburgh; and his views were in favour, not of gradual, but immediate emancipation. These views were ably expounded by him in a Note appended to a volume of Sermons, published in 1829; but at the last public meeting of the Society, he rose up and advocated them, and endeavoured to expose the absurdity of gradual abolition. We need not here reiterate arguments so powerfully stated, and which were so convincing that he turned a whole assembly, amounting to nearly two thousand persons, in favour of his opinions, though, before he spoke, they had rapturously applauded the sentiments so eloquently delivered on the other side. Nay, in a few days, the Society itself became a convert to his principles; and called another public meeting, at which a petition to both Houses of Parliament in favour of immediate emancipation was carried, by acclamation. The speech he made on this celebrated occasion, which was his last public exhibition, was perhaps the most eloquent and conclusive he ever delivered, and, as it is published, will long be referred to as perhaps the most powerful specimen of oratory that this northern capital has witnessed.

From what has been said, it is evident that his engagements were peculiarly numerous and important. He was continually active, but more active still from a sense of

And all his labours, he found time to write for the public. He published "Lectures Expository and Practical" in 1810; "Sermons on Infidelity" in 1821; "Lectures on Portions of the Psalms," in 1826; "Sermons," in 1829; and in 1830, "The Doctrine of Universal Pardon, considered and related to a series of Sermons, with Notes critical and expository." These sermons, which compose this volume, were first preached in St. George's, in refutation of the Row Heresy, and were given to the public only in consequence of the most urgent solicitations. He was, besides, the author of several occasional sermons; and various articles connected with the Apocrypha controversy, which appeared first in the Christian Instructor, were published by him in a separate form. He was also an extensive contributor to the Edinburgh Encyclopedia; the articles which he wrote for that work, which are of a miscellaneous description, are distinguished by his usual ability and vigour of language. It is to be hoped that more of his pulpit discourses may be given to the world, as we regard them, in fullness of matter, force of diction, and practical usefulness, among the best compositions of their kind of which our language can boast. It is said, that at the time of his death he was engaged in composing a Life of his celebrated friend, the late Sir Henry Moncreiff.

We had much more to say, had our limits allowed. We meant to refer to Dr. Thomson's persevering efforts, in conjunction with Dr. Inglis and other members of the Assembly's Committee for the propagation of the Gospel in India, in behalf of this important object. At the last meeting of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, Dr. Inglis, in terms that did him honour, spoke of the valuable services rendered by his deceased friend to that cause. We purposed also to speak of "The Society for Improving the System of Church Patronage in Scotland," of which he was the founder. Nor did we intend to omit some notices respecting his exquisite taste for music, and the great interest he took to improve the Psalmody in his own church, and sacred music in general. A fortnight only before his death, he addressed an admirable letter in a printed form to the members of his congregation on the subject, with the view of effecting still further ameliorations in this department of public worship. He himself, it may also be mentioned, composed some tunes of sacred music of great merit, which may be found in a volume of church music, compiled and published under the united superintendence of himself and his late preceptor, Mr. R. A. Smith. But on these matters, and others, we must not at present enlarge.

In conclusion, we cannot refrain from stating, that we never knew an individual of greater energy and worth of character, of more enlightened and active philanthropy, of greater integrity, and who deprecated more severely the want of this virtue in others, more useful in public life, or more amiable in his own family, and in private society, more attached to sound principle, and more ready to maintain it at all hazards; or to whom, since the days of our great Reformer, the eulogium is so applicable, that in discharging his duty, "he never feared the face of man."

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During the excitement caused by the sudden death of a public man, cut down in the prime of life, and in the middle of a career of extensive usefulness, it is easy to pronounce a panegyric; but difficult to delineate a character which shall be free from the exaggeration of existing feeling, and recommend itself to the unbiased judgment of cool reflection. Rarely has such a deep sensation been produced as by the recent removal of Dr. Thomson; but in few instances, we are persuaded, has there been less reason, on the ground of temporary exaltation, for making abatements from the regret and lamentation so loudly and unequivocally expressed. He was so well known, and his character and talents were so strongly marked by peculiarities of that description which all classes of men are apt to appreciate, that the circumstances of his death did not create the interest, but only gave expression to that which already existed in the public mind.

Those who saw Dr. Thomson once knew him; intimacy might give them a deeper insight into his character, but furnished no grounds for altering the opinion which they had at first been led to form. Simplicity, which is an essential element in all minds of superior mould, marked his appearance, his reasoning, his eloquence, and his whole conduct. All that he said or did was direct, straightforward, and unaffected; there was no labouring for effect, no paltering in a double sense. His talents were such as would have raised him to eminence in any profession or public walk of life which he might have chosen—a vigorous understanding, an active and ardent mind, with power of close and persevering application. He made himself master in a short time of any subject to which he found it necessary to direct his attention—had all his knowledge at the most perfect command—expressed himself with the utmost perspicuity, ease, and energy—and, when roused by the greatness of his subject, or by the nature of the opposition which he encountered, his bold and masterly eloquence produced an effect, especially in a popular assembly, far beyond that which depends on the sallies of imagination, or the dazzling brilliancy of fancy-work. Nor was he less distinguished for his moral qualities, among which alone conspicuously an honest, firm, unflinching, fearless independence of mind, which prompted him uniformly to adopt and pursue that course which his conscience told him was right, indifferent to personal consequences, and regardless of the frowns and threats of the powerful.

Besides the instructions of his worthy father, it was Dr. Thomson's felicity to enjoy the intimate friendship of the venerable Sir Henry Moncreiff, who early discovered his rising talents, and freely imparted to him the stores of his own vigorous and matured mind, and of the experience which he had acquired during the long period in which he was at the head of one of the parties in the national church. Though Dr. Thomson was known as a popular and able preacher from the time he first entered on the ministry, the powers of his mind were not fully called forth and developed until his appointment to St. George's. He entered that charge with a deep sense of the importance of the station as one of the largest parishes of the city, containing a population of the most highly educated class of society; and not without the knowledge that there was in the minds of a part of those among whom he was called to labour, a prepossession against the peculiar doctrines which had always held a prominent place in his public ministrations. But he had not long occupied that pulpit, when, in spite of the delicate situation in which he was placed by more than one public event, which forced him to give a practical testimony in favour of the purity of the Presbyterian worship, and the independence of the Church of Scotland, dis-pleasing to many in high places, he disappointed those who had foreboded his ill success, and verified the expectations of such of his friends as had the greatest confidence in his talents. By the ability and energy of his

and cherished a respect for all faithful ministers, which was founded not only on the principles of toleration and good-will, but on the conviction that their labours were useful in supplying the lack of service on the part of his own church, and in counteracting those abuses in her administration, which he never scrupled on any proper occasion to confess and deplore.

It is well known that Dr. Thomson belonged to that party in the Church of Scotland which has defended the rights of the people in opposition to the rigorous enforcement of the law of patronage; and in advocating this cause in the Church Courts he has for many years displayed his unrivalled talents as a public speaker, sustained by an intrepidity unwarmed by power, and a fortitude which was proof against overwhelming majorities. Of late years he has devoted a great portion of his labours to the defence of the pure circulation of the Scriptures, and to the emancipation of the degraded negroes in the West Indies; and in both causes he has displayed his characteristic ability, zeal for truth, and uncompromising and indignant reprobation of every species of dishonesty, injustice, and oppression. His exertions in behalf of the doctrines and standards of the Church against some recent heresies and delusions, afford an additional proof, not only of his unwearied zeal in behalf of that sacred cause to which he devoted all his energies, but of his readiness, at all times, to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints."

Great as Dr. Thomson's popularity was (and few men in his sphere of life ever rose so high in popular favour), he did not incur the woe denounced against those "of whom all men speak well." He had his detractors and enemies, who waited for his halting, and were prepared to magnify and blazon his faults. Of him it may be said, as of another Christian patriot, no man ever loved or hated him moderately. This was the inevitable consequence of his great talents, and the rough content in which he was involved. His generous spirit raised him above envy and every jealous feeling; but it made him less tolerant of those who displayed these mean vices. When convinced of the justice of a cause, and satisfied of its magnitude, he threw his whole soul into it, summoned all his powers to its defence, and assailed its adversaries, not only with strong arguments, but with sharp, pointed, and sometimes poignant sarcasm; but unless he perceived insincerity or perverseness, his own feelings were too acute and just to permit him gratuitously to wound those of others. That his zeal was always reined by prudence—that his ardour of mind never hurried him to precipitate conclusions, or led him to magnify the subject in debate—that his mind was never warped by party feeling—and that he never indulged the love of victory, or sought to humiliate a teasing or pragmatic adversary—are positions which his true friends will not maintain. But his ablest opponents will admit, that in all the great questions in which he distinguished himself, he acted conscientiously; that he was an open, manly, and honourable adversary; and that, though he was sometimes unreasonably vehement, he was never disingenuous. Dr. Thomson was constitutionally a reformer; he felt a strong sympathy with those great men who, in a former age, won renown, by assailing the hydra of error, and of civil and religious tyranny; and his character partook of theirs. In particular, he bore no inconsiderable resemblance to Luther, both in excellencies and defects; his leonine nobleness and potency, his masculine eloquence, his facetiousness and pleasantry, the fondness which he showed for the fascinating charms of music, and the irritability and vehemence which he occasionally displayed, to which some will add the necessity which this imposed on him to make retractions, which, while they threw a partial shade over his fame, taught his admirers the needful lesson, that he was a man subject to like passions and infirmities with others. But the fact is, though hitherto known to few, and the time is now come for revealing it, that some of those effusions which were most objectionable, and exposed him to the greatest obloquy, were neither composed by Dr. Thomson, nor seen by him until they were published to the world; and that in one instance, which has been the cause of the most unparagoning abuse, he paid the expenses of a prosecution, and submitted to make a public apology, for an offence of which he was innocent as the child unborn, rather than give up the name of the friend who was morally responsible for the deed, an example of generous self-devotion which has few parallels.

To his other talents Dr. Thomson added a singular capacity for business, which not only qualified him for taking an active part in the Church Courts, but rendered him highly useful to those public charities of which the clergy of Edinburgh are officially managers, and to the different voluntary societies with which he was connected. This caused unceasing demands on his time and exertions, which, joined to his other labours, were sufficient to wear out the most robust constitution; and he at last sunk under their weight.

In private life Dr. Thomson was every thing that is amiable and engaging. He was mild, and gentle, and cheerful—deeply tender and acutely sensitive in his strongest affections—most faithful and true in his attachments of friendship—kindhearted and indulgent to all with whom he had intercourse. His firm adherence to principle when he thought principle involved, whatever appearance of severity it may have presented to those who saw him only as a public character, had no taint of harshness in his private life; and unbending as he certainly was in principle, he never failed to receive with kindness what was addressed to his reason in the spirit of friendship. It may indeed be said, with truth, that great as were his public merits, and deplorable the public loss in his death, to those who had the happiness to live with him in habits of intimacy, the deepest and the bitterest feeling still is, the separation from a man who possessed so many of the finest and most amiable sensibilities of the human heart. In him the lion and the lamb may be said to have met together. But it was around his own family heart, and in the circle of his intimate acquaintances, that Dr. Thomson was peculiarly delightful. It was equally natural in him to play with a child and to enter the lists with a practised polemic. He could be gay without levity, and grave without moroseness. His frank and bland manners, the equable flow of his cheerfulness and good humour, and the information which he possessed on almost every subject, made his company to be courted by persons of all classes. He could mix with men of the world without compromising his principles, or lowering his character as a minister of the gospel; and his presence was enough to repress any thing which had the semblance of irreligion.

The loss of such a man, and at such a time, is incalculable. His example and spirit had a wholesome and refreshing, an exhilarating and elevating, influence on the society in which he moved; and even the agitation which he produced when he was in his stormy moods was salutary, like the hurricane (his own favourite image, and the last which he employed in public), purifying the moral atmosphere, and freeing it from the selfishness, and duplicity, and time-serving, with which it was overcharged.

Dr. Thomson was born in June 1778, and was ordained in the year 1802. He has left a widow and seven children, five of whom are daughters.