

**THE LIFE OF SIR ROBERT  
MORAY: SOLDIER,  
STATESMAN AND MAN OF  
SCIENCE (1608-1673)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649635108

The Life of Sir Robert Moray: Soldier, Statesman and Man of Science (1608-1673) by Alexander Robertson

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Cover @ 2017

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# THE LIFE OF SIR ROBERT MORAY

SOLDIER, STATESMAN AND MAN OF SCIENCE  
(1608-1673)

BY

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LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C. 4

NEW YORK, TORONTO

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS

1922

## PREFACE

ALEXANDER ROBERTSON

ALEXANDER ROBERTSON, one of the band of young scholars who fell in the Great War, was born on the 12th of January, 1882. His father, the late Robert Robertson, a distinguished student of the University of Edinburgh, was for many years headmaster of the Edinburgh Ladies' College, one of the largest secondary schools for girls in the kingdom. Alexander, who was the elder son, was educated at George Watson's College, Edinburgh, where he gained, among other prizes, the silver medal for English. Having matriculated at the University of Edinburgh in 1901, he won distinction in the various classes he attended, and graduated M.A. in 1904. Two years later he concluded his university course by taking First Class Honours in History. After a term as *assistant anglais* at the Lycée at Caen, he returned to his old school as History Master. In the four years that followed, all his spare time was given to strenuous study, while holidays in France and Germany afforded him an opportunity of perfecting his knowledge of foreign languages. The work of a schoolmaster, however, proved irksome to one whose interests were primarily those of a scholar; and although he was gradually coming to his own as a teacher, and attracting the respect and even devotion which boys of a certain type render to a master whom they admire, he was glad when the award of a Carnegie Scholarship enabled him to proceed to the University of Oxford. This *Life of Sir Robert Moray*, for which he received the degree of B.Litt. in 1913, was the result of two years' study as a research student of New College. A third year, during which he held a Carnegie Fellowship, was devoted to a "Life of Sir William Lockhart of Lee"—another distinguished soldier and diplomatist of the seventeenth century—which has not yet been published.

His appointment as Lecturer in History in the University of Sheffield in January, 1914, realised his long cherished ambition to secure an academic post ; but when, eight months later, the war broke out, the path of honour and duty was clear to him. With his usual conscientiousness, he refused a commission on the ground that he did not know " one end of a rifle from the other," and enlisted, in September, 1914, as a private soldier in " A " (University) Company of the Sheffield University and City Battalion, afterwards the 12th (Service) Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment. He was no athlete, and to a man of his nervous and sensitive temperament, military duties were totally un congenial. But his indomitable will power enabled him to overcome his aversion, and he found compensation in the friendships he formed among his comrades of " A " company. In December, 1915, he was ordered to Egypt, where, as the historian of the battalion notes, many of the members of " A " company spent their scanty hours of leisure in learning Italian and reading Dante. When the battalion proceeded to France in the following March, Robertson was detained for five weeks in hospital at Marseilles. He rejoined his unit on the eve of the Battle of the Somme, and fell with many of his comrades in the attack on Serre on the 1st of July, 1916.

Like not a few of his gifted contemporaries in the trenches, Robertson was led to give poetic expression to his thoughts and experiences. *Comrades*, dated " Somewhere in France, May 28, 1916," ran into three editions ; and in 1918 another booklet was published under the title of *The Last Poems of Alexander Robertson*, with an introduction by the late Professor Hume Brown, Historiographer-Royal for Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

These poems reflect the thoughts of the author during his

<sup>1</sup> Nos. 36 and 45 respectively of the " Second Century " of the Vigo Cabinet Series published by Elkin Mathews, London. The second edition of *Comrades* contained a portrait of the author. Three of the poems appeared in *Soldier Poets* (Erskine Macdonald, 1916), and two in *The Muse in Arms*, edited by E. B. Osborn (Murray, 1917). See also *For Remembrance: Soldier Poets who have Fallen in the War*, by A. St. John Adcock (Hodder and Stoughton, second edition, 1920), pp. 21-3; and R. A. Sparling's *History of the 12th Service Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment* (Sheffield, 1920), pp. 58, 73 and appendix.



military life. In "Passing Oxford in a Troop-Train," for example, he meditates on the strange chance which has brought "The scholar's city into view," and

"The Cumnor Hills with Arnold's tree  
And Iffley's ancient house of prayer  
And sunlit slopes of Shotover."

In "A Wish: New College Library," a copy of which now hangs on its walls, he would fain once more

"Sit by the open window where the air  
Comes fragrant from the garden's blaze of flowers  
And unselfconscious pass the silent hours  
Of afternoon, or wander here and there  
Finding quaint wisdom in old volumes rare."

Among the many memories which crowd upon him during the voyage through the Mediterranean Sea, "The Pillars of Hercules" recall the fabled isles, where

" . . . with wistful minds they set  
Beyond the guardian terror of these seas  
The beauty of the hid Hesperides."

But whether he dwells on love of Oxford days, the literary and historical associations of the scene, or home ties and affections, there runs through all the characteristic note of the stern self-discipline with which he braced himself for the ordeal of battle:—

" . . . . . keen to maintain,  
Though not assured, hope in beneficent pain,  
Hope that the truth of the world is not what appears,  
Hope in the triumph of man for the price of his tears."

For those of us who knew him well, the poems are "the vivid presentment of the man." As Professor Hume Brown wrote: "They display all his intellectual eagerness, his consuming desire 'to know the best that has been thought and said in the world.' Everywhere the poems suggest a wide outlook on life and the world—the result of earnest reflection and of wide and various reading. They suggest, moreover, a mind

that had long grappled with life's problems and had arrived at conclusions which sufficed for the inspiration of his own . . . [They] are the testimony of one who spent his life in converse with the noblest ideals, and was prepared to make the greatest of sacrifices at the call of what he regarded as his duty." Robertson's main characteristics were, indeed, a certain high seriousness, an over-ruling sense of duty and of loyalty to truth as he saw it, and a fastidious conscientiousness. To the casual acquaintance he might seem reserved and even proud. But his intimate friends were aware that the reserve was the almost unconscious defence of one essentially shy and not infrequently diffident of his own powers. Nor were these qualities inconsistent with a happy wit and repartee—"Robertsonianisms," as his set at Oxford termed them—which made him the centre of any gathering of kindred spirits.

To one of Robertson's temperament and interests, the varied career and character of Sir Robert Moray made a strong appeal. He thoroughly enjoyed a study which involved researches in the libraries and archives of Oxford, London, and Edinburgh, Yester House in Berwickshire, and Maastricht in Holland, and which allowed him to sojourn once again in Paris. To France, like a true "Scot Abroad," he was devotedly attached; and his own brief military service in that country now adds a touch of pathos to his account of Sir Robert's career as a recruiting agent for France and as Colonel of the Scottish Guards—an aspect of Scottish history which the unpublished material in Paris enabled him to elucidate fully for the first time. The same thoroughness characterises those chapters which throw fresh light on the relations between Charles I. and the Scots, on certain problems of the Restoration, and on the administration of Scotland during the Lauderdale regime. That he saw his subject "steadily and saw it whole"—to adapt the words of his favourite poet—is proved by his excellent chapter on Sir Robert Moray and the Royal Society in which the development of science in this country is dealt with in the light of a general European movement. Nor can the discerning reader

fail to realise something of the biographer's own character from the sympathetic care and minuteness with which the moral and intellectual qualities of Sir Robert are set forth.

Only a few pages of the revision which Robertson had in hand have been traced, and the work is now published substantially as he left it. In some places the narrative has been condensed by the present writer, mainly for reasons of space, but in the abbreviated version the language of the original has been preserved. Another of his friends, Mr. F. P. Wilson, Lincoln College, Oxford, has kindly read the proofs.

In the circumstances it is now impossible to record the names of all to whom the author was indebted in the course of his researches. Mention may be made of the late Marquess of Tweeddale, who readily granted access to the Lauderdale Letters preserved at Yester House; of the late Mr. David Douglas, Edinburgh, for kind permission to utilise the transcripts of the Kincardine Papers in his possession; and of the officials of the Royal Society for similar facilities. During the progress of the work Sir Charles Firth was a continual source of help and encouragement.

Finally, a grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, which has facilitated the publication of the work in its present form, is gratefully acknowledged.

HENRY W. MEIKLE.