
EDITORIAL

Sir Stewart Duke-Elder, Life President, Emeritus Director of Research, and Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Ophthalmology London, formerly Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon to St. George's Hospital Consultant Surgeon to Moorfields Eye Hospital, and Director of Research at the Institute of Ophthalmology died on March 27th at the age of 79.

He was born on April 22nd 1898 at Tealing near Dundee and was the son of a Scottish Minister. Before proceeding to St. Andrew's University in 1915 he had been a brilliant pupil at school and was invariably top of the class. He graduated M.A. in 1919 with first class honours in Natural Science and also took the B.Sc. with distinction in Physiology. He qualified with the N.B., Ch.B. in 1923, obtained the F.R.C.S. England in 1924 and the M.D. of St. Andrews, in which he gained a Gold Medal, in 1925.

Early in his career at the instigation of Sir John Parsons F.R.S. (Moorfields and University College Hospital) he devoted some time to research in the physiology of the eye and in biochemistry.

In his research he naturally became interested in the mechanism of raised intraocular pressure and the causes of glaucoma and in 1932 he published the first Volume of his «Textbook of Ophthalmology» concerning the development form and function of the visual apparatus. In the preface he wrote «This volume is devoted to the fundamental sciences upon which alone a thorough understanding of clinical ophthalmology can rest, and upon which any advances in the treatment of disease must be based».

At an early stage in his career he built up a large private practice and in 1932 he operated upon the then Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald for glaucoma which doubtless brought his name before the public but to ophthalmologists he was already well known for his beautifully written «Textbook of Ophthalmology» Volume I, his clear and concise »Recent Advances in Ophthalmology» published in 1927 and his «Practice of Refraction» published in 1928 which were a striking proof of his knowledge and his ability to describe scientific facts in a clear and attractive manner. At an early age he achieved the distinction of being appointed Surgeon Oculist to King Edward VIII and subsequently to King George VI and then to the present Queen.

He was knighted in 1933.

Duke-Elder was doubtless best known for his many contributions to medical literature, the first and foremost being his «Textbook of Ophthalmology» in seven volumes (1932-1954) which was a stupendous achievement by a man who wrote every word of it himself before it was submitted for typing. In recognition of this magnificent publication he was awarded the Fothergillian Prize of the Medical Society of London for the best British contribution to Medical Literature. Having finished this text book and realising that some of it needed rewriting and bringing up to date he decided to bring out a much larger work entitled the «System of Ophthalmology» in fifteen volumes, the first being published in 1958 and the last in 1976. In several of these volumes he enlisted the help of some of his colleagues, but there is no doubt that the inspiration and direction were his and so was the final transcription to achieve the uniformity and the clarity which was characteris-

tic of all his writings. All this work was moulded in a coherent form, presented in logical sequence, and easy to follow and a joy to read.

Early in life he learned to depend upon fewer hours of sleep than most people need, and that is part of the explanation of his amazing output of learned papers and books from 1924 until the outbreak of the war in 1939, and then again from 1945 onwards.

Apart from these major works and a series of articles in many ophthalmic and scientific journals Duke-Elder was for many years Editor in Chief of the British Journal of Ophthalmology and of Ophthalmic literature in which he maintained the highest standards.

It is perhaps not generally known that the amalgamation of the three main eye hospitals in London (Moorfields, the Royal Westminster and the Central London) and the formation of the Institute of Ophthalmology, in the building of the Central London, was put into action a year before the inauguration of the National Health Service and this was largely due to the efforts of Sir Stewart encouraged and assisted by Sir John Parsons and Ida Mann. It fact as long ago as 1937 Sir Stewart had made plans for an Institute of Ophthalmology in London, for although some useful research work had been done in the British Isles it was mainly clinical and there was no centre where properly organised research work was undertaken. This was especially true of ocular pathology and the basic sciences.

Over the years the Institute has been the means of training numbers of young ophthalmologists in the correct approach to research methods and of encouraging them to continue to make some useful contribution to the science of ophthalmology and not only to become well trained clinicians and ophthalmic surgeons.

It was largely in connection with his work at the Institute, which enjoys an international reputation, that won Sir Stewart a distinction which nowadays is rarely conferred upon members of the medical profession who are primarily involved in clinical work, and more rarely still upon ophthalmologists, namely the Fellowship of the Royal Society. Sir Stewart was the second ophthalmologist to gain this distinction in the present century, the first being the late Sir John Parsons.

Although many countries have produced learned professors of ophthalmology and scientific workers who have dedicated themselves to research work in some particular field, there has been no one who was so universally respected and revered as a leader of ophthalmology as Sir Stewart. He served as President of the International Council of Ophthalmology for a long period and on retiring from the Chair was unanimously elected as an honorary Life President.

For many years he and his charming wife Phyllis had entertained numbers of foreign ophthalmologists at their home in London, and their hospitality and friendliness was well-known.

Sir Stewart was a warm hearted and friendly Scot with a delightfully informal manner. With his charming smile and puckish sense of humour he would at once put strangers at their ease. He also had the ability to listen, and to take a friendly interest in the personal problems of his collea-

* Em homenagem a Sir Stewart Duke-Elder os Arquivos Brasileiros de Oftalmologia publicam este resumo de sua biografia, conseguida graças à colaboração do Dr. Peter Wright.

gues. His advice was invariably sound and given with careful thought. His judgment and timing was quite amazing and always based on a profound knowledge of his subject.

He had the capacity and power of cheerfully over-riding difficulties which to some would have seemed insurmountable. Sometimes at Committee meetings he would sit silently whilst others were arguing at some length, and then quite suddenly and quietly, ratherlike a conjurer producing a rabbit out of a hat, he would sum up the situation with a wise and simple solution showing foresight and judgment and rendering further discussion unnecessary. His private practice was enormous not only because of his clinical skill and judgment, but also because of his kindness and his concern for each patient's welfare, and for the solace he could give even to a patient whose case was hopeless. His opinion was sought from all over the world.

In the second world war he was consultant ophthalmic surgeon to the Army with the rank of Brigadier. He thoroughly enjoyed his Army service, and the administrative experience that he gained was a great help to him in the post-war

epoch. His army duties involved visits to overseas hospitals and units in many theatres of the war. He was subsequently Civilian Consultant in Ophthalmology to the R.A.F. and also Ophthalmic Adviser to the Ministries of Health, Supply and Labour and to the London Transport Board.

Honours were showered upon him from all directions. He was made an honorary member of practically all the ophthalmological societies in the world and of many other scientific bodies and he was given numerous honorary degrees and fellowships.

Sir Stewart was a happily married man with a charming wife who greatly helped and supported him throughout his professional life. In the 1930s Phyllis Duke-Elder was often seen at work in the library at the Royal Society of Medicine checking references and making abstracts for Stewart. She had graduated in medicine in 1926 and subsequently worked as clinical assistant in Stewart's out-patient clinic at Moorfields. During the second world war she was in charge of the Zachary Merton Hospital at Banstead to which Stewart referred special cases for investigation from the Army.

