

**ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND
WRITINGS OF ROBERT SIMSON,
M.D.: LATE PROFESSOR OF
MATHEMATICS IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

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Account of the Life and Writings of Robert Simson, M.D.: Late Professor of Mathematics in the University of Glasgow by William Trail

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WILLIAM TRAIL

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10753 OF
ROBERT SIMSON, M. D.

LATE PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

By the Rev. WILLIAM TRAIL, LL. D. F. R. S. Edin.

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. SAVIOUR'S, CONNOR.



Robertus Simson. M.D.

GEOMETRIAM SUB TYRANNO BARBARO SÆVA SERVITUTE DIU SQUALENTEM,
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1812.

W. G. 1

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TO
THE REVEREND THE PRINCIPAL,
AND TO
THE PROFESSORS,
OF THE
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW,
THIS ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
AND WRITINGS
OF A DISTINGUISHED MEMBER
OF THEIR SOCIETY
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

Shelfon 25 May 1943

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ADVERTISEMENT.

ABOVE thirty years ago the late EARL STANHOPE honoured me with a request to draw up an account of the Life and Writings of the late Dr. SIMSON, of Glasgow, which might be published in the new edition of the *Biographia Britannica*. The slow progress of that great work left me much at liberty as to the time of preparing an article which could appear only near the end of it; and for a number of years having been occupied by engagements of a different kind, I was in some measure compelled to postpone the execution of my undertaking, much longer than I wished to have done.

As there is not at present any near prospect of the completion of the *Biographia*, I could not properly, at my time of life, defer any longer embracing the opportunity afforded me of paying this small tribute of respect to the memory of that eminent man, by whose friendship and instruction I was honoured during some of the last years of his life. I thought it my duty therefore, though the undertaking was still

liable to interruptions from other concerns, to collect the necessary materials, and to arrange them for a separate publication.

With respect to the incidents of Dr. SIMSON's life, particularly those of the early part of it, I obtained satisfactory information from a short narrative drawn up by the Doctor's colleague and particular friend the late Mr. CLOW, which, from the intimacy subsisting between them for many years, may be considered as authentic and accurate. From several gentlemen who had been in the same College with Doctor SIMSON other circumstances have been communicated, and even from my own acquaintance with him, though only for a few years, some interesting particulars came within the reach of my own observation.

With regard to Doctor SIMSON's scientific pursuits, there are abundant materials of information in his Works which have been published, and particularly in his learned Prefaces and Notes which accompany them. Some circumstances, also, have been collected from his unpublished MS. papers, and from the small remains of his Correspondence. It is much to be regretted that the greater part of his Mathematical Correspondence, which appears to have been very extensive during a great part of his long life, had been either lost or destroyed in his own time. Some interesting fragments of it, however, were found among his papers; and a series of his letters to that eminent mathematician the late Earl STANHOPE, from 1750 to 1758, was in the most liberal and obliging manner communicated by the present Earl; and from them some curious notices of Dr. SIMSON's studies have been extracted.

Some history and explanation of the ancient geometrical Analysis, almost necessarily, forms a part of an account of the literary life of Dr. SIMSON, by whom that Analysis has been completely restored and illustrated. The *Mathematical Collections* of PAPPUS, in which is contained nearly every thing that is known from the Ancients of that celebrated instrument of investigation, which they employed so successfully in their geometrical inquiries, from the Doctor's early partiality for that branch of science, naturally became an object of his particular study. Some account therefore of that work, and of Dr. SIMSON's commentaries on it, is requisite for giving a just view of his geometrical labours, and for estimating their importance to, what is so much wanted, a corrected edition of that valuable Author. Even with the risk of several repetitions, it has appeared convenient to detach from the Memoir the particular account of PAPPUS, and some explanations of the ancient Analysis connected with it, and to annex them as an Appendix. These details, though uninteresting to many readers, may be acceptable to others; and my object in preparing them will be attained, if they can save some trouble to those who at any future time may undertake a new edition of the *Mathematical Collections*. Two short passages of PAPPUS, concerning the ancient classification of geometrical lines, are added in a second appendix, in the original language, with COMMANDINE's version of them.

To these is subjoined Dr. SIMSON's translation of the description of the Porisms of EUCLID, in the Preface to the seventh book of PAPPUS; in which are some material improvements of the former translations.

August, 1812.