

RECORDS OF A NAVAL SURGEON

Garden Milne (1791–1842)

by

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THROUGH THE GOOD offices of Sir Cecil Wakeley, there has recently been placed on temporary loan to the College a small collection of manuscripts and other items, now the property of Mr. J. D. Hossack but formerly

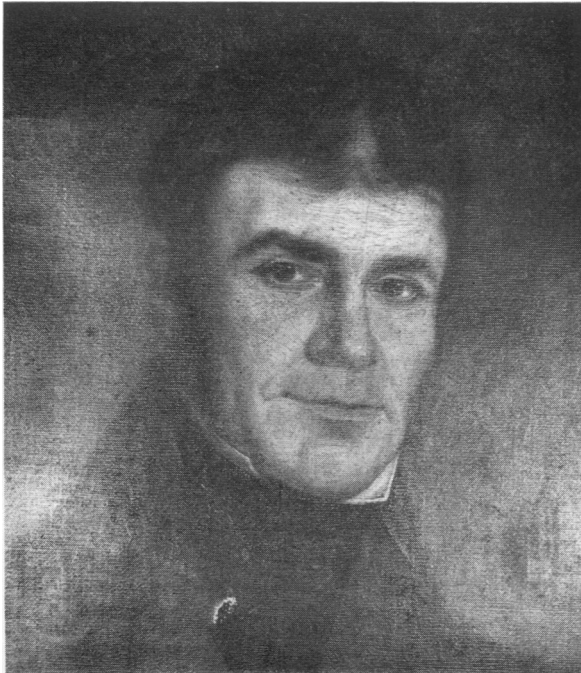


Fig. 1. Garden Milne

that of his ancestor, a naval surgeon by the name of Garden Milne. These include his portrait (Fig. 1), the Journal of Cases treated by him on board H.M.S. "Cadmus" between 20th January 1812 and 30th May 1813, and a complete set of tickets of admission to lectures at the University and classes at the Infirmary during his medical studies in Edinburgh. By means of these documents and from information gleaned from books of reference and other sources, the following story of Garden Milne and his family has been compiled.

On the north-east coast of Scotland, at the mouth of the river Spey, is the small village of Garmouth; near it is the still smaller village of Kingston,

standing upon a ridge composed of pebbles brought down by the river and thrown up again by the tide. It takes its name from the fact that the as yet uncrowned King Charles II landed here from Holland in 1650, accompanied by his surgeon, Richard Wiseman, who, 15 years later, in the year of the "Great Plague", was elected Master of the Surgeons' Company. It seems that the vessel could not get into the small harbour, but anchored in the bay, and a small boat was sent out from the shore to land the young King, then aged 20. Even so, the boat could not get near enough to allow him to step ashore dry-shod, whereupon a Garmouth fisherman, by the name of Thomas Milne, waded out, turned his back to the King, rested his hands upon his knees and bade His Majesty "Lowp on". "Nay, friend", the King is reported to have said, "I am too great a weight for so little a man as you." "I may be leetle o' stature", replied Milne, "but I'll be bound I'm baith strong and steedy and many the weightier burden I've carried in my day." The King hesitated no longer, mounted on Milne's back and was soon landed safely on the boat green. It does not seem that Milne received any reward for his service; but he and his descendants came to be known as the "King Milnes".

All the property owners of Garmouth held the right of salmon fishing in the Spey, though many carried on other occupations as well, as did the original King Milne's grandson, Robert, who was a farmer. Robert's grandson, William Milne, born in 1763, took up residence in Banff and allowed his sister Margaret and her husband Captain John Wilson to live in "Moss Toft", the family house at Garmouth. William Milne himself, who rose to the rank of Captain in the Government Transport Service, married Helen Duncan, eight years his senior, and they had three children, a son, Garden, born in 1791, and two daughters, Mary, born in the following year, and Bathia. The Garden and the Robinson families were prominent residents of the town of Banff in the 18th century and members of both intermarried with the Milnes, which is the reason for this unusual Christian name.

At the age of 15, Garden Milne went to Edinburgh to begin the study of Medicine and during his first term attended classes at the Royal Infirmary and lectures at the University in Medical Practice (James Gregory), Chemistry and Pharmacy (Thomas Charles Hope) and Anatomy and Surgery, first and second courses (John Barclay), as well as being admitted a reader to the Library. During the next year he continued his Anatomy and Surgery under the supervision of John Barclay and his clinical studies with Drs. Home and Rutherford and in addition attended at Surgeons' Hall for lectures on the Principles and Practice of Surgery by John Thomson, who also held classes at the University on Military Surgery. After about 18 months, however, that is, in April 1808, he left Edinburgh and travelled to London, where, on 6th May, he was approved at the Royal College of Surgeons as a Naval Assistant, an examination that cost him a

guinea. The reason for this abrupt change in plans was possibly the urgent need for medical men, particularly naval surgeons, during the course of the Napoleonic Wars. Milne was only 17, but he was at once appointed to the "Cadmus", recently captured from the Spanish and carrying 10 guns, as the only medical officer on board. The Captain was D. Winter, the Purser J. Willcocks; and the next five years were spent in nothing more exciting than cruising the Channel, presumably as a deterrent to the French invasion plans.

On 3rd February 1809, less than a year after his first visit, Garden Milne again attended at the Royal College of Surgeons in London and was approved as Surgeon 4th rate, and paid his three-guinea fee. He returned to the "Cadmus", which, a year later, was fitted with six more guns, had a new Captain, Thomas Fyfe, and a new Purser, William Soady.

Milne's Journal does not begin until 20th January 1812, when he had already been at sea almost four years. Weeks sometimes passed by when there was apparently little to report, especially in the summertime. The first serious casualty noted here was the quartermaster, William Fonding, who, on 27th October 1812, was caught by the left elbow between a capstan bar and the lock cover of a carronade. It was not until 20th November, after three weeks of intense pain, that the ulna was successfully reduced and the man only returned to duty on 29th December, two months after the accident.

Stern measures had, at times, to be adopted. On 11th November one of the crew, John May, was reported to be suffering from pains and to be "rather peevish". This continued for over a month till, on 17th December, he "was washed with soap and water over his whole body"; and Milne concluded that it was his peevishness that kept him in his present state and that he was evidently "imposing".

During the whole of the winter months of 1812-13 there were numerous cases of catarrhal infections on board, at one time the greater part of the ship's company was so affected, the reason being that all had been exposed to cold and wet in the raw, foggy weather of the Channel. Milne had apparently continued his studies so far as he was able and records an experiment that he carried out as a result of his reading of the beneficial effects of tincture of digitalis on those suffering from pleuritic affections. "Indeed", he writes, "it seems astonishing that the disease could have been as much subdued in so short time. The tincture of digitalis was exhibited to some, with spermaceti mixture; to others the compound powder of ipecacuanha with thick barley water. Whether the action of the digitalis is directly stimulating or not I shall not pretend to determine but I am certainly of opinion that it is beneficial in all inflammatory pulmonary affections because I have had an opportunity of trying venesection alone and along with the digitalis at the same time on four patients and

from the speedy removal of pain and subsequent convalescence in those who took the digitalis I ground my opinion. This experiment was inspired by reading Dr. Sanders's treatise."

James Sanders, M.D., published in 1808 a *Treatise on Pulmonary Consumption . . . to which is added an inquiry proving that the medicinal properties of the Digitalis or Foxglove are diametrically opposite to what they are believed to be*. This received a somewhat adverse review in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* (Vol. IV, page 364, July 1808). For an abscess on the leg, Milne adopts the treatment recommended by Dr. James Cassels of Kendal. In a short paper in Vol. VIII (January 1812, page 123) of the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, Dr. Cassels recommends sulphate of zinc for the cure of scrofulous ulcers. These references indicate that Milne was a subscriber or had access to this journal.

He had obviously been greatly perturbed by the number on the sick list during the winter months of 1812-13 and he notes on 28th February that the ship's company had received prize money and had "purchased according to my desire. All wear flannel shirts and drawers, thick worsted stockings and in bad weather thick sea boots which protects the inferior extremities from the effects of wet and cold." He also remarks that they are supplied continually with fresh beef "but seldom vegetables except what they purchase at their own expense, there being no contract for them at Dover". The "Cadmus" was at anchor in Dover Roads for some weeks during the spring of 1813 and Milne records on 6th March: "During the whole time we have been in the Downs the ship's company have found means of procuring spirits and of keeping themselves with very few exceptions in a constant state of intoxication from which no evil has hitherto originated except some battered faces etc." There was one more serious incident, however, when John May, the unfortunate who was forcibly washed to cure his peevishness, on the evening of 17th May "following some words and a few blows from the Captain attempted suicide with a blunt razor lashed into a wooden handle. He made two cuts about half an inch above the os hyoides about two inches in length which divided the skin and cellular membrane but none of the muscular fibres except perhaps a few of the platysma myoides." As May was "rather boisterous", he was put in irons, but on the following morning was quite penitent and attributed his lapse to having drunk too much.

Milne left the "Cadmus" on 31st July 1813, at which time there was no one on the sick list. On 30th November he joined H.M. Sloop "Harlequin" at Sheerness and for the next six months the ship's company consisted of marines and a few harbour duty men, all of whom, he says, "were extremely healthy". On 9th June 1814, however, the full crew was assembled—"a set of fine healthy-looking young men"—and they set sail for Portsmouth, whence they were ordered to Newfoundland. In

the middle of the Atlantic, due west of the Azores, on 21st January of the following year, they ran into the enemy and the quartermaster, Edmund Rapley, was wounded at 1 p.m. by a "cannon ball which comminuted the clavicle of the left side, carrying a great part of it away with all the muscles on the shoulder as far as the scapula towards the arm and backward and exposing a great part of the suprascapularis nearly as far as the superior posterior angle of the bone." "To my surprise", Milne continues, "on placing my finger on the radial artery I felt it pulsating yet I conceived it almost impossible that the subclavian could be uninjured. I resolved to take the humerus out of the socket and secure the subclavian but the patient could not be prevailed on to submit. The scapula is also injured and all the parts of the deltoid arising from the clavicle removed. I took away several of the loose fragments of the bone and covered the wound with pledgits and bandage and put him in a cot where he soon revived and continues very chearful." The whole of the arm and shoulder was supported with pillows and the patient was tended day and night, his back being rubbed regularly with brandy. After eight days he was able to sit up a little. On 20th January he was allowed to get out of bed and walk to a chair; and by the middle of the next month he could sit up the whole day and the report reads: "The wound contracting very fast; upon the whole I think the size of it is not more than half the original. Dressed twice a day with straps. Has six glasses of port daily and a glass of porter, besides citric acid, his diet principally vegetables." Unfortunately, this is the last entry in the book.

Presumably Milne retired from the Royal Navy on half pay at the conclusion of the war with Napoleon in 1815; certainly he resumed his medical studies in Edinburgh in October of that year. For the first 12 months he repeated the course on the Principles and Practice of Surgery with John Thomson and on Anatomy and Surgery with John Barclay. There then seems to have been a further break in his studies, lasting apparently almost a year; and it seems likely that the humdrum round of lectures and classes held little attraction for him after more than five years at sea, during which time he had been in sole charge of the health and well-being of a whole ship's company. Indeed, there is evidence that he indulged in a moderate round of varied pleasures during his absence from the University; but he returned, and worked without intermission to complete his course at the beginning of April 1818. On 27th April he wrote to his friend and distant kinsman, John Robinson, as follows: "I wrote to you about a fortnight ago announcing my success before the medical conclave and making a very unreasonable request—but one which I well know you will rejoice at having in your power to grant me. I expected ere this to have heard from you but in all probability my hurried scrawl was not very intelligible nor very pressing—however if you have not written already, if you will send me an order on some of the Edinburgh banks for fifty pounds I'll feel obliged—as I have soon to pay what will

be my chief expense, that is in 10 days. . . . I should like very much to find some consumptious person about August who would pay my expenses to the continent and I'm now looking for such a person but there is little chance of it. In the meantime I shall make myself as complete as I can in every branch of my profession and I have come to a determination to set myself down in Banff and try what is to be done there. My reason for doing so is that at present I don't choose to borrow money to commence anywhere else and indeed if I did I should have to contend. Now I think in Banff by living for a time as I have been doing then I shall be able to have some small sum disposable in a couple of years besides paying you off in proper form and according to circumstances I can proceed."

Presumably John Robinson advanced the requisite fifty pounds, for on 24th June Milne took a second examination; and on 1st August the degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred upon him by the Senatus Academicus of the University of Edinburgh for a thesis entitled "De Catarrho", two printed copies of which are to be found in the Library there. Milne then seems to have settled at once in Banff and made it his home for the rest of his life. Although quite a small place—its present population is not much more than 3,000—it is of great antiquity, with fishing as its mainstay as it has always been. Its situation at the mouth of the river Deveron was pleasant and Milne, who seems to have been the only medical man settled there and coming moreover from one of the best known families, soon built up a profitable practice. He does not seem to have had a wife, but both his sisters had married while he was at sea, Bathia to William Hossack, a merchant in Banff, and Mary to William Grant, a shipmaster. The Grants had two sons, Garden, born in 1812, and William in 1814. From a letter written to John Robinson on 4th December 1821 we learn of the untimely death of this brother-in-law, William Grant. "He was a young man of first rate talent in his profession, one who was generally esteemed and died much regretted." The disaster which caused his death occurred at sea off St. Abb's Head. The letter continues: "Macdonald says that the loss of the vessel is to be attributed entirely to spreading so much canvas, no less than the mainsail, foresail and the jibs, so that she drifted to leeward and by the time that they had her snug under the traysail, double reefed foresail and storm jib, St. Abb's Head was seen by poor Grant himself frowning in awful majesty over them." The vessel was almost in safety round the west point of Eyemouth when it was thrown upon the rocks and torn to atoms. Only one of the crew survived, Macdonald, who brought the news back to Banff. Grant's body was not found for four days and was probably buried at Eyemouth, for Milne writes that "every respectable person in the vicinity attended his funeral to pay the last sad tribute" . . . "a source of melancholy pleasure to think that among strangers his remains are so much respected."

In this same letter, Milne remarks that he "had taken the house that Geddes the Ganger lives in for my mother and Mary; they will have plenty

of accommodation with tolerable public rooms." He does not mention where he himself resided, nor yet his father who, according to this same letter, had also been in some danger, unspecified but possibly he had travelled along the coast to seek news of his son-in-law. "The state of suspense that we were in about my father was awful and indeed I had given him up but I trust that he was spared to spend his old age in ease and comfort under my auspices in Banff." Towards the end he remarks: "I had almost forgot to tell you that Jamie Imlach's bonny wife has got a fine boy—she was very ill but is doing very well." This James Imlach was the author of a *History of Banff*, published in 1868, dedicated to the "Hon. the Lord Viscount MacDuff", from which some of the information contained in this paper has been derived.

Among the documents is one giving evidence of Milne's election as Burgess, as follows:

Inveraria vigesimo octavo die Mensis Aprilis Anno Millesimo Octingentesimo et vigesimo in presentia magistratum. Quo die vir Honoratus Garden Milne Armiger Medicinæ Doctor in Banff Municeps et Frater Guildae praedicti Burgi acceptus et admissus est in deditissimi amoris et affectus ac eximiae observantiae testimonium.

Extractum per me Georgium Yeats scribam communem dicti burgi.

Some of the other papers are bills for medical attendance on his friend John Robinson and his family, one of which is accompanied by a letter dated 23rd November 1836: "It is with reluctance that I enclose an account to you but knowing your determination all I can say is that little of my services have been required during the past year and long may it be so."

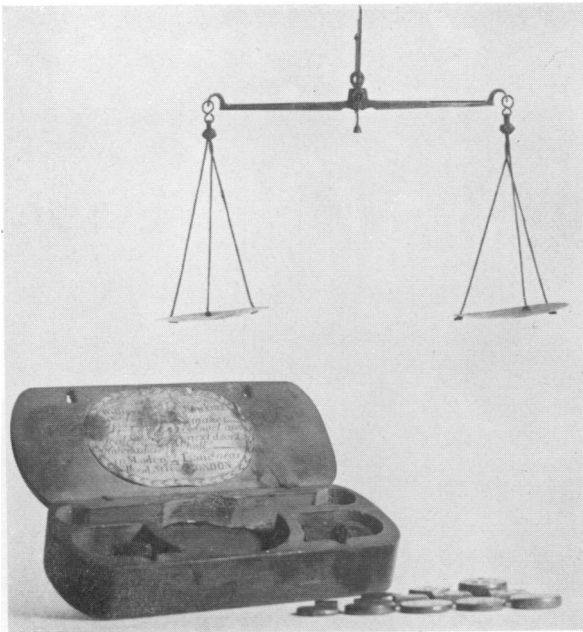
One of the more interesting printed papers is a statement of the project to improve Banff Harbour according to the plan proposed by Mr. Telford by means of which vessels of 400–500 tons could be accommodated. It is pointed out that the town possessed peculiar advantages for carrying on "the Herring and other Fishings, on the most extended scale, and for the further prosecution of the Greenland Whale Fishery; but hitherto the great benefits arising from these natural advantages had been but partially enjoyed and the trade of the town greatly retarded owing to the bad state of the Harbour". The town magistrates appealed to the Parliamentary Commissioners for Highland Roads, Bridges and Harbours and had received the promise of a grant in aid of £7,000 on condition that an equal sum was expended by the petitioners.

Garden Milne died on 5th July 1842 in the fifty-second year of his life. His mother had died in the previous year and his sister Mary in 1837; but his father, William Milne, was still alive and indeed survived his only son by five years. A copy of Garden Milne's will, which had been signed and witnessed only a fortnight previously, on 21st June, reveals that he left his property and land to his niece, Mary Grant, for her lifetime, after which it was to be divided equally between the children of his two sisters. He left to his father, "William Milne, Shipmaster in Banff, in case he shall

RECORDS OF A NAVAL SURGEON



(a)



(b)

Fig. 2

JESSIE DOBSON

survive me, the whole free yearly interest and annual rent of my whole remaining moveable means and estate, which payment I appoint to be made to him at two terms in the year, Whitsunday and Martinmas, in order that my said father may be duly alimented and his comforts attended to in his old age." The executors appointed by him were William Hossack, his brother-in-law, and Garden Grant, his nephew. The will was read after the funeral on 7th July by George Robinson Forbes, the solicitor.

Another most interesting item in this collection is the hardwood box containing the scales and weights used by Garden Milne in his dispensary (Fig. 2). These are of a pattern typical of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century and are in an excellent state of preservation with the maker's label intact. Some of the weights are of the "coin" variety, a relic of the necessity to guard against loss of money value by clipping.

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