

EPILOGUE

In September 2003 I boarded a limousine bus from Edinburgh airport bound for the city. The summer's Edinburgh Festival had just ended and quiet was beginning to return to the streets. I was headed for Donaldson's College, a splendid building designed by William Henry Playfair (1790–1857) that lay just outside the city, facing the bus route. Surrounded by lawns and looking like some sort of castle, it presided over a spacious site of 1.58 acres (Figure 6).²⁰²

Until 1992, the school was known as Donaldson's Hospital. Founded by James Donaldson, it is a school for children with special needs. Children aged three to eighteen board at the school, which is among the world's leading institutions for the hearing impaired. My visit fell just during the break between school years, so there were no children in sight as most had returned to their families for the holidays.

Dr. George Montgomery, a gentleman of about sixty thoroughly conversant with the history of the school, showed me around the building. As one sees in many old schools in England, the courtyards and corridors were spacious. The rooms were not much decorated but all the ceilings were high. When I remarked on the pleasantly open feeling the high ceilings gave the rooms, my guide remarked wryly that in winter all the heat was likely to rise to the ceiling, so one could feel quite cold sitting there.

When I explained that I was studying James Donaldson and his father Alexander,



Figure 6. Former Donaldson's College. Photograph by Yamada Shōji.

²⁰² Donaldson's College was moved to the suburbs of Edinburgh in 2008.

my guide said “Matters of literary property?” and looked a bit uncomfortable. It seemed clear he did not want to hear the founder called a “pirate publisher,” but he showed me into the library-cum-gallery of the school. Among the many items on display I saw James Donaldson’s will. Apparently it had been found in his safe the day after he died. It wasn’t the original, but had been written in a flowing cursive hand giving an authentic feel of history copied into a notebook. It read as follows:

‘At Broughton Hall the 4th of July eighteen hundred and twenty-eight, I, James Donaldson, of Broughton Hall and Broughton Park, declare this to be my last Will and Testament, with liberty to add, eik, pare, and alter at any time, even on [my] death-bed (cancelling and annulling all my former Wills, Codicils, etc.).

‘I leave all my property, heritable and personal, viz.:—

My Stock 3 per cent. Consols, £100,000;

Bank of England Stock; Stock New 4 per Cents.;

Bank of Scotland Stock; Royal Bank Stock;

Deposit Money, Bank of Scotland;

Property, Broughton Hall and Broughton Park;

ditto Princes Street;

ditto Castle Hill, and of whatever description which I may possess at my death;

Annual Rents;

to build and found an Hospital for Boys and Girls, to be called Donaldson’s Hospital, preferring those of the name of Donaldson and Marshall’ (which latter was his mother’s name), ‘to be after the plan of the Orphan Hospital in Edinburgh and John Watson’s Hospital’;

According to this will, in other words, all the considerable wealth that had accumulated from the publishing business James carried on from his father’s generation was to be used to build a charitable home for needy children. The entire amount involved must have come to a figure of several millions of pounds in the currency of today, but since the value of land was quite different at that time, it is difficult to grasp the total sum of his endowment.

Donaldson’s Hospital was built in accordance with James’ will over a period of nine years beginning 1842. Queen Victoria, who visited in 1850 is said to have remarked that, “It is finer than some of my Scottish palaces.”

Gazing over the broad lawns of the College, I imagined children chasing balls and running around at play. The Donaldsons’ work may have been “pirate publishing,” but the books that they made available at cheap prices satisfied young people’s thirst for knowledge and the wealth they amassed had been used to support the needs of children. One could not deny that their fight to end perpetual copyright had ultimately led, not to

the satisfaction of personal greed, but to the public good. It seemed to me that Alexander Donaldson would have been delighted with his son's decision to invest his wealth in an institution for public welfare. He must have been quite proud of his son.

