

MONUMENTAL BRASS IN THE OLD OR WEST
CHURCH, ABERDEEN.¹

By CECIL T. DAVIS.

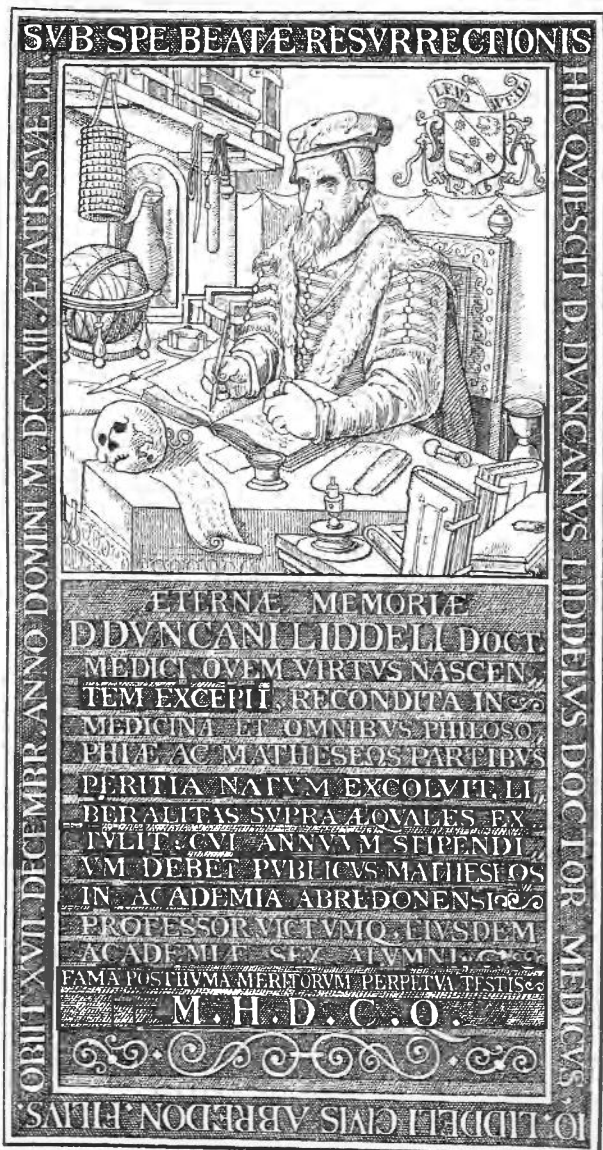
IN September, 1893, during the Annual Meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom at Aberdeen, my attention was directed to the brass of Doctor Duncan Liddel in the Old or West Church, a portion of the curious church of St. Nicholas situated in the centre of the town. This brass, now placed on the south wall of the church, consists of a large sheet of metal measuring 5 feet 5 inches by 2 feet $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches; it is fastened to the wall by eight brass screws with large heads projecting nearly an inch from the surface.

The brass is worthy of notice as being one of the few in Scotland on which appears an effigy. Its history too is interesting. The whole memorial is in a splendid state of preservation, the lines are as clear as when the brass left the workshop. It bears no trace of the long journey it bore when first made nor of the vicissitudes it afterwards suffered.

Dr. Liddel died 17 December, 1613, aged 51, and unmarried. On the 9th of the same month he had executed a Deed of Mortification in which "he directed that two monuments should be erected by his executors, one on the lands of Pitmedden, and the other "within the Kirk of New Aberdeen, as Mr. Thomas Nicholson [executor] and the Counsell of Aberdeen, shall think expedient." No notice appears to have been taken of his wishes for five years until 2 September, 1618, when the Council took action in the matter by referring the wish of the "said defunctis" to his brother John, and asking him to attend to it "with all possibill diligence."

It is hardly a question to be considered here, whether

¹ The Institute is indebted to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for permission to reproduce this brass.



MONUMENTAL BRASS TO DR. LIDDEL, 1613, FROM THE OLD
 OR WEST CHURCH, ABERDEEN.

Jamesone, the "Scotch Vandyke," made the portrait from which the brass was engraved, though it is to be feared that the supporters of this statement have not proved their case. However the executors decided on erecting a brass to Dr. Liddell, and from the Inventory of Writs in the Burgh of Aberdeen the following is copied:—

"The compt off the pleitt off bress bocht and transportit be Johne Liddell from Antverp to Abd. as followis—for the buriall place of his brother Doctor Liddell.

Item the said pleitt off brass veyng		
219 lb at 17 sts. ye pund is ...	31 lb	6 d flemis.
Item mair payet Jaspert brydegrowme		
citizen in Antverp for workmanschip		
yroff	50 lbs	
Mair gifin to him in buntay 2 kinkins		
salmond	3 lbs	
Mair for transporting ye same out of		
Machlein customis thair and the		
charges of the craftisman wrocht the		
pleitt his going thair and back-		
cuming be vagone		30 s
Mair for the pass and cnstume yrof in		
Antverp & Lille		40 s
Mair for fraucht yroff and my awin pas-		
sadge to middilbur ^t		16 s 8 d
Mair for careing betuixt Middlebur ^t		
and Campheir... ..		3 s 4 d
Mair Lost in difference off silver betuixt		
zelandis and brabantis money on eurie		
albertus 4 stsyne peice qlk will extend		
to	3 lbs	5 s
Mair for my charges thrie voadges out-		
vart and hamvart extending to ...	30 lbs	
S ^a in all		121 lbs 15 s 6 d

Quhilk extendis in Schottis money as I		
payit my self for the same at 14 nobles		
is	825 lbs	8 s 6 d
Mair for twa zeiris proffeitt of 1000 merkis		
yroff	133 lbs	6 s 8 d
Mair for sinking the same in ye steane		
and Laying yroff to Alexander		
Wyisman	10 lbs	
S ^a off all		995 lbs 15 s"

From this it may be gathered that John Liddel made three journeys to Antwerp ; these may have been—first, to find an engraver and to get a design from him ; second, to take the design when the executors and possibly the Town Council had approved of it ; and third, to bring the monument home. Gaspar Bruydegoms was employed at the mint at Antwerp early in the seventeenth century. His wife Anne was daughter of Gaspard Jonghelinck, warden of the mint, and grand-daughter of Jacques Jonghelinck the sculptor of the tomb of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, at Bruges.

Few instances are to be found of an account for the ordering and payment of a brass, and fewer still in which the name of the engraver also appears.

John Liddel on his third journey to Antwerp brings the "brass" home with him. He has a matrix or indent made—as per this item "Mair for sinking the same in ye steane & Laying yroff to Alexander Wyisman 10 lbs."—the brass is fixed to the stone and put in the pavement over Liddel's grave. But evil times fell on the West Church 1732–50, it became ruinous, yet fortunately one of its guardians caused the brass to be put into St. Mary's Chapel, where it was preserved from the melting pot. When the church was restored the brass was recovered and put on the wall, where it now is.

The half effigy occupies the upper portion of the plate, and represents an elderly man seated at a table in a thoughtful attitude with hand poised in the act of writing. His hair is closely cropped and covered by a cap with a flap reaching half over the ears. The beard is trimmed to a point flowing and of moderate length, the moustache is drooping and covering the mouth. He wears a furred robe open from the shoulders. His doublet has five rows of braid with a button in the centre on each arm and braided across the chest. Above it a limp moderately wide collar. Hanging loosely around his neck is a ribbon, tucked in below the fourth button. In his right hand he holds a quill and on the forefinger of his left is a jewelled ring. His hands rest on a MS. book with parchment leaves. To his left is a pouch containing paper and a seal with what apparently appear to be the letters D.D.L. (Dominus Duncanus Liddel). Close by the

book is the sand-pot, used before blotting paper was invented. In front are a pair of pince-nez, with wide rims possibly of horn, a skull, a scroll partially open, and a deed to which is appended two seals. On his right is an ink-stand, in front a knife or eraser lying across a quill. A globe mounted with the equatorial band stands on the further corner of the table and on the opposite corner is an hour-glass. The table is covered with a cloth with embroidered fringe. Above are books on a shelf, with broad clasps and all except one with fore-edge to the spectator, just the reverse from the present fashion. Hanging from pegs are a round woven basket, and some narrow tape or laces, also what is probably a portable ink-stand and pen-case. The chair with carved back stands before a piece of plain cloth pegged up, and above are his arms on an escutcheon hanging from a peg in the wall. The arms are:—*arg.*, on a bend between a mastiff's head in chief and a greyhound's head in base coupé *gu.*, three stars of the field. The motto is "Leid Weil." In a niche in the wall under the shelf is an alembic. In the foreground is a side table, on which is a candle in a turned wooden candlestick, and there are also on the table four books, one of which is fastened by a strap and buckle.

This plate affords us a very good insight into a study of olden time.

The epitaph is in Latin, the first sentence is round the edge and the second is beneath the effigy. It may be thus rendered into English:—

Here rests, in hope of a happy resurrection, Duncan Liddel, Doctor of Medicine, son of John Liddel, citizen of Aberdeen. He died 17th December, MDCXIII, in the 52nd year of his age.

To the eternal memory of Duncan Liddel, Doctor of Medicine—whom virtue took possession of at his birth; whom, as he grew up, profound skill in medicine and in all departments of Philosophy and Mathematics,¹ adorned, and generosity exalted above his contemporaries, to whom the public professor of Mathematics¹ in the College of Aberdeen owes his yearly salary, and six students of the same College owe their maintenance—posthumous fame,

¹ It may be well to notice the Greek form of Genitive MATHESEΩΣ.

the permanent attester of merit, has dedicated and consecrated this monument."

Professor Stuart in 1790 issued a sketch of his life. In his own work *Ars medica* is a letter from Caselius to John Craig giving an account of some of his early days; and the Rev. C. Platts has contributed to the Dictionary of National Biography a memoir of Liddel.

To Mr. Alex. M. Munro, of Aberdeen, the writer is much indebted for much valuable information about Dr. Liddel. Mr. Munro has written an article on Dr. Liddel in the *Scottish Notes and Queries*, December, 1887, giving in the same work an illustration of the brass by the late Mr. Andrew Gibb. Illustrations of this brass may also be found in *The Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. XI. pl. xix. p. 450 (complete) and pl. xxii. p. 456 (effigy and surroundings only), also in *The Memorial Catalogue, Heraldic Exhibition, Edinburgh*, 1891, pl. CIV.