

The History of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh—The Prestons.

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During the first century in the history of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, there were two outstanding men responsible for its welfare, James Sutherland, the first Keeper of the Garden, and Charles Alston, who followed and held office for fifty-five years.

The history of the Garden from its inception in 1670 until the end of Sutherland's tenancy formed the subject of the preceding number of these Notes; and now, before passing to Alston, we have to take further notice of three men already mentioned, William Arthur, and the two Prestons.

Regarding Arthur, who succeeded Sutherland as King's Botanist in 1715, we need say little, for his connection with the Garden was a brief one, and an account of his life has already been published. (2) We would refer the reader to that account, and would merely remark that being an extreme Jacobite he fled from the country after the 1715 rebellion and died in Rome in 1716—"from eating figs."

The Prestons occupy a unique position in our narrative, since neither of them at any time held charge of the Royal Garden. It will be remembered that Sutherland, who had created three gardens within the city, on retirement from his Professorship in the Town's College in 1706, handed over charge of the Physick Garden at Trinity Hospital to Charles Preston, but meanwhile he continued to be King's Botanist and Regius Professor. There were thus two contemporary professors of botany in Edinburgh, each with charge of a separate physic garden. This state of affairs lasted for over thirty years, until George Preston, who had succeeded his brother Charles in 1712, resigned in 1738, when the gardens came again under the control of one person, Charles Alston.

It has been necessary very briefly to recapitulate these facts because the sequence of the early Keepers of the Garden has hitherto been misunderstood and erroneous statements have been made by various writers concerning them. It is now apparent that the Prestons, having held charge of the Town's Garden only, have merely an indirect claim to consideration in connection with the Royal Botanic Garden, but

NOTE :—The numbers in round brackets relate to the bibliographical references. Interpolated remarks are enclosed in square brackets. Except where there is an obvious error, the spelling of the original text is retained.

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none the less they played an important part in the development of the present Garden, so that our story would be incomplete without some reference to them. Accordingly, a chapter is devoted to their activities and, as before, use is made of original documents and literature applicable to the purpose.

Excerpts from some of Charles Preston's letters, which will be of special interest to botanists, are also included.

Charles Preston.

1660-1711.

From the Parish Register of Lasswade in Midlothian we learn that Charles, son of Robert and Margaret Preston, was born on the 12th July, 1660, and moreover that Lord Cardross and Charles Monteath of Randefurd signed the register as witnesses. (45) The Record of Testaments (28-33) enables us to trace his family, showing that Charles was the grandson of John Preston, Kt., 4th of Valleyfield, who had two sons. The elder, George, inherited the title and became 5th of Valleyfield in 1637. The younger, Robert, who was the father of Charles, in 1663 obtained a charter of the lands of Preston, an estate afterwards known as Gorton, delightfully situated on the banks of the North Esk not far from Hawthornden in Midlothian. In 1672 Robert Preston became a senator of the Royal College of Justice and was knighted. Sir Robert was twice married. His first wife bore him two sons, Robert and Arthur. He was married again in 1657 to Margaret Bothwell, and Charles was the second child of this union.

We know nothing of the early life of Charles Preston, but there is little doubt that he was brought up in comfortable surroundings amid a wide circle of family friends.

Our first definite information is of Preston as a young man in his early twenties, when mention is made of his name in Erskine of Carnock's Journal, a work which is a stirring commentary upon life in those troublous times. (16) Erskine of Carnock was the third son of the Lord Cardross to whom we have referred, and he was two years younger than his friend Charles Preston. Destined for the Bar, he studied in Edinburgh—"but laureation was denied him as he refused to take the oath affirming the King's supremacy in ecclesiastical as well as civil matters." Charles' name appears but seldom in the Journal, yet the two men seem to have been close friends, companions on their walks near Edinburgh, and each visiting the other's home. We learn with interest that at the age of twenty-four Charles had already acquired a keenness for the study of plants and that he was at least a casual visitor to the Physic Garden. Several of the entries in the Journal which mention Charles Preston are worth quoting.

"May 8th [1684].—Forenoon, I was in the Physick Garden with Alexander and Charles Preston."

"May 10th.—I went to the Park this morning with Alexander and Charles Preston and Mr. John Magie, that I might learn to know the field herbs. I was with my brother."

"May 15th.—This morning I went to the Park with Charles Preston and John Magie, that I might learn the herbs, and stayed with them till about twelve."

"12th June.—I dined with my brother. My mother, and my sister Magdalen took horse about 8 at night. Cha. Preston went with her."

"July 30th.—I came from Boquhan to Torrie where was Charles Preston, Miss Mag. Lumsden, and Miss Preston, Valleyfield's daughter."

"August 6th.—I went to the Valleyfield, and from that to Overtoun with Charles Preston, where I saw the men, who were indeed very ill wounded, and very innocently, having only come to the door with their cloaths scarce on, and making no resistance, two of them not being together at that time."

"August 11th.—I took boat this forenoon at Cromy with Charles Preston and my brother William, and came to Blackness, where, in the castle, we did visit Mr. William Erskine, a presbyterian minister who had been a prisoner there a long time, and also the Lady Caldwell, who was prisoner there."

"In the afternoon Charles Preston and I came to Cramond Bridge on foot, where we stayed all night in a smith's house, there being a great rain when we came there."

"Augt. 15th.—I was in company at night with James and Walter Stewarts, Mr. James Stevenson, Robert Park, Mr. Patrick Shiels. I dined in an inn with Mr. Gray, a west country curate, he being with Charles Preston, yet not very willingly, tho' he was very discreet to me and moderate in his discourse in respect of others; but it troubled me when I remembered that David did not so much as (sit) with dissemblers, which I took the most part of them to be."

"Sept. 17th.—The Chancellour went for Drummond early this morning. I was with Alexander and Charles Preston and with Lathallan."

"January 2nd, 1685.—I met with James Lumsden, my cousin, who was lately come from Holland. I was at night with Preston of that Ilk, and Alexander and Charles his brothers."

"Jan. 9th.—I was a while with Charles Preston in his mother's."

"Aug. 24th. 1685.—I read upon Durham on the Revelation, wherein I delighted much. My sister Veronica came to see me but stayed not, Charles Preston and his sister Mary, who knew nothing of my being here, waiting for her return. This night my Lady Kincardine came home to the Abbey, having been at the Court at London with her daughter Ochiltree's Lady."

"Sept. 29th.—Mrs. Margaret Ker came from Blackness with her, and Ch. Preston was with her."

"February 15th, 1684.—I was in company with Alexander Preston,