Sir Donald MacAlister of Tarbert. By his Wife, with chapters by Sir Robert Rait and Sir Norman Walker. Pp. vii+392. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1935. Price 12s. 6d.

Few lives can have presented more facets to the biographer than that of Sir Donald MacAlister, and we are grateful to Lady MacAlister for the concise and simple record of her husband’s varied achievements she has given us with such admirable restraint.

Her slight sketch of the varying fortunes of the Barrmore MacAlisters in Glenralloch, and of the sterling qualities of his more immediate ancestors, suggests the background and supplies the appropriate atmosphere by which we can trace the influences that went to moulding some of Sir Donald’s most outstanding characteristics: his love of his calf-country, his dogged perseverance in the face of difficulties, his capacity for sustained effort, and his high standard of public duty and of personal rectitude. But against this background there stands out a man of quite exceptional intellectual endowment.

Donald was a bookish boy from the first, and he found more enjoyment in country walks than in ordinary boyish sports. His mother often said to him, “Ach, Donald, put away these weary books and go and play with your brothers!” He liked to look round him, and even the two “pawmies” with the tawse inflicted on him on his first day at school in Perth, for indulging in this natural habit, did not cure him of it.

The doctrines of the Shorter Catechism were instilled into him by his schoolmaster, Mr Rattray, at Aberdeen; and at Liverpool, Mr Sephton so successfully guided his studies in Latin, Greek, mathematics and science; that he gained the first place in the Oxford Senior Local Examinations, as well as exhibitions at Balliol at Oxford and at St John’s at Cambridge, the choice of his university being ultimately decided by a coin coming down “heads for Cambridge.”

From the first, MacAlister had set his mind on medicine as his career. As a prelude, however, he took for a time to mathematics, and after gaining many important prizes in his course, he went on to the Tripos examination and came out Senior Wrangler and First Smith Prizeman. A short interlude as mathematical master at Harrow gave him some rest and much happiness. All this seemed a safe beginning to a successful career in mathematics and allied branches of learning, but in spite of the earnest entreaties of his friends and preceptors, he returned to his first-love, medicine, and without much difficulty secured his degree. A period of research
work in Physiology at Leipzig, under Ludwig, followed, the results of which were embodied in the Gaulstonian Lectures in 1887. Later he became physician at Addenbrook’s Hospital and Assessor to the Regius Professor of Physic. His duties at Cambridge involved much administrative work, and his special gifts in this direction marked him out as a pre-eminently suitable representative of the University on the General Medical Council, which body he entered at the early age of 35. This was perhaps the most absorbing branch of Sir Donald’s life-work and the one on which he left his most abiding mark. An admirable sketch of his influence on the Council and its work is contained in a chapter contributed by his successor in the Presidency, Sir Norman Walker.

In 1907, not without persuasion, Sir Donald accepted the office of Principal of the University of Glasgow. Lady MacAlister’s account of the strenuous work he did in this capacity, particularly during the War years, is supplemented by a singularly illuminating chapter contributed by Sir Robert Rait, his successor in office. Such was the esteem in which Sir Donald was held in Glasgow, that on demitting office as Principal, he had the unusual distinction of being elected Chancellor of the University.

It is impossible in a short review to do justice to Sir Donald’s many other activities—literary, sociological, ecclesiastical, and linguistic—the last of these is proverbial. Biographies of medical men do not always make a wide appeal to general readers, but Sir Donald MacAlister was more than a medical man, and there are few to whom this simple tale of his life, written with such grace and humour, will not bring interest and inspiration.

Clinical Pathology and the Technique of Collecting Specimens.
By William Smith, M.A., M.D., B.Chir.(Cantab.). Pp.-viii+158, with 47 illustrations. London: J. & A. Churchill, Ltd. 1935. Price 5s.

The author explains that this book is intended not as a description of laboratory technique, but as a series of precise directions for the obtaining of the material required for a wide range of laboratory investigations. He hopes that it may thus be found useful to practitioners, students, nurses, and laboratory technicians. In our view, it is to the latter two classes that the book will make most appeal; we think that the former will find it too elementary. However, as the author speaks of microscopical examination of the urine as being rarely practised in a hospital ward, and of the estimation of the urine urea as requiring the services of a clinical pathologist, it may be that habits in these matters are, in some quarters, different from those to which we in Scotland are accustomed, so that Dr Smith’s book may be of wider appeal than we imagine. The detailed description of a
method of blood transfusion is a useful inclusion, though a curious oversight here is that the amount of citrate solution appropriate to a given amount of blood is not stated. There are certain other technical points with which, but for considerations of space, we would express some disagreement, but there are also others which we agree to be insufficiently widely known, and in emphasising which we think Dr Smith has performed a useful service.

NEW EDITIONS

*Midwifery.* By Ten Teachers. Fifth Edition. Edited under the direction of Clifford White, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S., F.C.O.G. Pp. xii+740, with 293 illustrations. London: Edward Arnold & Co. 1935. Price 18s.

The appearance of the fifth edition of *Midwifery* by Ten Teachers under the direction of Mr Clifford White brings this publication up to date and in line with the companion volume *Diseases of Women*, which reached its fifth edition last year. The characteristic features are retained, but a thorough revision has been undertaken so as to incorporate recent work on the physiology of menstruation and the ovarian cycle, the toxæmias of pregnancy, pyelitis and puerperal infection.

In the chapters on menstruation and the toxæmias of pregnancy the student will find a good summary of the present-day conception of these difficult and incompletely understood problems. The ætiology and treatment of puerperal sepsis is well set out, but expansion of the clinical features would give a better impression of the variety of possible lesions and degrees of severity of the infection.

Throughout, the book is well illustrated and the description in the text clear and concise, although an occasional printer's error has escaped the proof-reader, *e.g.* pp. 181, 301, 302. A useful inclusion is the advice given from time to time on the proper attitude to be adopted when handling such problems as sterilisation and induction of abortion. Like its predecessor, this edition can be recommended most cordially to students both undergraduate and graduate.

*Backache.* By JAMES MENNELL. Second Edition. Pp. ix+227. London: J. & A. Churchill, Ltd. 1935. Price 10s. 6d.

"Backache" is perhaps too modestly misleading a title for Dr Mennell's well-known book, including as it does a survey of many conditions which owe their existence to abnormalities in the spine but whose symptoms are at the periphery. The second enlarged