

Royal Society of Medicine

the view that it was dangerous to use a form of instrumental dilatation. With the greatest respect he joined issue with him on that point. To his own way of thinking there was as much precision in dilatation with a rubber bag filled with water or air as with the finger. He could not admit that the risk of rupture of the œsophagus was any greater—indeed he would consider it was less—with the bag than with the fingers. There might be severe cases which did not respond to that treatment, but he was satisfied that the average severe case would do so.

OBITUARY

SIR STCLAIR THOMSON

THE death of Sir StClair Thomson in Edinburgh on January 29th, at the age of 83, conveys something more than the sense of loss which all must feel at the passing of a distinguished man in the fullness of his years and honours, for it brings to a close an era in British Laryngology which began about eighty years ago with the initial effort of Morell Mackenzie. Amongst those who followed close upon him and established Laryngology as a reputable branch of medicine in Great Britain, StClair Thomson was for years the acknowledged leader and master, and herein was perhaps his greatest service. Although he was born in Londonderry, his father was a native of Ardrishaig, in Argyllshire, but Scotland seemed to have little attraction for him until, as often happens, he returned to the country of his boyhood towards the close of his life. This was perhaps due to the manner of his education, for after leaving the King's School at Peterborough, he did not go to the University of Edinburgh but followed Lister to London and became his house surgeon at King's College Hospital. This association exercised a lifelong influence over Thomson's work and outlook and its effects could be observed in his clinical methods, the careful though not over-elaborate study of each case, the caution in arriving at a diagnosis, the complete records and also in the scrupulous care exercised in his preparations and operative technique.

Travel with a wealthy invalid occupied a couple of years after qualification and then followed practice for seven or eight years in Florence, combined with practice at St. Moritz during the season. For this Thomson took the Swiss Federal Diploma at Lausanne. It was at the end of this period that he began the study of Laryngology in Vienna, Hajek, to whom he was always grateful, being one of his chief instructors, and he also studied in the aural clinic of Politzer. He was elected to the staff of King's College Hospital in 1901 and shortly afterwards developed the tuberculosis of lung and larynx from which he made such a remarkable recovery. This played a part in the deep interest which he took in that disease and led up to his devotion to King Edward's Sanatorium at Midhurst, his Mitchell Lecture at the Royal College of Physicians and the monograph for the Medical Research Council, which were based on the work at Midhurst and also to his continuous support of the Tuberculosis Association. His other great special interest was developed from his admiration for the work of Butlin and Semon on Cancer of the Larynx. He improved the

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technique of their operation of thyrotomy for limited cancers of the vocal cords and published careful records of his cases. Although these were not very numerous, for the disease is not a very common manifestation of cancer, and those of Butlin and Semon were much less so, he realized the value of thorough study of a small series of cases and he deplored the recent tendency to break away from the methods which he developed into laryngo-fissure and gave such successful results in his hands. His principal writing was the well-known textbook which passed through four editions besides a number of reprintings and in keeping this abreast of rapid changes he took great pride. Another early book on the escape of cerebro-spinal fluid from the nose is probably not much read nowadays, but it is a model of how a small monograph should be put together. In spite of all this industry, which by itself would have brought fame, his personal influence, his numerous friendships with the leaders of the profession all over the continent and in America, his carefully prepared hospitality and his genius for spreading encouragement and goodwill amongst the younger laryngologists were more potent factors in carrying him to the commanding position which he occupied in the profession. He became President of the Royal Society of Medicine and of the Medical Society of London, unusual distinctions for a specialist. At the Royal Society of Medicine, in addition to being President of the Laryngological Section, he also held office as President of the Section of History of Medicine, in which he took an interest that showed itself in much of the pottery, pharmaceutical jars and other decorative objects which he liked to exhibit in his house, where, too, his magnificent collection of coloured prints depicting scenes from Shakespeare reflected his knowledge of those plays from which he could quote aptly for any occasion. Residence abroad had given him the command of several languages and he had a natural aptitude for speaking in public which he cultivated most carefully, so that he made himself one of those rare people who can both write and speak supremely well, and was the outstanding personality in any company.

It was, however, the character behind all these gifts, the gentle wisdom, the unfailing gaiety and humour which gained and retained for him to the end the love, admiration and respect of all who had the privilege of his friendship.

L.C.