

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR GUSTAV ALEXANDER (Vienna).

ON April 12th Professor Gustav Alexander was shot through the heart in Vienna by a man on whom he had operated many years before, and who imagined that he had a grievance against the professor. The same man had made a previous attempt on his life twenty-two years ago, but on that occasion had fortunately missed his aim. Professor Alexander was probably the greatest exponent of modern scientific otology and his death will be felt as an irreparable loss by otologists all over the world.

Professor Gustav Alexander was born in Vienna in 1873 and graduated at Vienna University in 1898. During the two years following his graduation he acted as assistant in the Anatomical Institute of Vienna University under Professor Emil Zuckerkandl and after that acted as assistant in the General Surgical Clinic of Professor Albert. It will thus be seen that he had an excellent training in anatomy and general surgery before taking up his special subject. In 1900 he became assistant to the late Professor Adam Politzer and in 1903 was made Dozent in Otology. In 1907 he was elected Director of the Ear, Nose and Throat Department of the Vienna Poliklinik. The title of Professor Extraordinarius was conferred on him in 1909 and that of full Professor was accorded in 1919.

As Professor von Neumann points out in his obituary notice in the *Neue Freie Presse*, otology has lost in Alexander one of its greatest investigators and exponents. Surgical otology was founded in Vienna by Alexander, who operated in the manner of the general surgeon. At the beginning of his otological career, Alexander specialised in the anatomy of the organ of hearing, especially of the labyrinth, and made important discoveries which profoundly influenced the future development of his subject. He had an enormous power of work, shown by the fact that his publications numbered no less than 386—an average of about twelve each year. The ordinary otologist as a rule feels fairly satisfied with himself if he has contributed two articles each year to scientific papers, and stands aghast at Alexander's superhuman labours. These articles were not what the artist would call "pot-boilers," but were of the greatest scientific interest. For instance, in 1904 Alexander published an important work on the Ear of the Echidna, which gained for him the Lenval prize at Bordeaux. Later he published his well-known work on the Ear Diseases of Childhood and, along with Professor Marburg, *The Handbook of Oto-Neurology*. Later still he contributed the section on the Surgical Diseases of the Ear in the Albert-Hochenegg Text-book of Surgery. In addition to these major works he published an enormous



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Sincerely yours

E. Bruckner

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number of monographs, of which the best known are those on the Development of the Ear, War Injuries of the Ear, Neuritis of the Eighth Nerve, Congenital Syphilitic Affections of the Ear, Non-Purulent Affections of the Labyrinth (International Congress in London 1913), Malformations of the Ear in Cretins, Choked Labyrinth in cases of Brain Tumour, Cerebellar Abscess, the Pathology of the Intracranial Complications of Middle Ear Suppuration, Hereditary and Constitutional Deaf-mutism, the Labyrinth and Eighth Nerve in Japanese Waltzing Mice, Latent Otitis, Sinus Phlebitis, Meningo-Encephalitis and many other subjects. Alexander always gave the fullest possible recognition to the work which other men had done and at the end of practically all his articles we find an extremely full bibliography.

Alexander was not only a laboratory worker of outstanding merit but was also an extremely able clinician. His demonstrations on ear diseases were eagerly attended by post-graduates from all over the world. Recently he took part in the controversy which arose regarding the respective merits of early and late operation in cases of mastoiditis following acute suppurative otitis media. Alexander favoured late operation in these cases wherever possible, and there can be little doubt but that the modern trend of opinion is in favour of Alexander's view. The present writer may be forgiven for saying that in 1905 he had the privilege of attending courses by Professor Alexander, on the Anatomy and Operations on the Temporal Bone, on the Functional Examination of the Ear and, a little later, on the Pathology of Ear Diseases, and has come to the conclusion that the hours thus spent were the most interesting and also the most useful that he has ever known.

Professor Alexander in his controversies with other otologists—and they were numerous—was always courteous. He was an exceedingly kind man and took the greatest interest in what may be called the Public Health and Sociological aspects of his subject. This was well shown in his work at the Jewish Institute for the Deaf and Dumb. Further, in spite of his absorption in his life's work, he always found time for music. One can only describe him as an amazing personality.

It will be a source of gratification to British otologists that Professor Alexander was elected a Corresponding Member of the Otological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1928—a distinction which he greatly appreciated. He was anxious to read a paper before the Otological Section and this desire had not been forgotten by the President and Council of the section. Had Alexander lived there can be no doubt but that his wish to re-visit London, to meet his many British friends, would have been fulfilled.

J. S. F.