

## THE MEDICAL HISTORY OF JOHN KNOX

*J. Wilkinson,\* 70 Craigeleath Hill Gardens, Edinburgh EH4 2DH*

One of the most striking monuments in the city of Geneva is the large and extensive memorial to the leaders of the Reformation in Europe. This monument took eight years to complete and was finally unveiled and dedicated in the year 1917 in the midst of the First World War. The central group of statues of this monument commemorates the Swiss Reformers and includes a statue of John Knox, which is a reminder of the significant part that Knox played in the Swiss Reformation in addition to his vital role in the Reformation in Scotland.

John Knox was the last of the three great leaders of the European Protestant Reformation to die. On 18 February 1546, Martin Luther died at the age of 63 in Eisleben in Eastern Germany of myocardial infarction, secondary to systemic hypertension. John Calvin died at the age of 54 in Geneva on 27 May 1564 of pulmonary tuberculosis.<sup>2</sup> Knox was 57 years old when he died in Edinburgh on 24 November 1572. Although some specific clinical details of the cause of his death have come down to us, very few details are available of his medical history during the course of his life.

### THE SOURCES

The main primary source of our information about the life and activities of John Knox is in his own writings. These were collected and edited by David Laing in six volumes under the title *The Works of John Knox*, and published in Edinburgh over the years 1846 to 1864.

The most important and informative of these works is *The History of the Reformation of Religion Within the Realm of Scotland* of which Knox wrote the first four Books.<sup>3</sup> These present a vivid account of the progress of the Reformation in Scotland from its earliest stages to the Seventh General Assembly of 25 June 1564 which took place in Edinburgh. Knox himself is the central figure of these books. Although they are often regarded as Knox's memoirs, they constitute the chronicle of a religious movement and are not primarily an autobiography; he always refers to himself in the third person. As the justification of the activities of the leaders of this movement, the work is not unbiased but it is, nevertheless, 'remarkably trustworthy in detail'.<sup>4</sup> A fifth Book was added by an unknown author or authors to bring the account down to August 1567, but its pedestrian style is not that of Knox, although it is probable that Knox collected much of the material from which Book Five was compiled.<sup>5</sup>

Other items of Knox's own writings include letters and pamphlets. Many of his letters have been lost, but those of his personal and family letters which have survived reveal the human and affectionate side of the man, often lost sight of in the controversy which surrounds him.

Another important primary source is the *Memorials of Transactions in Scotland from 1569 to 1573* compiled by Richard Bannatyne, who was Knox's secretary in his latter years. This work incorporates entries from Knox's journal concerning the events of the last years of his life, together with materials which he had collected for use in the

\* Formerly Community Medicine Specialist, Lothian Health Board, Edinburgh.

continuation of his *History of the Reformation*. These are supplemented by entries from Bannatyne's own journal of events, notably an account of the last days of his master's life.

A second contemporary account of the last days of Knox's life also exists. This was written in Latin, while Bannatyne's journal was written in Scots. It was published in Edinburgh in 1579 by Thomas Smeton, at that time the minister of Paisley, and subsequently Principal of Glasgow University. No name is attached to this document, although the author is said to have sat with Knox during his last illness. Laing believed that it was written by James Lawson, who succeeded Knox as minister of St Giles just two weeks before Knox died.<sup>6</sup>

The secondary sources of information about Knox include the numerous biographies of him. The most important and most detailed of these are by Thomas McCrie (1813), Hume Brown (1895), Henry Cowan (1905), Eustace Percy (1937), Jasper Ridley (1968) and Stanford Reid (1974).

#### FAMILY HISTORY

The name Knox is said to be derived from the Celtic word *anoc* which means 'a small hill'. This word still occurs today in topographical terms such as the Knock of Crieff. Its origin as a family name presumably lies in the association of the ancestors of the Knoxes with some location in which a small hill was a characteristic feature. It has been suggested that its site lay in Renfrewshire, where the most noteworthy branch of the Knox family lived in the sixteenth century possessed of the lands of Knock, Ranfurly and Craigend which were situated on the east side of the River Cart near Paisley.<sup>7</sup> However, although the name may have been imported into East Lothian, it is just as likely that the Knoxes of the county acquired their name locally, since Knox was of lowly descent and not connected with any distinguished family.<sup>8</sup>

By the time John Knox was born, his surname was a common one throughout the Scottish Lowlands. It was variously written in English or Scots, Knox, Knock or Knockes; whilst foreign writers spelt it *Cnox*, *Cnoxus* or *Knoxus*. As Ridley points out, its pronunciation was sufficiently close to that of the Latin words *nox* (night) and *noceus* (criminal) to provide Knox's opponents with the opportunity of making many a hostile pun at his expense. One example of this was their description of Knox as *quasi nox, a nocendo* (like darkness from the doing of criminal deeds). Nevertheless, the initial letter 'K' of the name appears to have been pronounced in Knox's time and not left silent as it is today, although it was sometimes omitted in spelling so that the name was written simply as Nox.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Parentage*

Little is known about Knox's parents and, after he has left home to go to university, they disappear entirely from his story. We know that Knox's father was called William only because this fact was recorded in the register of burgesses of the city of Geneva, when his son John was enrolled as a burgess or citizen there on 24 June 1558.<sup>10</sup> In this register, Knox appears as *Jehan filz de Guillaume Cnoxe natif de Hedington en Ecossie*.<sup>11</sup> So far as his mother is concerned, we know only that her surname was Sinclair. This explains why Knox would sometimes sign his letters 'John Sinclair', when he wished to hide the identity of their writer in times of danger to his life and freedom, and to those of his correspondents.<sup>12</sup> According to Knox's biographer, Hume Brown, this was a common practice amongst the French Protestants or Huguenots.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of information about the early life of Knox indicates that he was of humble

origin. While he 'owed nothing to the advantages of birth or fortune',<sup>14</sup> nevertheless he belonged to a respectable, honest and hard-working family. His father and grandfathers were tenant farmers on the East Lothian estates of the Earls of Bothwell (whose family name was Hepburn). They and their forebears stood in feudal relationship to the Earls, and some had died under their standards, probably at the Battles of Sauchieburn (1488) and Flodden (1513).<sup>15</sup>

We have no details of the medical history of Knox's parents, and do not know when they died, nor what may have been the cause of their deaths. It has been suggested that William Knox was amongst those slain at the Battle of Flodden in September 1513, along with Adam, the second Earl of Bothwell.<sup>16</sup> If this were so, then Knox at that time would be only an infant in arms or would have been born posthumously.<sup>17</sup> Tradition has it that Knox's mother died early in life.<sup>18</sup> They had only two children - John and William, his elder brother. William settled in Prestonpans and became a prosperous merchant. Along with some others, he formed a company which bought a ship and traded with England in 'all kind of goods and lawful merchandise'.<sup>19</sup> He had three sons, all of whom became ministers of the Church of Scotland, respectively of Cockpen, Kelso and Lauder.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Date of birth*

For over four centuries it was believed that Knox was in his sixty-seventh year when he died in 1572 and so must have been born in the year 1505. This estimate of his age at death was given in Archbishop John Spottiswoode's *History of the Church of Scotland*, which was written some time before the latter's death in 1639, but not published until 1655.<sup>21</sup> It is now recognised that this estimate was incorrect and that Spottiswoode's printer had misread the author's '57th' for '67th' and so made Knox die in his sixty-seventh year. This error was uncovered by Hay Fleming at the time of the celebration of the 'alleged' quatercentenary of Knox's birth in 1905. Fleming pointed out that Knox's contemporaries, Sir Peter Young and Theodore Beza, said he died in his fifty-ninth year and fifty-seventh year respectively. This meant that he must have been born between 24 November 1513 and 24 November 1515, with sometime in the year 1514 being the most probable date.<sup>22</sup> If his father was killed at Flodden on 9 September 1513, Knox, even if he were a posthumous child, cannot have been born later than the spring or early summer of 1514. More specific than this we cannot be, although Lord Eustace Percy suggests he was born in the December of 1513.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Place of birth*

The entry in the Genevan register of burgesses records that Knox was born in Haddington in Scotland. An apparently more precise reference is given in a note by Beza in his collection of the portraits of Reformation leaders published in 1580, which says that *Johannes Cnoxus* was a native of Gifford (*Johannes Cnoxus Scotus Giffordiensis*).<sup>24</sup> This is now a village about four miles south of the royal burgh of Haddington, the chief town of East Lothian and the first stage on the old road from Edinburgh to London. However, the village of Gifford did not come into existence until after 1650 and so did not exist at the time of Knox's birth.

A possible explanation of the apparent discrepancy was suggested by Dr George Barclay, the minister of Haddington from 1722 to 1795. He pointed out that within the parish of Haddington lay two villages on the east side of the River Tyne, whilst on the west side lay the main part of the town. One village was called Nungate because it was built on the lands of the Abbey, and the other was called Giffordgate because it

was built on the lands owned by the Gifford family. Barclay said that it was here that Knox was born, namely, in a house in Giffordgate. He said it was a house of but mean appearance, which was still in existence when he contributed the article on Haddington to the *Statistical Account of Scotland* in 1791.<sup>25</sup> By the time the *Second Statistical Account* was compiled in 1845 the house had disappeared, but the site was still pointed out as that where the house had stood. Thomas Carlyle, whose wife, Jane Welsh, was a native of Haddington and a descendant of John Knox through his youngest daughter Elizabeth, had a memorial oak tree planted on this site with a tablet beside it stating that this marked the site of the house in which John Knox had been born.<sup>26</sup>

#### EDUCATION

When he was seven years old, Knox probably attended a Church song-school in Haddington where he would be taught the elements of Latin and religious knowledge, and be trained to sing in the Church choir.<sup>27</sup> Then at age ten he would transfer to the Burgh or Grammar School. Here he would continue to be taught Latin together with Logic, Science and Mathematics.<sup>28</sup> The Latin primer in general use was still that of Donatus, the fourth century Roman grammarian, although in 1522 a new grammar had been published by John Vaus of Aberdeen, and so it is possible that this new book was the one from which Knox learned his Latin grammar.<sup>29</sup>

In 1529, when he was 15 years of age, he went to St Andrews University to train for the Roman priesthood; Edinburgh University was not yet in existence and it is unlikely that he went to Glasgow University as was previously thought.<sup>30</sup> Haddington was in the diocese of St Andrews and it would be more natural for him to attend the University there. He spent his first two years studying Arts, taking his BA which would entitle him to be called 'Sir' John Knox, which was the usual designation of a secular priest who had not obtained the university distinction of 'Master' (*Magister*) and was derived from the Latin title *Dominus*. Such a priest was often called a 'Papal knight' as opposed to a knight created by secular authority.<sup>31</sup> Following this he studied the prevailing scholastic theology for three to four years and obtained his BD degree under John Major in St Salvator's College.<sup>32</sup> Major was also a native of Haddington, and by that time had become one of the leading intellectual figures of Europe, and been appointed Provost or Head of this college.

According to Beza, Knox was an outstanding student at the University who was expected to outshine his teacher, John Major.<sup>33</sup> He had a genuine enthusiasm for knowledge, which is reflected in the style and content of his writings.<sup>34</sup> 'As a writer of the old rich English tongue our Reformer has few equals and no superior. His prose is stately and full of music. Avoiding pedantry and classical and scholastic terms, he is a writer for all times, intelligible in every age, with an attractive literary excellence. In almost everything he wrote there is a touch of greatness'.<sup>35</sup> His language was refined and not vulgar and he used only a few Scottish words or idioms in his *History of the Reformation* and these usually when he was reporting direct speech. He spoke an anglicised Scots which was the result of his long residence in Europe and in England, his marrying into an English family and, above all, his intimate knowledge of the English Bible in the Genevan version of 1560, in the production of which Knox may have shared during his stay in Geneva in the years 1554, 1555 and 1558. Ninian Winzet (Wingate), one of his opponents, as he was about to debate with him in public at Linlithgow in 1559, said that he would have to use Latin in the debate as Knox had forgotten 'our auld plaine Scottis', and Winzet was not acquainted with Knox's southern accent.<sup>36</sup>

Knox remained a student all his life. In December 1562, at the close of his second interview with Mary Queen of Scots, he complained that all the waiting at Court she demanded was keeping him from his books.<sup>37</sup> His books constituted much the larger part of his personal property and it was with them, and with help from the old scholastic logic and the new learning (which included the Hebrew he had learned during ‘his quiet life of study’ in Geneva in 1555) that he spent hours in the preparation of the long sermon, he delivered in the course of his ministry in Edinburgh.<sup>38</sup>

#### THE PUBLIC FIGURE

After Knox had completed his studies, he taught scholastic philosophy and theology, most probably as a regent of one of the classes in the University. He was a good teacher and his classes were popular with the students.<sup>39</sup> He left St Andrews University finally in 1536 and was ordained a deacon in the Roman Church on 1 April of that year. Then on Easter Eve, Saturday 15 April, he was ordained to the priesthood by William Chisholm, Bishop of Dunblane, at Haddington in the Franciscan Church of St Mary (‘The Lamp of the Lothians’).<sup>40</sup> The canonical age for ordination was 24 years and Knox’s ordination at the age of 22 suggests that he must have impressed the Church authorities by his ability and learning.<sup>41</sup>

Nothing is known of Knox’s life and activity for the four years after he was ordained. By 1540 he is acting as a ‘notary apostolic’, providing legal services for members of the community in and around Haddington. The name of his office means that he acted under the authority of the Church of Rome. In 1543 we find him living at Longniddry House in East Lothian as tutor to the sons of the Protestant lairds of Longniddry and Ormiston, teaching them Latin grammar and literature, a little French, and some Bible and religious knowledge, using a catechism and the gospel of John.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, significant events had been taking place on the continent of Europe, whose influence was to change the course of Knox’s life and turn him into a figure of Scottish and European renown. These events were those of the rise and progress of the Reformation. Although the Reformation began with Martin Luther in Germany, it soon spread to other countries including Scotland. Its teaching entered Scotland through the east coast ports of Dundee, Montrose and Leith, carried by traders visiting Germany, France and the Low Countries, and by students returning from their studies in continental universities. From these coastal ports, the influence and teaching of the Reformation was spread by itinerant preachers throughout the rest of the country. One of these preachers was Thomas Gwilliam, a Court chaplain, who was the former Prior of the Blackfriars monastery at Inverness, and who had in fact been born at Athelstaneford in East Lothian.<sup>43</sup> When Gwilliam preached in Lothian, Knox was among his audience and he was impressed by his preaching and teaching. It was Gwilliam who first interested Knox in the Reformed Faith.<sup>44</sup>

However, the person most responsible for Knox committing himself to the Reformed Faith and becoming a public figure, was Master George Wishart (1512-1546).<sup>45</sup> Wishart had been a schoolmaster at Montrose and had been declared a heretic for teaching the Greek New Testament in the Grammar school there.<sup>46</sup> After spending some time in Switzerland in contact with Reformation leaders there, Wishart returned to Scotland in 1544 and in December 1545 he preached in different places in East Lothian. Knox was in close contact with him at this time and learned from him the doctrines of the Reformed Faith, including those of justification by faith as the sole basis of human salvation and of the supremacy of Scripture as the sole guide of faith and life.<sup>47</sup> As Wishart’s life was constantly in danger, he always carried with him an

old-fashioned two-handed sword, which Whitley suggests may have been a relic of Flodden.<sup>48</sup> During his preaching tour in Lothian, this sword was carried by John Knox, who thus acted as his bodyguard. This meant that Knox, having in this way declared his commitment to the Reformed cause, now became a public figure and a marked man.

Although Knox was now a wanted man, he continued to act as tutor to the sons of the lairds of Longniddry and Ormiston. At first, wearied of the constant movement from place to place to evade capture by the Church authorities, he had thoughts of leaving Scotland for Germany where he might study at the Protestant Universities of Wittenberg or Marburg ('the schools of Germany' as he called them). However, the lairds encouraged him to remain in Scotland and continue the education of their sons. He agreed to do this, although it meant that they had to be continually on the move with him.<sup>49</sup>

In April 1547, the fathers of his pupils suggested that Knox and their sons might be safer if they moved to the Castle of St Andrews. This Castle had been occupied by Protestant sympathisers since the murder there of Cardinal David Beaton, the leader of the Roman Church in Scotland, on 26 May 1546. Following this suggestion, Knox and his pupils sailed across the Forth and round the coast to St Andrews, arriving at the Castle on 10 April 1547. However, this move proved to be disastrous for on 30 July the Castle fell to the French forces summoned to their aid by Mary of Guise, the Queen Dowager, and the Earl of Arran, the Regent or Governor of Scotland. The 'Castilians', as its occupants were called, were carried off to France where, in violation of the agreed terms of their surrender, the nobles, lairds and those of rank were committed to the prisons of Brest, Cherbourg, Mont St Michel and Rouen, and the commoners, who included Knox, consigned to the galleys based at Rouen on the River Seine, as captive oarsmen or *forsairs*.

#### THE GALLEY SLAVE

The galleys were the labour camps of that period. Consignment to the galleys was regarded as the worst fate after capital punishment, and was the alternative punishment for convicts whose death sentence was commuted. Hume Brown describes service on them as 'a form of life which for unutterable horror is perhaps without parallel in the history of humanity'.<sup>50</sup> This was to be Knox's fate for 19 months, on the galleys which sailed from the French ports to patrol the east coast of Scotland. These galleys were used to convoy supplies and French troopships bringing soldiers to Scotland, and to intercept any English ships which might be bringing assistance to the Reformation party there.

The average French galley was 150 feet long with a beam of 50 feet. Such galleys stood about six feet above the waterline and so were not very seaworthy in rough weather. This meant that they could only cross the North Sea to Scotland in summer. The crew of each galley numbered about 150, with an average complement of 300 slaves. From the captain's cabin at the stern ran a raised central walkway, on either side of which the benches for the oarsmen were set at right angles to the vessel's side. There were 25 oars on each side, each rowed by six men who were chained to their benches by leg irons day and night. At night, the men slept on a little straw under their bench, and during the day they roasted in the sun or shivered in the cold or rain according to the weather, for the galleys were only partially decked. Although they had been convicted of no crime and were not even French, Knox and his colleagues found themselves rowing in the company of some of the worst criminals of France, and subject to violent

ill-treatment by the officers in charge of the slaves (*comites*) and their deputies (*sous-comites*). These men carried whips by which they encouraged the rowers and enforced discipline, often quite arbitrarily and on the slightest provocation.<sup>51</sup>

It is at this stage of his life that we first come across references to Knox's health. Knox himself says little about the conditions on board the galleys. Later he speaks in a letter of the 'torments of the galleys',<sup>52</sup> but gives no details apart from saying that the *forsairs* were 'miserably entreated',<sup>53</sup> and how at one point he was at Rouen 'lying in irons, sore troubled by corporal infirmity in a galley called *Notre Dame*'.<sup>54</sup>

There were several possible causes of this 'corporal infirmity'. There was the heavy physical work of rowing; the cramped space and position in which that rowing had to be performed, and the frequent ill-treatment under the lash of the whips of the overseers. There was the continual exposure to the elements of sun, rain, and cold, and to the insanitary conditions on board the galley which harboured rats and mice, to say nothing of lice and other parasites. Finally, there was the grossly inadequate diet which the slaves were given. This consisted of ship's biscuit and water, with a kind of vegetable soup three times a week. In addition, they were given wine when they were working on land.<sup>55</sup>

After about a year exposed to these conditions, Knox's health finally broke down. He had been a man in his early thirties and in robust health when he was first consigned to the galleys, but now he was exhausted and weakened by the severe physical work, and emaciated because of the inadequate diet. In the summer of 1548 he developed a fever and became so ill that his life was despaired of by all in the ship.<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence of the nature of the fever. It may have been bubonic plague; there were rats on the galleys, and this disease had appeared amongst the occupants of the Castle before it fell to the French forces.<sup>57</sup> Each galley had a 'hospital' which was situated in the centre and bottom of the ship where the sick were tended by the barber-surgeon, but this was such 'a plague-stricken hole' that the sick preferred to stay at their oar rather than be put into it.<sup>58</sup> Another possibility is that Knox had contracted louse-borne typhus fever.

In March 1549, Knox was released by the French Government after the successful negotiations of the English Government for the release of all the 'Castilians'. He arrived in England in the following month, where the Protestant King Edward VI was now on the throne. He was appointed by the English Privy Council as a licensed preacher to minister to both the garrison and the parish of Berwick. The town of Berwick had been ceded by Scotland to England in 1482, and so was within the jurisdiction of the Church of England for Church affairs. After a year he was transferred to Newcastle and then finally to London, until he left England for Geneva when the staunch Roman Catholic Mary Tudor came to the throne in 1553.

It was during his ministry at Berwick that Knox made the acquaintance of the family of Richard Bowes, who was the Captain of Norham Castle which lay about seven miles west of Berwick. He became the pastor and spiritual counsellor of Mrs Elizabeth Bowes, whose fifth daughter, Marjory Joan, he later married. It was a female descendant of Mrs Bowes who in 1767 married John Lyon, the ninth Earl of Strathmore, to found the Bowes-Lyon family from which our present Queen Elizabeth is descended through her mother.<sup>59</sup>

#### THE FAMILY MAN

We do not know exactly when Knox married Marjory Bowes, but it was probably about Christmas 1552 that they became officially engaged, for by January 1553 he begins to write to her mother as 'mother', having previously addressed her as 'sister', and in a

letter dated 20 September of that year, he refers to Marjory as 'my wife'.<sup>60</sup> The actual marriage ceremony probably took place in the summer of 1555 when Knox visited Berwick on his way from Geneva to Edinburgh.<sup>61</sup> Marjory proved to be an invaluable helpmate to Knox, and he always speaks of her in terms of cordial respect and affection. In a letter written to Knox after her death, Calvin spoke of her as 'a wife the like of whom is not easily found (*uxor nactus eras cui non reperiuntur passim similes*)'.<sup>62</sup> In another letter, this time to Knox's friend and colleague, Christopher Goodman, he describes her as 'the most delightful (*suavissima*) of wives'.<sup>63</sup>

In the summer of 1556, Knox and his wife went to Geneva, and during their stay there, Marjory was delivered of two sons. Nathaniel was baptised in May 1557 and Eleazar in November of the following year. After their mother's death, they were brought up by her relatives in Northumberland.<sup>64</sup> But we know little of their history until they both matriculated at the University of Cambridge eight days after their father died, and were admitted to St John's College there, where Thomas Lever, a former colleague of their father's at Frankfort-on-the-Main, was then Master. In due course they graduated in Arts and became Fellows of the College. Both of them entered the ministry of the Church of England. Nathaniel died of malaria (tertian ague) in 1580 while still at college.<sup>65</sup> Eleazar had a brilliant academic career and in May 1587 became vicar of Clacton Magna in Essex. He died on 23 May 1591 and was buried in the chapel of St John's College. Neither son married and so with the death of Eleazar, the male line of Knox's family became extinct.

Marjory herself died at Edinburgh in December 1560, about the time when the First General Assembly of 'the Universal Kirk of Scotland' was meeting in the Magdalene Chapel in the Cowgate of Edinburgh. At this time, Knox records that 'he was in no small heaviness by reason of the late death of his dear bedfellow, Marjory Bowes'.<sup>66</sup> She had often acted as his secretary and some of his letters are written in her fine, clear handwriting. She was probably not much more than 25 years old at this time and the cause of her early death is unknown. It has been suggested that she died in childbirth, when the child must have been stillborn or have died soon after birth.<sup>67</sup>

Four years later, on 28 March 1564, Knox married again. His new bride was Margaret Stewart, the daughter of Andrew, Lord Ochiltree, a descendant of James II. According to Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador, Mary Queen of Scots objected strongly to the marriage because Margaret was 'of the blood and of the name'.<sup>68</sup> Margaret was only 17 years old and Knox was now 50, a disparity in age which gave rise to some malicious gossip in Edinburgh in addition to the Queen's objection. She proved to be a faithful and affectionate wife although Knox makes few allusions to her in his writings. She bore him three daughters and outlived him by 40 years, dying in 1612.

#### HIS GENERAL HEALTH

Knox came of good farming stock in East Lothian, a fertile and prosperous area of the Scottish Lowlands. His parents' daily life on the farm would be hard and simple, and would be shared by John until he left home to go to the University. The fact that they were able to send him to university suggests that they did not live in the poorest of circumstances. There is no evidence to suggest that he enjoyed anything other than good health for at least the first 32 years of his life.

However, his biographers are divided about the strength of his constitution. Hume Brown regarded him as naturally of 'a feeble constitution',<sup>69</sup> but gives no evidence to support his opinion. Ridley, on the other hand, spoke of him as 'the type of man who survives a labour camp' and how when he was consigned to the galleys 'he was physically

in his prime at the age of 33, and obviously robust'.<sup>70</sup> Reid, a recent American biographer, also describes Knox as 'a man of considerable physical strength'.<sup>71</sup> Certainly he was no weakling if he could withstand a year of hard labour, ill-treatment, deprivation and malnutrition before showing signs of breaking down, and falling a victim to the infectious disease from which he nearly died.

Even after his release from the galleys in 1549, he still had the strength and energy to face a demanding career of over 20 years; a career in which he sought to carry through a heavy programme of work in the face of opposition, persecution and misrepresentation, and in which his aim was to provide his people and his country with a constitutional government, a national scheme of education and a reformed religion.

The question now arises of whether any record of the physical appearance of Knox exists which may allow us to form some opinion of the state of his health. Fortunately, we have both a description and a portrait of him.

The description was written by Sir Peter Young (1544-1628), tutor to James VI and a citizen of Edinburgh, in response to a request by Theodore Beza, a colleague of John Calvin in Geneva. In 1579, Beza was collecting biographical information to include in a book of portraits of leaders of the Reformation and had applied to Scotland for assistance with the biography of Knox. The original of Young's letter in which he described Knox was discovered at the end of last century in the Ducal Library at Gotha in Thuringia, Germany.<sup>72</sup> It was written in Latin and was dated 13 November 1579. It described Knox in the following terms:

In bodily stature he was rather below the normal height. His limbs were straight and well-proportioned; his shoulders broad; his fingers somewhat long. His head was of medium size, with black hair; his appearance swarthy, yet not unpleasent. His countenance, which was grave and stern, though not harsh, bore a natural dignity and air of authority; in anger his frown became very imperious. Under a rather narrow forehead his eyebrows rose in a dense ridge; his cheeks were ruddy and somewhat full, so that it seemed as though his eyes receded into hollows. The eyes themselves were dark blue, keen and animated. His face was somewhat long, with a long nose, a full mouth, and large lips of which the upper one was slightly the thicker. His beard was black flecked with grey, thick and falling down a hand and a half long.<sup>73</sup>

The date of this letter is some seven years after the death of Knox and means that Young was writing from memory, and describing Knox as he remembered him in the full vigour of his adult life.

No portrait of Knox was painted in his lifetime. The portrait which was published in Beza's *Portraits (Icones) of Illustrious Men* in 1580 was painted from memory by the Flemish artist Adrian Vaensoun, and sent by Young to Beza in Geneva along with the letter we have just quoted. It agrees with Young's description of Knox, except that the beard is too long. The length of Knox's beard has given rise to a whole controversial literature, but it seems clear that he did not have 'a river of a beard' as Beza's portrait depicted, only one about six inches in length.<sup>74</sup> However, from the point of view of Knox's medical history, neither Young's description nor Vaensoun's painting of his physical appearance reveals any sign of ill-health in their subject.

#### HIS CLINICAL HISTORY

There are very few specifically clinical references in Knox's writings, and therefore also in the various volumes of biography which are based upon them. For instance,

the two-volume biography of Knox by Hume Brown never mentions fever at all, and there are only two references to fever in Thomas McCrie's biography which runs to well over 500 pages. There are some references to ill-health and ailments in both biographies, but their nature is not specified. Thus when Knox arrived in Geneva from Scotland in 1556, we read that he was then able to enjoy family life and receive the soothing care which 'his frequent bodily ailments now required',<sup>75</sup> but we are given no indication of what those ailments were. For our present purpose we propose to pick out what references there are to ailments in Knox's own writings or in his biographies and consider them symptomatically.

### *Fever*

It has already been mentioned that fever accompanied the breakdown in health which Knox suffered in 1548 after a year as a galley-slave.<sup>76</sup> This 'galley-fever' might have been bubonic plague or louse-borne typhus fever contracted amid the insanitary conditions aboard the galleys.

After his return to England, Knox was appointed as a licensed preacher at Berwick by the English Privy Council in 1549, and then moved to Newcastle in the following year when he preached regularly in St Nicholas' Parish Church (now the Cathedral). In August 1551, whilst he was still in Newcastle, a severe outbreak of the sweating sickness occurred there and in Northumberland, the worst for over 30 years.<sup>77</sup> However, although it is known that the Duke of Northumberland lost his daughter in this outbreak in June 1552,<sup>78</sup> we have no information about whether Knox contracted this disease, although his bodily resistance to disease must have been very low at this time following his experience of the galleys.

In a letter to Mrs Anna Locke dated 2 September 1559, Knox speaks of travelling throughout the realm of Scotland in the interests of the Reformation 'notwithstanding the fevers which have vexed me for the space of a month'.<sup>79</sup> However, he gives no indication of the nature of these fevers but they obviously appear to have been chronic, since they persisted for a month. They affected his work, but did not apparently threaten his life.

### *Pain*

We first meet with a specific mention of pain in the year 1553, when he had several severe attacks of 'the gravel' or the passage of kidney stones down the urinary tract, producing renal and urethral colic. He calls this 'my old malady' and ascribes it to his imprisonment on the French galleys.<sup>80</sup> He speaks of spending sore and dolorous nights with severe pain in his head and stomach.<sup>81</sup> The mention of stomach pain has led to the suggestion that Knox suffered from peptic ulcer,<sup>82</sup> but the mention of 'gravel' would suggest that it was more probably due to kidney or urinary calculi and the colic they caused.

This condition appears to have been common in Europe in the sixteenth century. Both Luther and Calvin suffered from urinary calculi and their effects, which have been described by one of Knox's biographers as 'one of the cruellest diseases that can torture human flesh'.<sup>83</sup> Luther gives a dramatic account of an incident of urethral obstruction due to the impaction of urinary calculi in his urethra.<sup>84</sup> Calvin also provides a classic description of an attack of renal colic caused by the passage of a calculus down the ureter.<sup>85</sup> Knox's mention that the gravel began to affect him while he was confined to the galleys suggests that one predisposing factor to its development was the inadequate supply of drinking water on board the galleys resulting in a state of chronic dehydration.

This in turn would lead to the production and excretion of concentrated urine with the consequent predisposition to the formation of calculi in the urinary tract.

The only other type of specific pain to which Knox refers is that which occurred at the end of his life, and which appears to have been respiratory in origin. We shall consider this pain and its nature further, when we describe the last days of his life later in this article.

#### *Stress*

Until the year 1546, Knox had lived a relatively sheltered life apparently free from stress and ill-health. However, once he committed himself to the cause of the Reformation, his life became very full of stress. He became a hunted man and the events and activities which he records in his *History of the Reformation* illustrate the stress in which he lived. A few of these instances will be mentioned by way of illustration.

He was consigned to forced labour on the galleys which has already been described and from which he nearly died. He engaged in protracted negotiations with political leaders concerning religious freedom, some of whom were fickle and untrustworthy. On one occasion in December 1563, he was arraigned before the Queen and her Privy Council on a trumped-up charge of treason.<sup>86</sup> At various times in his life he had a heavy programme of preaching and writing. He describes this as his 'daily labour' and that he finds 'nothing is more contrarious to my health than writing'.<sup>87</sup>

Much of this writing arose from his desire to see that the newly-reformed Church was provided with a statement of its basic doctrines, a document setting out its Presbyterian constitution, and a book of Common Order for the guidance of its worship. The preparation of these documents, drawn up by Knox in consultation with his colleagues, was then followed by their submission to the new Church authorities to gain their acceptance. He was busy on the task of compiling the *History of the Reformation* up to the months before he died and as has already been mentioned, he left material for a fifth Book of that History, which he did not live to see completed. This material was left for his secretary Richard Bannatyne to deal with. When the amount of travelling around Scotland that he did in order to preach and to establish new congregations on the Reformed pattern is considered, we can understand what lay behind his comment in the letter written in September 1559 to his correspondent Mrs Anna Locke that 'Time to me is so precious, that with great difficulty can I steal one hour in eight days, either to satisfy myself, or to gratify my friends'.<sup>88</sup> In the following month he writes to another correspondent, Gregory Raylton, 'in twenty-four hours, I have not four free to natural rest and ease of this wicked carcass...I write with sleeping eyes'.<sup>89</sup> In addition to his writing, his study and his preaching, he carried a heavy pastoral responsibility for the counselling and care of those who formed his congregations in the different places in which he ministered.

Not only was he concerned with Church affairs, he was also involved in affairs of State arising from his desire to see the absolute monarchy of the Stewart dynasty replaced by a constitutional government in which the people were represented. Implied in this desire was the establishment of a scheme of universal compulsory education, a scheme which was thwarted when the nobles insisted on appropriating the lands and revenues of the Roman Church, with the result that these could not be used to establish schools, and train and pay teachers, which was part of Knox's plan.

It is obvious that in all these areas of his interest and activity, he would run into a great deal of opposition and make a large number of enemies, which did not make life any easier for him. Undoubtedly, Knox lived a life full of stress which

must have produced periods of anxiety and depression; however, there is no suggestion that these symptoms became unbearable or pathological. They were the normal and transient responses to the various events of his life. He met each reverse with fearlessness and courage based on his steadfast faith in God, in his own vocation to be God's servant, and in the ultimate triumph of what he believed to be God's cause.

#### *Exhaustion*

When Knox finally reached England after his 19 months of captivity and forced labour on the French galleys, he must have been in a very exhausted and debilitated condition. He then ministered in Berwick and Newcastle for three years where he was very happy and able to engage in what he calls 'bodily exercise' by which he meant the outdoor sports of bowls, archery and perhaps hunting.<sup>90</sup>

Although Knox may never have recovered his full strength after his imprisonment in the galleys, he was still able to undertake a life full of activity. However, there were times of weakness and exhaustion associated with his old trouble, the gravel, and with his frequent bodily ailments, whatever they may have been, perhaps attacks of fever both acute and chronic contracted on his journeys round Scotland. In addition, there were periods of intense political and religious activity which left him exhausted, especially after Mary Queen of Scots returned to Scotland to claim her throne in 1561. References to his weakness and exhaustion begin to appear in his letters from this time onwards and he begins to long for his long battle to end. Eventually to these causes of weakness and exhaustion was added the approach of old age which appears to have begun earlier in the sixteenth century than it does today, so that Hume Brown can say that in 1554 when Knox was about 40 years old, he was 'on the verge of old age'.<sup>91</sup>

#### HIS LAST YEARS

On 7 July 1559 Knox was elected minister of the Church of St Giles in Edinburgh and the opening of the year 1570 found him still in that post. He was, however, becoming increasingly exhausted because of the heavy pastoral and political workload he was still called upon to carry. As Hume Brown puts it, 'the weary consent to circumstance that sooner or later comes to most men, never came to Knox'.<sup>92</sup> He remained active to the end.

#### *The year 1570*

In October 1570 Knox suffered a stroke, which Bannatyne in his journal describes as 'a kind of Apoplexia, called by the physicians Resolution, whereby the perfect use of his tongue was stopped'. Both these words are used by the ancient medical authors for the sudden appearance of paralysis of one side of the body.<sup>93</sup>

The first question about Knox's stroke concerns its cause. Cerebral embolism is unlikely in the apparent absence of any evidence of a possible source of an embolus. This leaves us with a choice between cerebral haemorrhage and cerebral thrombosis, of which the latter appears to be more probable.

The next question is: which side of his body was affected? There are two possible clues to the answer to this question in the information available. The first one is in the observation by Bannatyne that when Knox suffered his stroke, 'the perfect use of his tongue was stopped'. The centre for verbal speech (Broca's area) lies in the frontal cortex of the left cerebral hemisphere in a right-handed person and a loss of speech

would normally mean that the thrombosis had affected this area and that the paralysis was on the right side of the body. However, Bannatyne does not speak of a loss of speech (aphasia) but of speech that was not perfect because of some interference with the use of the tongue which is one of the peripheral organs of speech (dysarthria). The result of this would be a decreased clarity of Knox's articulation and enunciation in normal speaking and preaching, due to facial paralysis, which affected the movement of the tongue because of the weakness of the muscles on one side of the mouth. Such interference could occur, no matter which side of the face was paralysed. This first clue is therefore ambivalent.

The second clue is found in the continued ability of Knox to write after his stroke and until shortly before his death. On the presumption that he was right-handed, this would mean that any paralysis affected the left-hand side of his body. He may of course have been left-handed, but such a feature would have been seized on by his enemies anxious to discredit him by making him out to be an abnormal and demonic personality and there is no evidence that this was done. It is also possible that he had to resort permanently to dictation to his secretary after his stroke, but again there is no evidence of this. In fact, we find him speaking of putting his 'hand to the pen' in the introductory sentences to a document published in 1572.<sup>94</sup>

Such evidence as there is, suggests that Knox had a right-sided cerebral thrombosis with a left-sided hemiparesis or paralysis of the body.

The next question concerns the severity of the stroke. Bannatyne tells us that Knox confounded all the rumours about the severe degree of his disability for 'within few days ... he convalescet and so returned to his exercise of preaching at least upon the Sunday'.<sup>95</sup> This suggests that the stroke should be regarded as a minor one.

The evidence we have examined so far does not suggest that Knox had any residual paralysis following his stroke. However, McCrie maintained that the stroke left him with some degree of disablement of one hand and one foot. He finds confirmation of this in two phrases which Knox used in his writings.<sup>96</sup>

With regard to the hand: in signing a document in January 1571 Knox said that he signed 'with my dead hand and a glad heart praising God'.<sup>97</sup> McCrie suggested this meant that his hand was paralysed. However, it seems clear that he signed his name with his 'dead hand', which could not therefore be regarded as paralysed.

The second phrase occurs at the end of one of Knox's letters where he signs himself as 'John Knox, with his one foot in the grave'.<sup>98</sup> Again, McCrie takes this to mean that he suffered from paralysis of one lower limb as a result of the stroke. However, the date of this letter is 2 January 1569, which is nearly two years before the stroke occurred.

In this connection, if we examine the usage of the adjective 'dead' in Knox's writings in relation to himself or his person, we find that this usage is usually metaphorical rather than literal. In a document of 1572, we find him referring 'my half-dead tongue':<sup>99</sup> this cannot mean he had some paralysis of the tongue, for he continued to preach with as great vehemence and zeal as ever he did, until about two weeks before he died. At the end of a letter dated 26 May 1572, he describes himself as 'lying in St Andrews, half-dead'.<sup>100</sup> Finally, in his last will and testament drawn up in Edinburgh and dated 13 January 1572, Knox speaks of himself as 'a dead man for almost two years past'.<sup>101</sup>

It would appear reasonable to conclude that when Knox speaks in these terms about himself, he is referring to his physical exhaustion and weakness. His stroke may not have left him with any marked residual paralysis, but it had made him much

weaker than he was before. Following his stroke, he was now able to preach only on Sundays. Also, when he went to St Giles to preach at noon each Sunday, he had to be helped across the street and up into the pulpit.<sup>102</sup>

### *The year 1571*

In 1571 it became obvious that because of his increasing physical weakness and because of the political situation in Edinburgh, Knox should leave the city. In April an unsuccessful attempt on his life had alarmed his friends, but he was still very reluctant to go. Finally, on 30 April a proclamation came out from the Castle that all Queen Mary's enemies must leave the City of Edinburgh within six hours and although he protested, this left Knox with no choice but to leave. He left on 5 May, crossed the Forth three days later and then proceeded by easy stages to St Andrews, accompanied by his wife Margaret and their three small daughters, together with Bannatyne, Knox's faithful secretary. They arrived in St Andrews at the beginning of July and were accommodated in the Novum Hospitium of the Priory near St Leonard's College.<sup>103</sup>

On 5 August 1571, the Twenty-sixth General Assembly met at Stirling, but Knox was too weak to attend. In a letter he wrote to the Assembly, he spoke of 'the daily decay of natural strength which threatens my certain and sudden departure from the misery of this life'.<sup>104</sup>

Even though he was so weak and ill at this time, Knox preached every Sunday in the parish Church of Holy Trinity, expounding the book of the prophet Daniel.<sup>105</sup> In his congregation was a young theological student called James Melville, who was the nephew of Andrew Melville, the joint architect with Knox of Presbyterianism in Scotland.<sup>106</sup> James was 15 years old at the time and kept a diary in which he recorded his impression of Knox as he preached. He wrote as follows:

I saw him every day of his preaching go carefully and slowly, with a fur of marten-skin about his neck, a staff in one hand, and good godly Richard Bannatyne, his servant, supporting his other arm, from the Abbey to the parish Kirk; and by the said Richard and another servant, lifted up to the pulpit, where he behoved to lean at his first entry; but, ere he had done with his sermon he was so active and vigorous that he was like to break the pulpit in pieces and fly out of it.<sup>107</sup>

Although his body was weak, Knox's mind was still acute and active. His preaching could still fascinate and thrill his hearers, as Melville testifies. He used to take a notebook and pen to record Knox's sermons, but he found that as the sermon proceeded he became so enthralled and excited that his note-taking became impossible because he was unable to hold his pen steady.<sup>108</sup>

### *The year 1572*

Knox's bodily strength was now declining fast. At the end of the letter dated 26 May 1572, he describes himself as 'lying in St Andrews, half dead'.<sup>109</sup> On 12 July he confesses that 'as the world is weary of me, so am I of it', and seven days later he writes that 'out of bed, and from my book, I come not but once in the week'.<sup>110</sup> However, even in bed he still continued to study and to write. In this closing year of his life, Knox completed the fourth book of his *History of the Reformation* and issued his last publication, a 40-page pamphlet in answer to a letter written by a Scottish Jesuit called James Tyrie. In the preface to this pamphlet, Knox says that he is writing it in 'these dolorous days, after that I have taken goodnight of the world'.<sup>111</sup>

Meanwhile, the situation in Edinburgh had improved and on 4 August, two commissioners were sent to St Andrews with a letter signed by members of the congregation inviting Knox to return to St Giles, because John Craig, his successor there, had been translated to Montrose. In spite of his great weariness he readily agreed and set off by ship for Edinburgh on 17 August, landing at Leith on the twenty-third. Reaching Edinburgh, he took up residence with his family in a new home in the High Street hard by the Netherbow, the house known today as John Knox's House, which is situated within sight of St Giles.<sup>112</sup>

On Sunday 31 August, Knox preached once again in the great Church of St Giles. The acoustics in St Giles had never been good, but his voice was now so weak that few of the congregation could hear him. On the Sundays which still remained to him, he arranged to preach in the smaller building of the Outer Tolbooth, which had been created about 1564 by dividing off the west end of the nave of the Cathedral. The building so created had two storeys; the lower one was used as a Law court and Council chamber, and the upper one for worship. It was in this much smaller accommodation of the Upper Tolbooth that Knox chose to preach his final series of sermons.<sup>113</sup>

About six weeks before Knox died, we have a description of him written by Sir Henry Killigrew, the newly-appointed English ambassador to the Scottish court. It was contained in a letter from Killigrew to his superiors in London, Lord Burghley (William Cecil) and the Earl of Leicester. The ambassador reported as follows:

John Knox is now so feeble as scarce can he stand alone, or speak to be heard of any audience; yet doth he...every Sunday cause himself to be carried to a place where a certain number do hear him and doth preach with the same vehemence and zeal that he ever did.<sup>114</sup>

Although he could still preach with great energy as Killigrew has described, he was quite unable to cope with the pastoral work demanded of him, and so a colleague was sought for him to help in the work of the parish.

On Sunday 9 November, Knox preached his last sermon and performed his last public duty. Having preached the sermon at the service in the Upper Tolbooth, he then proceeded into the great Church where he was helped up into the pulpit and inducted James Lawson, the Vice-Principal of Aberdeen University, to be his colleague and successor as the minister of St Giles. At the close of the service he pronounced his blessing on the people. Then, leaning on his staff, he walked slowly back to his house near the Netherbow, escorted by almost the whole congregation. He never emerged from this house alive again.<sup>115</sup>

#### HIS LAST DAYS

Knox's secretary, Richard Bannatyne, in his *Memorials of Transactions in Scotland* gives a day-to-day account of the last two weeks of Knox's life on earth.<sup>116</sup>

On Tuesday 11 November 1572, Knox had a severe fit of coughing and brought up a great deal of phlegm, which left him very breathless.<sup>117</sup> His friends, urged him 'to call for the assistance of physicians, particularly of Dr Preston. He readily complied, saying that he was unwilling to despise or neglect ordinary means'.<sup>118</sup> After this he rapidly grew weaker, and by Thursday he was too ill to continue his daily reading of passages from the Bible. From this time on, his wife and Bannatyne took turns to read to him such passages of Scripture as he asked them to read each day. On the Friday he got up and said he must go to St Giles and preach, for he thought it was Sunday.

On several days he was visited by friends and public figures and was even able to sit at table with them. At his request, the Kirk Session of St Giles visited him on Monday the seventeenth, but the exertion of addressing the elders and deacons was too much and after this 'he became much worse; his difficulty in breathing increased, and he could not speak without great and obvious pain'.<sup>119</sup> Conscious that the end was not far off, on Friday the twenty-first he asked Bannatyne to order the wooden coffin or 'kist' in which he would be buried.<sup>120</sup> On Sunday the twenty-third 'he breathed with greater difficulty' and it was obvious to those who were with him that his death was not far off.<sup>121</sup>

On Monday 24 November, about ten o'clock in the morning, he got up and dressed and sat in a chair for about half an hour. He then returned to bed. When Robert Campbell, one of those who were sitting by his bedside asked him if he had any pain, Knox replied, 'It is no painful pain, but such a pain as, I trust, shall put an end to this battle'.<sup>122</sup>

About five o'clock he asked his wife to read the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians and then the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel. Of this latter chapter he said it was 'where I cast my first anchor'.<sup>123</sup> After his wife had read to him, he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke he lay quiet for some hours, occasionally asking for his lips to be moistened with a little weak ale. At half past ten the company had family worship in which his physician, Dr Preston joined, and which Knox indicated that he heard by raising his hand. About 11 o'clock he gave a long sigh and a sob and suddenly said, 'Now it is come' and died peacefully, without any struggle or obvious pain.<sup>124</sup>

He was buried on Wednesday 26 November, in the Churchyard on the south side of St Giles, which at that time extended from the Church southwards down to the Cowgate. This Churchyard was wholly covered over in 1633 when Parliament House and other buildings were erected on the site, and so the grave is no longer identifiable.

The great crowd of mourners was led from the house to the graveside by James Douglas, the fourth Earl of Morton, who had been elected Regent on the very day of Knox's death. Morton was known for his laconic manner of speech,<sup>125</sup> and after the grave was filled in, he uttered his memorable eulogy, 'Here lies one who neither feared nor flattered any flesh'.<sup>126</sup>

#### THE CAUSE OF DEATH

Knox died in his fifty-eighth year. For the last 25 years of his life he had carried an intolerable burden of ecclesiastical, political and pastoral responsibility which grew heavier as the years passed. During those years he contracted fevers whose nature is unknown, but which could have included malaria (tertian ague). He had attacks of renal colic and experienced periods of intense stress and physical weakness. In his fifty-sixth year, Knox appears to have had a mild stroke.

Our final question in this description of his medical history concerns the cause of his death. It has been suggested that he had a second stroke some two years after his first one and that this was the cause of his death.<sup>127</sup> This seems unlikely. The clinical features of his terminal illness are not those of cerebrovascular disease, but of respiratory disease.

Cough is only mentioned at the onset of the disease on Tuesday 11 November, when it was described as producing a great deal of phlegm and leaving Knox breathless and very weak.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, the accounts of his last days mention his breathlessness on several occasions, particularly after entertaining his many visitors. The exertion of speaking to the Kirk Session of St Giles when the members visited

him at his request, increased his breathlessness and made speaking painful.<sup>129</sup> After the service at St Giles on the Sunday immediately before his death, some of the congregation visited Knox, and Bannatyne tells us that they 'seeing him draw his breath so shortly, asked him if he had any pain'. Knox's answer to their question was, 'I have no more pain than he that is now in heaven'.<sup>130</sup> On the following day, he assured his friend Robert Campbell that it was not a painful pain he had for 'he did not consider nor feel that to be pain which should put an end to so many distresses, and be the beginning of eternal joy'.<sup>131</sup>

During the last two weeks or so of his life, Knox became gradually physically weaker and Smeton notes how extremely attentive his wife was to him in his weakness.<sup>132</sup> He became unable to continue his regular daily reading of the Bible and others took turns to read to him.<sup>133</sup>

The clinical picture of Knox's illness includes all the major symptoms of respiratory disease, except haemoptysis. This suggests that he died from a lower respiratory tract infection, probably acute bronchopneumonia.<sup>134</sup> Knox's elderly age and his extreme exhaustion predisposed him to the development of this disease and to the fatal outcome to which it often leads in older people. Once he had become a public figure, his life had been mainly one of ceaseless activity and unremitting toil. He died an exhausted man, but he had proved himself to be a great Christian leader and a statesman who became 'the reformer of his Church's faith and the assertor of his country's liberty'.<sup>135</sup> He had exhausted himself in his battle for the political, social and, above all, the religious freedom of his people and his country.

Knox may not have left much in the way of medical records from which we can reconstruct his medical history, but he left his people a national and religious legacy on which they could build the future freedom and progress of their country. The influence of this legacy can still be seen in the life, character, literature and institutions of Scotland today.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Dr Bryan Ashworth FRCPE for his advice on the interpretation of the clinical features of the stroke which Knox suffered in 1570.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

##### *Key to abbreviations*

Bannatyne = Bannatyne R. Memorials of transactions in Scotland 1569-1573. Pitcairn R ed. Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1836.

Brown = Brown P H. John Knox: a biography. London: A & C Black, 1895.

Cowan = Cowan H. John Knox: the hero of the Scottish Reformation. New York: Putnam, 1905.

Dickinson = Dickinson WC (ed). John Knox's history of the Reformation in Scotland. London: Thomas Nelson, 1949. In this edition the spelling has been modernised throughout, but vernacular words which are still in current use at the present day have been retained.

McCrie = McCrie T. Life of John Knox. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1840.

McCrie, *Iones* - McCrie T. Beza's *Iones*: contemporary portraits of reformers of religion and letters. London: Religious Tract Society, 1909.

Melville = Melville J. *The diary of Mr James Melville 1556-1601*. Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1829.

Percy = Percy E. *John Knox*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937.

Reid = Reid WS. *Trumpeter of God: a biography of John Knox*. New York: Scribners, 1974.

Ridley = Ridley J. *John Knox*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Smeton = *The account of Knox's last illness and death*. Published by Thomas Smeton in 1579 and included by Laing in Works 6:649-60. See Reference 6 below.

Works = Laing D. *The works of John Knox*. Edinburgh: Wodrow Society (Vol. 1,2) and TG Stevenson (Vol. 3-6), 1846-1864. Reprinted in 1895 by James Thin, Edinburgh. Laing was librarian of the Signet Library in Edinburgh from 1837 to 1878 and secretary to the Bannatyne Club until its demise in 1861.

Whitley = Whitley E. *Plain Mr Knox*. London: Skeffington, 1960.

<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson J. The medical history of Martin Luther. *Proc R Coll Physicians Edinb* 1996; 26:115-34.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson J. The medical history of John Calvin. *Proc R Coll Physicians Edinb* 1992; 22:368-83.

<sup>3</sup> There have been several editions of Knox's *History of the Reformation* including those by David Buchanan (1644), David Laing (1864) and William Croft Dickinson (1949).

<sup>4</sup> Dickinson WC. A new history of Scotland. London: Thomas Nelson, 1961; 1:319, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Dickinson, 1: xciii-xcv. Both Richard Bannatyne, Knox's secretary, and David Buchanan, the editor of the 1644 edition of Knox's *History of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Robert Bryson), have been suggested as the author, but both are excluded on the grounds of the style of writing of the Book. See Works 2: 468.

<sup>6</sup> Works 6: 645-60. The introduction to this account states that it was 'drawn up by a pious and learned man, who sat by Knox during his sickness until his latest breath' (649). Laing believed that this man was James Lawson, Knox's colleague at St Giles (648). The English translation of the Latin text of this account was published in 1802, probably the work of Thomas McCrie, Knox's biographer (646).

<sup>7</sup> This statement about John Knox's lineal connection with the Renfrewshire family of Knox was first made in print by David Buchanan in the account of *The life and death of John Knox* which he prefixed to his edition of Knox's *History of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Robert Bryson, 1644). The statement will be found on page ii of the 1732 edition. Although McCrie accepts it on the first page of his biography of Knox, Hume Brown (1:5) dismisses it as lacking evidence and not worth serious consideration.

<sup>8</sup> Jamieson JH. John Knox and East Lothian. *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalist Society* 1938; 3:51.

<sup>9</sup> Ridley 14.

<sup>10</sup> Brown 1:4, n.2.

<sup>11</sup> Brown 1:10.

<sup>12</sup> To a letter written by Knox to Mrs Janet Adamson and Mrs Janet Henderson from Lyons in 1557 (Letter XXXV), an early annotator added the following comment after Knox's signature as John Sinclair: 'This was his mother's surname which he wrote in time of trouble'. See Works 4: 225,245.

<sup>13</sup> Brown 1:8, n.1.

<sup>14</sup> Brown 1:8.

<sup>15</sup> Brown 1:5. See also Works 2:323, Dickinson 2:38.

<sup>16</sup> Works 6: xvi; Ridley 13. See also Whitley 17: 'We hear of no younger brothers and sisters, which strengthens the possibility that it was the father who was killed at Flodden'.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson JM. *New light on John Knox*. Edinburgh: Miniprint Publishers, 1979; second edition, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Works 6:lxxv.

<sup>20</sup> Works 6:lxxv-lxxviii. See also Crawford W. *Knox genealogy*. Edinburgh: GP Johnstone, 1896; Appendix II: The descendants of William Knox.

<sup>21</sup> Spottiswoode J. *History of the Church of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1850; 2:180.

- <sup>22</sup> Cowan 22, n. 1. On the date of Knox's birth see Fleming DH in *The Scotsman* of 27 May 1904 and *The Bookman* of 1905. For a more recent detailed discussion see Ridley 531-4: Appendix I. The date of Knox's birth.
- <sup>23</sup> Percy 9.
- <sup>24</sup> Brown 1:10.
- <sup>25</sup> Sinclair J (ed). *The statistical account of Scotland 1773-1794*. Wakefield: EP Publishing Ltd, 1975; vol.2, The Lothians: section vi, 504. This is a reissue of the original edition of this volume published in 1791.
- <sup>26</sup> Jamieson JH. John Knox and East Lothian. *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalist Society* 1938; 3:63-5. See also Cowan 25-9. Cowan includes a photograph of the site with the tree, opposite p24 of his book. Jane Welsh Carlyle is buried in the ruined choir of St Mary's Church, Haddington.
- <sup>27</sup> Ridley 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Brown 1:18-19.
- <sup>29</sup> Ridley 15.
- <sup>30</sup> McCrie 2; Brown 1:20; Ridley 535: Appendix II. Knox's University.
- <sup>31</sup> Works 1:555-8: Appendix XIV. On the title of Sir, applied to priests. See also Brown 1:59; Dickinson 1:xxxii, n.2. Examples of papal knights are found in Shakespeare's plays, e.g. Sir Oliver Martext, the vicar in *As you like it* and Sir Nathaniel, the verbose curate in *Love's labour's lost*.
- <sup>32</sup> Ridley 17. However, Dickinson says 'he does not appear to have taken a degree' (1:xxxii). The records of St Andrews University show that this was not uncommon at this time. Thus from 1513 to 1579, out of 1000 students each year, an average of only 26 took an ordinary degree and only 10 took a master's degree. See Anderson JM op. cit. 2.
- <sup>33</sup> Ridley 17; Beza. *Iovnes* Geneva: 1580; Sig. Ee3. See McCrie, *Iovnes* 227-32. Knox's portrait is opposite p227. See also Reference 74 below.
- <sup>34</sup> Brown 1:29.
- <sup>35</sup> Hewat K. *Makers of the Scottish Church at the Reformation*. Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace, 1920; 17. 'In language and in style the History is a masterpiece, written by a man who could marshal words to meet his mood': Dickinson 1:lxxix. Knox has been described as 'the first, almost the only, great prose writer in the vernacular' by Aeneas Mackay in the *Dictionary of national biography*, edited by Sidney Lee. London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1892; 31:308; art., Knox J.
- <sup>36</sup> Hewat op. cit. 16.
- <sup>37</sup> Works 2:334; Dickinson 2:46; McCrie 236.
- <sup>38</sup> Innes AT. *John Knox* Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier 1896; 145.
- <sup>39</sup> McCrie 8.
- <sup>40</sup> Whitley 18. The church was called the Lamp of Lothian (*Lucerna Laudoniae*) because when its lofty choir was lit up at night, it could be seen for miles around. See Miller J. *The Lamp of Lothian or the history of Haddington*. Haddington: James Allan, 1844; 384.
- <sup>41</sup> Ridley 17-18.
- <sup>42</sup> Works 1:185-6; Dickinson 1:82; Ridley 26.
- <sup>43</sup> Works 1:95; Dickinson 1:42; Cowan 53; Ridley 31.
- <sup>44</sup> Calderwood D. *History of the Kirk of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1842; 1:155-6. This work was originally written around 1650.
- <sup>45</sup> Works 1:125; Dickinson 1:60.
- <sup>46</sup> Cowan 56-60; Percy 20.
- <sup>47</sup> Works 1:137; Dickinson 1:67.
- <sup>48</sup> Whitley 23.
- <sup>49</sup> Works 1:185; Dickinson 1:81-2.
- <sup>50</sup> Brown 1:81.
- <sup>51</sup> Reid 55-7. See also Marteilhe J. *Memoirs of a Protestant condemned to the galleys of France for his religion*. Translated by Oliver Goldsmith. London: Religious Tract Society, 1866. The original French edition of this book was published in 1704.
- <sup>52</sup> Works 6:104. Letter XLVII: Knox to Mrs Anna Locke from St Andrews dated 31 December 1559. See also Brown 2:66.
- <sup>54</sup> Works 3:8. Epistle of Knox to the congregation of the Castle of St Andrews 1548.
- <sup>55</sup> Ridley 67.
- <sup>56</sup> This attack of fever appears to have occurred when Knox's galley was lying off the Scottish coast between Dundee and St Andrews on the second occasion on which the galleys returned to Scotland. See Works 1:228; Dickinson 1:109; McCrie 43; Brown 1:85.

- <sup>57</sup> Brown 1:80; Cowan 81.
- <sup>58</sup> Macmillan D. John Knox: a biography. London: Andrew Melrose, 1905; 37.
- <sup>59</sup> Whitley 48.
- <sup>60</sup> Works 3:376. Letter XVII: Knox to Mrs Bowes probably from London dated 20 September 1553. In the same year, Knox addresses a letter from Newcastle to 'Dear mother and spouse'. See Works 3:369. Letter XV: Knox to Mrs Bowes dated January 1553.
- <sup>61</sup> Cowan 134; Ridley 140-3.
- <sup>62</sup> Johannes Calvini Opera. Brunswick: Schwelschke 1863-1900; 18:cols. 433-4. Letter 3377: Calvin to Knox dated 23 April 1561. English translation in Works 6:123-4.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid. cols. 434-6. Letter 3378: Calvin to Goodman of the same date. English translation in Works 6:125. Knox himself in his will drawn up on 13 May 1572, spoke of Marjory as 'the dearest mother...of blessed memory' of his two sons, Nathaniel and Eleazar (Works 6: lvi-lvii).
- <sup>64</sup> Works 6:lxiii; Cowan 391.
- <sup>65</sup> Crawford W. Knox genealogy. Edinburgh: GP Johnstone, 1896; 3.
- <sup>66</sup> Works 2:138; Dickinson 1:351.
- <sup>67</sup> Ridley 143.
- <sup>68</sup> Works 6:533. Letter LXXIII: Thomas Randolph to Sir William Cecil from Edinburgh dated 18 March 1564. By this the Queen meant that Margaret was of the royal House of Stewart.
- <sup>69</sup> Brown 1:85. See also Smeton 649. Smeton speaks of Knox having 'a frail and weak body', but this is a description of Knox in his old age, not very long before his death.
- <sup>70</sup> Ridley 68.
- <sup>71</sup> Reid 32.
- <sup>72</sup> Brown 2:322-4. Brown gives the original Latin version of the letter.
- <sup>73</sup> Dickinson 1:lxxxvii.
- <sup>74</sup> Whitley 29; Brown 2:320-4; Ridley, Frontispiece. See Carruthers W. On the genuine and spurious portraits of Knox. *United Free Church Magazine* May 1906; 16-21.
- <sup>75</sup> McCrie 120.
- <sup>76</sup> McCrie 43.
- <sup>77</sup> Ridley 103. See note on the sweating sickness in Wilkinson J. The medical history of Martin Luther. *Proc R Coll Physicians Edinb* 1996; 26:132, n.52.
- <sup>78</sup> Works 3:167, n.2. A Godly Letter to the Faithfull in London, Newcastle & Berwick, dated 1554.
- <sup>79</sup> Works 6:77. Letter XXXIV: Knox to Mrs Anna Locke from St Andrews dated 2 September 1559. See also McCrie 173.
- <sup>80</sup> Works 3:90. A Confession and Declaration of Prayer dated in the month of July 1552; Works 3:364. Letter XI: Knox to Mrs Bowes from Newcastle dated 23 March 1553. See also McCrie 59; Ridley 152.
- <sup>81</sup> Works 3:351. Letter IV: Knox to Mrs Bowes from Newcastle during 1553.
- <sup>82</sup> Reid 75.
- <sup>83</sup> MacCunn FA. John Knox. London: Methuen, 1895; 13.
- <sup>84</sup> Wilkinson J. The medical history of Martin Luther. *Proc R Coll Physicians Edinb* 1996; 26:124-5.
- <sup>85</sup> Johannes Calvini Opera. Brunswick: Schwelschke 1863-1900; 20: col. 34. Letter 3961: Calvin to Margaret, Queen of Navarre, dated 1 June 1563. This letter was written in French.
- <sup>86</sup> Works 2:403-21; Dickinson 2:93-100.
- <sup>87</sup> Works 3:364. Letter XI: Knox to Mrs Bowes from Newcastle dated 23 March 1553.
- <sup>88</sup> Works 6:77. Letter XXXIV: Knox to Mrs Anna Locke from St Andrews dated 2 September 1559. See McCrie 173.
- <sup>89</sup> Works 6:88. Letter XXXVIII: Knox to Gregory Raylton from Edinburgh dated midnight of 23 October 1559.
- <sup>90</sup> Ridley 105.
- <sup>91</sup> Brown 1:151.
- <sup>92</sup> Brown 2:253.
- <sup>93</sup> Bannatyne 62; McCrie 314. The word 'resolution' used by Bannatyne is from the Latin verb *resolu*, to loosen, which in medical authors was used to denote paralysis. See Celsus, De Medicina 3:27, 1A (Loeb edition 1:345).
- <sup>94</sup> Works 6:479. Title page to An Answer to the Letter of James Tyrie, a Scottish Jesuit. This was originally written in 1565 but was revised in 1572, as Knox tells Sir John Wishart of Pittarrow in his letter of 19 July of that year (Works 6:617). The note thus dates from 1572.
- <sup>95</sup> Bannatyne 62.

<sup>96</sup> McCrie, *Ianies* 230.

<sup>97</sup> McCrie 333.

<sup>98</sup> Works 6:569. Letter LXXXVIII: Knox to Sir William Cecil from Edinburgh dated 2 January 1569.

<sup>99</sup> Works 6:482. Preface to An Answer to the Letter of James Tyrie, a Scottish Jesuit, 1572.

<sup>100</sup> Works 6:616. Letter CI: Knox to Sir James Douglas of Drumlanrig from St Andrews dated 26 May 1572. See also Brown 2:274.

<sup>101</sup> Works 6:lv. Knox's Last Will and Testament. See also McCrie 499.

<sup>102</sup> Bannatyne 62; McCrie 319.

<sup>103</sup> Melville 26; Brown 2:266, n.1.

<sup>104</sup> Works 6:604-5. Letter XCVII: Knox to the General Assembly at Stirling written from St Andrews and dated 3 August 1571.

<sup>105</sup> Bannatyne 255; Melville 21.

<sup>106</sup> Pitcairn R (ed). The autobiography and diary of Mr James Melville. Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society 1842; i-lxiv. This is a short biography of Melville prefixed to the book by the editor.

<sup>107</sup> Melville 26; Dickinson 1:lxvi.

<sup>108</sup> Melville 21.

<sup>109</sup> See Reference 100 above.

<sup>110</sup> Dickinson 1:lxvi-lxvii; Works 6:617. Letter CII: Knox to Sir John Wishart of Pittarrow from St Andrews dated 19 July 1572.

<sup>111</sup> Works 6:473-520. An Answer to a Letter written by James Tyrie, A Scottish Jesuit, 1572.

<sup>112</sup> This house is on the north side of the High Street about a quarter of a mile down from St Giles. It was allocated to Knox by the Town Council which was responsible for his accommodation. Its owner was James Mosman, a goldsmith, whose father had made the crown for Mary of Guise-Lorraine when she became the queen of James V in 1538. Mosman, being a supporter of Mary, Queen of Scots, had removed to the security of the Castle, leaving the house at the disposal of the Council. See Brown 2:315-19; Cowan 383-90.

<sup>113</sup> Bannatyne 263. See Lees JC. St Giles', Edinburgh: church, college & cathedral. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers 1889; 157-8 and Dunlop AI. The kirks of Edinburgh 1560-1984. Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society, 1988; 1. See also Works 6:631, n.2.

<sup>114</sup> Works 6:633. Letter CVIII: Sir Henry Killigrew to Lord Burghley (William Cecil) and Robert, Earl of Leicester, from Edinburgh dated 6 October 1572.

<sup>115</sup> Smeton 654; McCrie 337-8; Ridley 515.

<sup>116</sup> The events of the last days of the life of Knox are described on pages 281-9 of Bannatyne's *Memorials*. This section of the *Memorials* was published separately in an annotated edition with modernised spelling by Fleming DH (Edinburgh: The Knox Club, 1913).

<sup>117</sup> Bannatyne 281; Smeton 654. Smeton speaks of 'a continual defluxion' or flow of phlegm, which obstructed Knox's air passages and made his breathing difficult. Smeton also gives the date on which this fit of severe coughing occurred as Monday 10 November.

<sup>118</sup> Smeton 654.

<sup>119</sup> Bannatyne 285; McCrie 342.

<sup>120</sup> Bannatyne 287; Smeton 658.

<sup>121</sup> Smeton 658.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Bannatyne 288; Smeton 659.

<sup>124</sup> Bannatyne 289; McCrie 346.

<sup>125</sup> Melville 84. Melville notes that Morton's speech was laconic even on the scaffold. See also Bannatyne 331.

<sup>126</sup> Melville 47; Bannatyne 290; Brown 2:288, n. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Pearce GR. John Knox. London: Duckworth, 1936; 139.

<sup>128</sup> Bannatyne 281; Smeton 654.

<sup>129</sup> Bannatyne 285; McCrie 342.

<sup>130</sup> Smeton 641-2.

<sup>131</sup> Bannatyne 288; Smeton 658.

<sup>132</sup> Smeton 654.

<sup>133</sup> Bannatyne 285.

<sup>134</sup> This disease is commonly known as 'the old man's friend' as it often occurs as the terminal stage in the illnesses of elderly people.

<sup>135</sup> McCrie, *Ianies* 231.