

Aberdeen

Aberdeen

IT is a little startling to ordinary persons, and not altogether gratifying to the Aberdonians in particular, to read of James Fourth of Scotland as writing, towards the end of the fifteenth century, to Pope Alexander Sixth of Rome, an epistle confessing that the inhabitants of Aberdeen were ignorant of letters, and almost uncivilised. He declared that there was, among them, no person fit to preach the Word of God to the people, or to administer the sacraments of the Church. And he prayed the Pontiff to recognise the benighted condition of the place, and to found a college in the North, for the benefit of those youths who were too far away from St. Andrews and from Glasgow to avail themselves of the privileges of those already existing institutions. The

result was a "Bull," obtained in 1490, and the ratification of it in the Scottish Parliament ten years later. And so the light of learning was first shed upon Aberdeen.

The college was dedicated to the Holy Mother, and was originally called the College of St. Mary of the Nativity. But, as its scope was broadened, and, as the arts and sciences began to run side by side with divinity, it became known as "King's College"; no doubt in honour of that same James Fourth of Scotland, who had done so much to foster it.

Ignorance of letters, in their simplest form, it may be said in defence of Aberdeen, was very general in those days, as the historians tell us; and it is now impossible to prove that a single Scottish baron a century before the establishment of King's College could write his own name.

King's was particularly fortunate from the beginning. Bishop Elphinstone, James's guide, philosopher, and friend in that part of the Kingdom, and the instigator of the



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institution, richly endowed it; and, at his death, he left for its continuance, what was then a large sum of money. Its earliest professors were men faithful, sincere, and eminently fitted for their work; and it was fairly well housed. Its Chapel, still standing at the beginning of this twentieth century, carefully restored and famous for its carvings of wood, is all that is left, now, of the original structure, except the crown-capped tower, picturesque, and beloved of all Aberdonians.

In the Chapel, during term-time, in these days, but on Sunday mornings only, are services held; not compulsory, although largely attended by the students, male and female, generally in cap and gown. The uniform, by the way, is not compulsory either.

No little solemn, old-fashioned ceremony is observed on these occasions. Behind an officer, bearing the mace, marches the Principal, robed. He is followed by the professors, also robed, walking according to

seniority of appointment. The Head of the College occupies the ancient throne of the pre-Reformation bishops; and the professors sit in stalls, to the right and to the left of him, within what was, originally, the high altar.

The students have seats reserved in the body of the building; the young women being separated from the young men by the breadth of the aisle. At the west end of the edifice are beautifully carved stalls, in which sit, on one side, those relatives and friends of the Faculty who belong to the gentler sex. On the other side is accommodation for any male person who may enjoy the privilege of that extremity of the sanctuary. They are as firmly separated as if it were a Jewish synagogue or a Quaker meeting-house. The aged pulpit, brought from the Cathedral of Aberdeen, bears the arms of a prelate of the middle of the sixteenth century.

Bishop Elphinstone, the founder, sleeps under a slab of black marble, in front of the altar; and near by is a slab of blue-stone

commemorating Hector Boece, the historian and the earliest Principal of King's. Why these monuments are not of Aberdeen granite is not explained, nor is it known, now, what became of the metal effigies which once ornamented the tombs of these ancient, original worthies. These brasses, certainly merited a better fate than to have stopped a modern hole, or to have kept the wind away from some later-day vandal.

The long-abolished custom of college residence was tried, again, at King's, about 1750, on the ground that the students, scattered in lodgings about the town, were badly looked after in the matter of physical care and attention. There were two scales of living, one cheaper, and, naturally, poorer, than the other. There were public prayers every morning at eight; and the gates were shut every evening at nine. All this was looked upon, however, as bordering too much upon the rejected and abhorred convent and monastic system, and it was soon given up.

Mr. John Malcolm Bulloch, in his *History of the University*, says that this residential part of King's College, long since vanished, seems to have been upon the site of the present Greek and Latin class-rooms. It consisted of about seventeen chambers, named after the heavenly bodies, as Jupiter, Luna, Saturn, Mercury, and the like; or after the signs of the Zodiac, as Taurus, Gemini, Leo, Virgo, and Scorpio.

The library of King's College, now properly housed, is not particularly remarkable or distinguished, except for its troubles and trials. It was originally built on the wall of the Chapel, when it consisted, chiefly, of purely ecclesiastical works. About the end of the second decade of the eighteenth century, what the borrowers and stealers had left of it was carried to the Jewel House. A few years later, the room was enlarged and repaired; about 1775, it was nearly destroyed by fire; and the books were kept in the nave of the Chapel until 1870, when the present Library building was erected.



CHAPEL, KING'S COLLEGE, ABERDEEN.

Marischal College, in the New Town of Aberdeen, was founded in 1593, by George, Fifth Earl Marischal of Scotland, hence its name. There would seem to be no particular reason for two academies so near together; but, perhaps, the New Town, then more important and more populous than the Old, was a little jealous that a poor village, consisting of a single street, should be the municipal seat of learning. But, more probably, there was a feeling that King's College leaned too much towards the old order of things religious; that particular Earl Marischal, the founder, being a zealous member of the Reformed Church. He and his heirs retained the right of appointing Principal and Faculty, until the family estates were forfeited, in 1715, when the last Earl Marischal found himself in serious difficulties with the Crown, which assumed the patronage.

The earliest home of Marischal College was in the old monastery of the Grey Friars. When it was about a century old,

—before its second “Jubilee,” so to speak, —other and somewhat better quarters, on the same site, were built for it. But neither its first nor its second shell was considered worthy of the spirit and the soul within it, and in 1841, the central block of the still existing buildings was finished and occupied. On a carefully preserved stone from the older structure is cut, in relief, and in very ancient style of lettering, the family motto of the Keiths, Earls Marischal:—
“Thay Haif Said: Quhat Say Thay? Lat Thame Say.”

Like the famous inscription at Stratford-on-Avon, which begs good friends to spare the bones of Shakspeare, and which is believed to be of earlier date than Shakspeare's time, the Keith motto, slightly altered, is to be found elsewhere in Scotland. There still exists in the town of St. Andrews, near the Old Abbey wall, an agèd stone lintel upon which, according to tradition, the subject of a good deal of malicious gossip carved with his own hand, and in rude let-

ters, the sentences:—“They Have Said. And They Will Say. Let Them Be Saying.” His neighbours may have appreciated the force of the rebuke. But, no doubt, they went on “saying” all the same. Just as the world answered the Marischal query in Aberdeen, “What Say They?” by saying a great deal more; and saying it with unpleasant and unfavourable emphasis.

Within a comparatively few years, marked and valuable additions have been made to Marischal, chiefly through the munificent gifts of Dr. Charles Mitchell, a wealthy and very generous patron, who built, and donated, the Mitchell Hall, and Tower, which bear his name. Here is housed the Students’ Union, with its debating hall, luncheon, concert, billiard, and smoking rooms; while on the floor above is the large and imposing chamber in which take place the graduating exercises and the other serious and solemn functions of the University.

For a great many years there was a visible and active lack of harmony between the

students of King's and Marischal, which, now and then, resulted in rows between Gown and Gown, with Town as a passive, but interested, spectator. And it is hinted that the Faculty of each institution encouraged, rather than discouraged, the trouble. But, in the course of time, harmony was established, until the rivals became as one flesh, some forty years ago.

There was, on both sides, no little opposition to the combination, but in 1858, an Act was passed for the better government of the universities of Scotland, which provided that "the University of King's College of Aberdeen and Marischal College of Aberdeen were to be united and incorporated into one university, under the style and title of the University of Aberdeen." And thus, although still separated in space, they are one in title and in spirit; the arts and divinity being taught in the Old Town, while medicine, science, and law are taught in the New.

We read that during the last years of



CHOIR STALLS, KING'S COLLEGE, ABERDEEN.

Catholic rule at Aberdeen, the day's duties began at six in the morning; that every one in the College, even including the servants, was compelled to speak Latin, except in cases of necessity, which, no doubt, were frequent; and that the bursars had to wear their hoods everywhere, except in chapel and in chambers. Those bursars served at the common-table, and acted as janitors, week about. Nearly all the students slept in the College buildings then; and those who lodged elsewhere were not permitted to go out between six in the morning, and nine in the evening, unless to get their meals. It was another duty of the bursars, who wore long gowns with white belts, to see that the rich took no advantage of those who were poor in purse; to see that the poor were not plundered by the drones; "Doronery" seeming to be synonymous with wealth. The rules for the exclusion of women were very strictly enforced; and celibacy was compulsory. As late as the first quarter of the seventeenth century,

every professor was "to remain a single person, and no ways to marry a wife, so long as he remained in said office." Up to that time, the graduating students were in the habit of entertaining the Faculty at banquets, each student being assessed no small sum for that purpose. But the parents complained of the cost of these feasting; and, in 1628, the practice was abandoned, although the assessments continued. The money went no longer for "drinke," but for books to increase the library; each volume containing the donor's name, and an expression of his thankful remembrance for his education. The money was certainly spent for a better purpose; but it is not recorded that the parents were any better pleased at the additional expense.

Provision was made for two hours of play every afternoon; although "care was taken to employ a spy that none might play truant on the links"—which hints at golf at Aberdeen as early as 1641. The game figures in a statute of James

First (of Scotland) dated some two centuries earlier.

Bowles, target-practice, and football were favourite amusements. Bowles were harmless enough, as still they are; but football was considered dangerous; and we read that when one townsman complained of being sorely injured in the calf by a careless arrow, shot from the Quadrangle of Marischal, he was told that it might have been worse—the shaft might have killed his neighbour's cow, and that the matter would be looked into!

The Faculty as well as the students had their recreations and pleasantries; for it is recorded that when the regents of the New College "went across," to visit the professors at Old Aberdeen, they were regaled with "wyne, tobacco and pypes"; and that a certain Earl of Mar, on one occasion, was treated to sack and beer, between smokes.

A serious Town and Gown battle was fought, in 1770, between King's and a band of youthful mariners, from the ships in the harbour. The sailors seem to have had the

better of it; for Gown was driven ignominiously into the building; the gates of which narrowly escaped the assault of a battering-ram in enraged seafaring hands. The Principal, however, in all the dignity of his office, addressed the attacking force, and requested them to come back again the next morning to talk it all over quietly. The next morning the navigators had other things to do, and to think about, and the gates were spared. It is believed that the undergraduates began it, which is not unlikely. Blue-jackets, generally, are offensive to scarlet gowns.

The old names of the class-men at Aberdeen are still retained in part. The Freshmen are "Bejans"; the Seniors are "Magistrands," as at the beginnings of things; although the Juniors are "Tertians," now, not "Bachelors." The University, in its retention, in greater or lesser measure, of some of the academic principles on which it was founded, is unlike its sister institutions in the Kingdom of Scotland; and it holds a



LIBRARY, KING'S COLLEGE, ABERDEEN.

unique position among all the universities of Great Britain as being the first to establish a Faculty of Medicine. Medicine was a part and parcel of the original curriculum; while it was not taught in Cambridge until 1540, or in St. Andrews for nearly two centuries later.

The Aberdeen undergraduates, especially at their general assemblies, have a way of handling the obnoxious student which is peculiarly their own. They "pass him up" or they "pass him down"! If, while at the outer edge of the crowd, he should, in any way, make himself obnoxious or conspicuous, the cry is immediately raised: "Pass him up." And he is passed up, literally, generally upside-down, over the heads of his fellows, no matter how great the distance; and from hand to hand. If he should chance to give offence while in the inner circle, some leader exclaims: "Pass him down." And down he is passed in the same high-handed way. He receives little damage, except, perhaps, to his dignity

and to his feelings, unless he resists; and then the chief damage is done to his clothes.

On one occasion of some grand academic function, when two Town Counsellors, who should have marched in procession with their peers to the place of honour reserved for municipal authority, appeared a little later, and modestly took back seats, it is reported that the students demanded that they should be "passed up." And "passed up" they were, in regular form. They wore evening-dress, they were not very light of weight, even for grave and serious magistrates, and they did not altogether like it. But they submitted as gracefully as possible to the ordeal, and they reached the platform not very much the worse, although in an inverted position. The performance, naturally, gave great pleasure to the student body.

Perhaps from Aberdeen do some of the American universities inherit the pleasing, but solemn, custom, at the end of the Commencement season, of passing their own

“grave old Seniors” through the windows of railway carriages out of the college for ever, and into the traditional “wide, wide world”!

At the close of the summer session of 1901, the students who assembled in Mitchell Hall, on the morning of graduation and of the conferring of degrees, “passed” nothing but silly words, many of them in the worst of taste, and none of them witty or amusing. There were groans, and ironical cheers, and cat-calls, and scraps of song, for the utterance of which there never seemed to be any particular reason or excuse. They were not even silly enough to be funny.

The only young-woman-graduate of the occasion, modest, gentle, pretty, in her gown and hood, was “capped” with unusual honours, for, as it was announced on her appearance on the platform, she had “nearly swept the board.” She was cheered a little, but the cheers seemed to be derisive, and not altogether worthy of the subject or

creditable to the cheerers. They kissed, very audibly, the backs of their hands to her; and she was saluted familiarly and affectionately, by her first name, "Clementina," which, by the way, was not her first name as printed on the programme.

Peculiarly outrageous, and absolutely inexcusable upon any grounds of morals or of decency, was the undergraduate conduct during the opening religious services, short as they were. It was bad enough when men applauded, and even encored, the prayer, according to a long-established, and most disreputable, custom. But when they interrupted the prayer by frequent calls, to the Very Reverend John Lang, the Principal, to "Hurry up, Jock!" they were not only irreligious, but they were ungentlemanly as well, which in some eyes, is worse; and is absolutely without excuse. It is pleasant to realise that these poor students shocked their hearers, if they did not shock themselves, and each other; and that there was not one responsive smile in the hall.



LIBRARY, KING'S COLLEGE, ABERDEEN.

As a certain distinguished Scotsman, who is sometimes looked upon as a heathen who never went to college, who never sought, or received, a degree, who was only a ploughman, by birth, but who was a man, and a gentleman "for a' that"—as Burns once said: "An atheist's laugh is a poor exchange, for Deity offended." And Aberdeen, on this particular occasion, made one Scotsman's son, for the only time in his life, ashamed of Scotsmen!

George Macdonald, who was a student of King's College, sent Alec Forbes to Aberdeen from Howglen in the third decade of the nineteenth century; and he paints an excellent, and, no doubt, a correct, picture of the social life there at that period; which is too long, however, to be even condensed here. Alec studied anatomy, and he fell in love, and into bad company when his love failed him. And his guardian angel was an eccentric librarian, who is too good to be true, unfortunately, and who must be a pure creation of the novelist.

Aberdeen, like the sister institutions in Scotland, has its lately founded Union. And it has its more ancient smaller social clubs for the advancement of learning, and, in a limited way, for the exchange of thought on various subjects gay and grave. The average number of students is larger than at St. Andrews and much smaller than at Edinburgh and Glasgow. The gown is of the regulation scarlet. There are two sessions during the year; and there is a University magazine called *Alma Mater*. It first appeared in 1883; it is published weekly during the winter term; it costs twopence a number; and it is under the general management of the Students' Representative Council.

There are two literary associations, although not of the University, of which the Aberdonians are very proud. One is undisputed fact, the other is very vague, but not impossible, tradition. The fact is Lord Byron, who, as a boy, attended the Grammar School of Aberdeen; and who, with his mother, lived, among other places in Aber-

deen, at the Broadgate, No. 68, opposite Marischal.

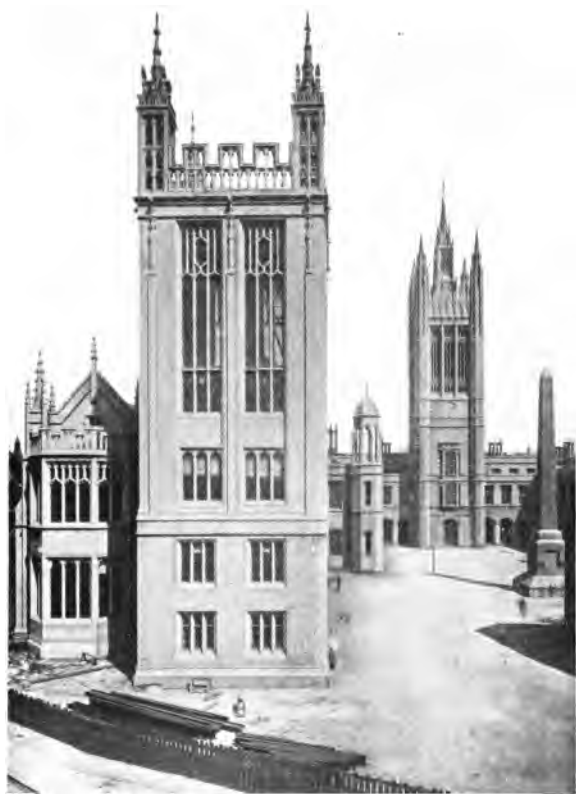
The name "George Gordon," cut by his own youthful hand, on the lid of the desk, in the youthful way, is said to have been visible long after the youth woke up, that historical morning in St. James's Street, Piccadilly, to find himself famous.

It is curious that so many of the lovers of Scottish verse, who quote "A man's a man for a' that," and "On, Stanley, on!" should forget, when they quote "Maid of Athens, ere we part," that Byron, as well as Scott, and as well as Burns, was a Scotsman. Though born in London, he was partly educated in Aberdeen; his mother was a Gordon of Gight and Monkshill, the possessor of rich estates in the Dee country; and her husband added her name to his on their marriage, the boy being the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Byron Gordon. All of this Byron remembered throughout his life; and in *Don Juan* he boasted that he was "half a Scot by birth, and bred a whole one."

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Moore said that it was always a delight to him to meet an Aberdonian in any part of the world. In his early voyage to Greece, not only the shapes of the mountains but the kilts and hardy figures of the Albanesi "carried him back to Morven," he declared. And in his last fatal expedition, the uniform he designed for himself consisted, in part, of a Gordon-tartan jacket.

Shakspeare is the tradition. In 1601, the town records show that "the King's Servandis, who playes comedies and stage-playes," arrived in Aberdeen, and received thirty-two merks, "by reason that they were recommended by His Majesty's special letter, and has played some of thair comedies here." The company had been organised under the patronage of Elizabeth; and "His Majesty" was James Sixth of Scotland, who was to become James First of England two years later. Shakspeare is fondly supposed, by the Aberdonians, to have been an active member of this company, and to have absorbed then and there some of the ideas



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and figures of *Macbeth*. Witches, at that time, were important inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and their incantations and blasted heaths were very familiar to the people of Aberdeen.

The players were well bestowed. The Magistrates entertained them at dinner, and gave the freedom of the city to Master Laurence Fletcher, the Manager. Whether or no the Town saw Shakspeare cannot be determined. But the Gown, in gown or out of it, certainly saw the "stage-playes," from the back seats and galleries; and no doubt, by stealth. Gown rarely misses a show of any kind!

Hector Boece, whose name was variously spelled, by himself, and by his contemporaries, Boece, Boyis, Boyes, Boiss, Boys, and Boice, was older than King's College. He is supposed to have received some portion of his earlier education in Aberdeen; and he is known to have studied, later, in Paris, where he was brought into intimate and familiar intercourse with Erasmus. In

the year 1500, he was induced by Bishop Elphinstone to become the first Principal of Aberdeen, moved thereto by the extraordinary richness of the salary offered, which, according to Dr. Johnson, was forty marks a year, a sum equal to two pounds three shillings and four pence, or about eleven dollars in the subsequent currency of the United States of America. This income the Scots-hating lexicographer of Fleet Street declared to be quite sufficient, not only to supply the needs, but to support the rank and dignity, of the President's high office. In the matter of this yearly stipend, however, the worthy Doctor was either deceiving, or himself deceived; for other historians show that the Principal was in receipt of fifteen times two pounds per annum, besides having a pension of fifty pounds Scots from the King. And, on one occasion he was presented, by the Town Council of Aberdeen, "with a tun of Wine, or twenty pounds Scots, to help him buy his bonnets."

Principal Boece was a valuable man to the College. He is best remembered now as the author of a quite forgotten *History of Scotland*, written in Latin. But he it was, of some training in the then little known art of healing, who persuaded Bishop Elphinstone to establish the Medical Faculty in the University; and thus he made Aberdeen the pioneer of all the teachers of medicine in the British Isles.

Alexander Ross whom Burns styled "our own brother" and "a wild warlock," gained a bursary in Marischal College, in 1714; and the degree of Master of Arts, in 1718. His *Fortunate Shepherdess* is not remembered now, even in Scotland, except in his native Aberdeenshire, where it is said to be as popular, and to be quoted as much, as is *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or *The Gentle Shepherd* himself. He wrote verses in his college days, perhaps this particular verse, but he did not appear in print until more than half a century later; and he was nearly seventy when his

Fortunate Shepherdess was introduced to the world in 1768. The young tender of sheep was called "Helenore," her humble lover was "Rosalind," not a common name, among men, in the rural districts of North Britain even then; and their story is told in the Scottish dialect of Ross's period. "Rosalind" and "Helenore," as appellations, are not quite so happy as are "Touchstone" and "Audrey"; but then Audrey thanked the gods that she was not poetical, and the creator of Helenore was "a wild warlock."

Alexander Cruden, who styled himself "Alexander the Corrector," was a son of Aberdeen, and a student of her University. When he entered Marischal cannot, on account of the loss of the register, be determined, but he remained there long enough, without making any marked impression upon anybody, to receive his degree of M.A. At about that period, he developed a melancholy madness, whether from the effects of a disappointment in love, or from



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the effects of the bite of a mad dog, the authorities differ; the symptoms having been considered, by contemporary local experts, as not at all unlike!

He conceived the idea, at an early age, that he was especially designed by Providence to set the world right; and he began his career as "Corrector," after leaving Aberdeen, by reading proofs for a London printer.

By his *Concordance of the Bible*, surely a monumental work, and a literary landmark of no mean value, he is now known, and by none other of the books he published, in the leisure hours of a bookseller's life. The fact that an ingenious Philadelphian professed to have discovered, and corrected, no fewer than ten thousand errors in the *Concordance*, which he pirated and printed in 1836, giving Mr. Cruden no credit for anything but his mistakes, does not lessen the obligations which Biblical students, the world over, owe to Cruden. Nor does it make him less of an honour to Aberdeen, his

Alma Mater, despite the fact that a dog bit him, in his youth, or that the daughter of one of the local Aberdeen clergymen did not respond to his juvenile, and undergraduate, but eccentric offers of love and devotion.

James Beattie, author of a once very popular poem called *The Minstrel*, entered Marischal in 1749, when he was fourteen; and he remained there as an undergraduate, for four years, quickly gaining a bursary, or free scholarship. He devoted his spare hours to the study of Virgil, as translated by Dryden; to Thomson's *Seasons*; and to *Paradise Lost*, not neglecting music, of which he was passionately fond. In 1760, he became the Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal, occupying the chair during the rest of his active life, lecturing, and writing poems of varying merit. The first book of *The Minstrel* appeared in 1771. During occasional visits to London, he became intimate with Gray, Garrick, and their contemporaries among the wits and the players; and he even won the good opinion of Dr.



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Johnson. "We all love Beattie," remarked the Doctor to Boswell once, "and Mrs. Thrale says if ever she has another husband, she 'll have Beattie."

This was praise indeed! But one wife was enough for Beattie. And Mrs. Thrale subsequently made other arrangements.

No son of the University of Aberdeen ever succeeded in attracting so much attention to himself as did James Macpherson, the translator, or the inventor, of "Ossian." He entered King's College in 1753, and he migrated to Marischal in 1755; but he took no degree at either. During his undergraduate days, in Aberdeen and in Edinburgh, where he is supposed to have studied divinity for a time, he is said to have produced upwards of four thousand of the lines which were attributed to the semi-historical Scottish Bard; beginning his versification at the early age of seventeen. How much Ossian had to do with these, and with the subsequent lines of the poems, was never decided in Macpherson's own time.

His supporters and his detractors were equally enthusiastic, and equally divided; and Dr. Johnson, during that never-to-be-forgotten "Journey to the Hebrides," took some pains to look into the matter for himself. He concluded, naturally, as both Ossian and Macpherson were Scotsmen, that there could be no virtue in either of them; and, anticipating the history of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he declared, in effect, that Ossian was the Mrs. Harris of Scottish literature, while Macpherson was the Sairey Gamp.

Johnson went so far as to call Macpherson names; and Macpherson threatened to convert Johnson with an oaken cudgel. It was a very pretty quarrel, so far as it went; it moved Horace Walpole to assert that Macpherson was a bully, and that Johnson was a brute; it gave Macpherson a good deal of notoriety; but it did not settle the question of the authorship of Ossian's Poems.

George Colman, the younger, after learn-



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ing nothing but mischief at Westminster School, and at Christ Church College, Oxford, according to his own confession, was sent to King's College in Aberdeen "to be tamed." He described himself there as "an extraneous animal in a crowd of scholastic yahoos"; and there he is said to have found in Roderick Macleod, Professor and, after Colman's time, Principal, some of the amusing eccentricities which he immortalised in Dr. Pangloss, the apparently impossible tutor to Dick Dawlas in *The Heir at Law*. Colman wrote one or two plays during his two years' residence in Aberdeen; but they were as negative, in their way, as was his college career.