The Journal of Laryngology and Otology

(*Founded in 1887 by* MORELL MACKENZIE *and* NORRIS WOLFENDEN)

March 1936

SOME IMPRESSIONS THAT REMAIN*

By A. LOGAN TURNER (Edinburgh)

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW MEMBERS: The Council has honoured me by its invitation to be the spokesman of the Society on the occasion of its Silver Jubilee Meeting; and I shall endeavour to the best of my ability to justify the confidence it has placed in me. Twenty-five years have elapsed since the Society was founded within these walls. The first and all the subsequent meetings in Edinburgh have been held in this room. Although completely reconstructed some years ago and no longer recognizable as the scene of our early meetings, yet surely to-day it is still haunted by the memory of once familiar faces, and from its walls our ears seem to catch the faint echo of some well-remembered voices, now long still!

As the years pass on, memory is apt to play tricks making it more difficult to recall with accuracy the events surrounding the birth of our Society. The project, however, had been under discussion for some time before it actually took shape. I can recall discussing the idea at intervals with Peter McBride and J. S. Fraser and similar conversations were also held in Glasgow among some of the specialists. But there is no doubt in my own mind that definite action was first taken by W. S. Syme, senior, and through his energy and infectious enthusiasm the scheme was finally brought to fruition. On his invitation I travelled to Glasgow in the summer of 1910, and, after dining at his hospitable table, we discussed along with

* Address delivered at the Silver Jubilee Meeting of the Scottish Otological and Laryngological Society in the Ear and Throat Department, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, November 16th, 1935.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

some of his colleagues in that city the steps that should be taken to put the plan into execution. The details were left in his hands and the inaugural meeting was summoned for Saturday, November 11th, 1910, at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

As bearing on the above statement, it is interesting to read the following record in Syme's minute of that meeting. "The proposal to found a Society was mooted three years ago, but for various reasons the time was not then considered opportune. In June of this year (1910) an informal meeting was held in Glasgow at which it was decided to call together all those in Scotland who held a University, Hospital or Dispensary appointment in this special branch of medicine. The meeting on November 11th, 1910, was the result, when twenty-four out of a possible thirty attended."

The first figure is accurate, but there is obviously some confusion as to the correctness of the second: I think, however, there is little doubt that the Society comprised thirty-one original members and the list of members now in your hands has been drawn up accordingly. In perusing the minutes I find that one old custom at the Society's meetings has unfortunately been allowed to lapse. In those early days each member present signed his name and a correct sederunt was thus obtained. I think the secretary should be instructed to pass round at every meeting a paper on which each member and guest present will sign his name, the latter placing the word "guest" against it. I feel that some such authentic record of the attendance would be of value in our Proceedings.

I was called to the Chair as the senior specialist in the department in which we met. The Agenda contained twenty cases and there was ample time for their discussion. I should like to refer specially to a lantern demonstration by J. S. Fraser, in which he showed a series of microscopical sections from a case of purulent labyrinthitis, the first demonstration of the kind in Scotland. We dined together at the Caledonian Station Hotel, drank success to our venture, and then proceeded to conduct private business. The arrangements we made were somewhat primitive. We elected only one Office-bearer, a secretary and treasurer, to be chosen annually. There was no question as to our choice of this important official: W. S. Syme was the unanimous and well-deserved selection of the members. We arranged to meet twice annually, summer and winter, in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Edinburgh and Glasgow alternately, the chairman on each occasion to be selected in order of seniority from the staff of the hospital at which we met. Thus launched we carried on undisturbed for a time, our meetings being well attended and full of interest ; and we occasionally increased our membership. In November, 1913, however, we amended our constitution, introducing certain changes to bring us into line with other medical societies. A President, a Vice-President and Members of Council were elected, in addition to the Secretary and Treasurer, the arrangement being that the President should be elected alternately from the members resident in Edinburgh and Glasgow. We also introduced a new class of Corresponding Members and Neil Maclay of Newcastle-on-Tyne, who died in 1926, was then elected. We defined these members as those resident in Northern England, but we debarred them from the privilege of taking part in the private business of the Society, an unsuccessful attempt being made later to upset this ruling.

On May 6th, 1914, at the meeting in the Western Infirmary, Glasgow, James Walker Downie occupied the chair as the first President of the Society. How little did any of us then realize that the smooth course of our lives would soon be interrupted and that the Society would not meet again till 1919. The tragedy of Serajevo did not startle Europe till three weeks after our meeting. The war clouds had not yet begun to darken the horizon. We were still pleasantly concerned with our own occupations and many of us were agreeably engaged in planning our summer holidays.

But even in the short life of the Society prior to the war, death had unexpectedly removed one of our original members. George Taylor Guild died in November, 1912, at the early age of 44 years. Guild was a native of Fife, who graduated in medicine at Edinburgh in 1891, and settled in Dundee in the later 'nineties. He became attached to the Dundee Royal Infirmary and was appointed Lecturer in Diseases of the Ear and Throat in the University of St. Andrews. A man of a somewhat retiring disposition, he took no active part in the work of the Society, but during his short period of membership he attended on the four possible occasions.

Five years had passed when, on June 14th, 1919, we resumed our meetings here in the Royal Infirmary. We missed the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

familiar figure of our President, Walker Downie, who was prevented by illness from occupying the chair, his place being taken by James Kerr Love. But in the interval our ranks had been thinned: three of our members had passed over. Thomas Barr, our second Chairman, died in January, 1917, aged 71 years. Thomas Barr, genial, kindly and unassuming, held a somewhat unique position as a pioneer in otology in Scotland. After a long service in general practice he became a pupil of Politzer, Gruber and Urbantschitsch in the Vienna School. His literary contributions were of great value, and his text book on *Diseases of the Ear* was an authoritative work. In his early days the specialty had little or no standing in the General Hospitals in this country, but he was, finally, the holder of the first Lectureship in Otology in the University of Glasgow, being appointed in 1895. Sir William Macewen acknowledged his indebtedness to Barr in the preface to his treatise on *Pyogenic Infective Diseases of the Brain and Spinal Cord*, published in 1893: its wealth of anatomical, pathological and clinical observations and its brilliant series of successful operations on intracranial infection, which have not since been equalled, notwithstanding all our advances in knowledge during the past forty years, have made it a classic. Few, if any of us, read Macewen's book to-day; yet I have vivid recollections of what a close companion that volume was to me when occasionally, on a country visit, I assiduously perused it on the outward journey, but cheerfully substituted, on the homeward way, a thriller from the railway bookstall.

James Mackenzie Booth was our representative from Aberdeen. He died in May, 1919, aged 64 years, a month before the reassembling of the Society after the war. He, too, had been a pupil of Politzer and Urbantschitsch, but in his professional career he was primarily a surgeon, being first assistant surgeon and then surgeon to the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, where he instituted a clinic for diseases of the ear, nose and throat, which was recognized by the University. His chief contribution to the proceedings of the Society was an account of the mechanism and mode of use of the Maurice Kinesiphone.

We had to mourn also the loss of one of our young original members, William Guthrie Porter, D.S.O., R.F.A., the only member of the Society who died on active service. Popular among a large circle of friends he was affectionately known as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

" Billy " Porter. He was ever a loyal friend : although of a gentle and kindly nature, a strain of Irish blood developed in him a combative spirit which found expression in his keenness for military training. For years he was a member of the Territorial Force, attached to the Midlothian Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. Immediately after graduation, in 1902, he served in the South African Campaign. And when, in the European War, so many of the qualified doctors were recalled from the combatant forces to enlarge the medical units, he was allowed to remain attached to his Battery in France, so valuable were his services and so great his influence for good as an officer.

Before the war Porter had already established his position in the specialty in Edinburgh and his contributions to its literature had marked him out as a man of great promise, who, were he alive to-day, would be holding a foremost position amongst us. But he fell a victim to the bullet of a German sniper south of Ypres on June 8th, 1917, as did countless others of his generation who " willingly and wittingly laid down the unachieved purposes of their lives ".

> They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

Our first President, Walker Downie, did not long survive the war period : he died on July 21st, 1921, aged 65 years. During the last two or three years of his life impairment of health interfered with the regular discharge of his duties and with his attendance at the meetings of the Society. He was appointed to the Nose and Throat Department of the Western Infirmary, Glasgow, in 1888, and it must seem almost incredible to us, living in such altered conditions to-day, to learn that twenty-eight years elapsed before two wards were allocated to him for his patients. He then became, in 1916, full surgeon : since 1895 he had been University Lecturer in Diseases of the Nose and Throat. It was in the rôle of teacher that Downie excelled, and long before the introduction of compulsory classes he attracted students in ever increasing numbers as the value of his instruction became known. He had many interests outside his professional work, as a lover of Art and as a great traveller. I have in my library a small volume from his pen which I value as a gift from his widow and as a chapter in the medical history of Scotland. It is an account of the *Early Physicians and Surgeons of the Western Infirmary, Glasgow,*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which should strongly appeal to all medical graduates of the University in the west. He paints a charming word picture of such men as Sir William Gairdner, James Finlayson, Sir Thomas McCall Anderson, Sir George Macleod and Dr. George Buchanan.

In 1919, the Society elected its first Honorary Member and singled out for that distinction Peter McBride, the *doyen* of the specialty in Scotland. No happier selection could have been made, and we are glad to know that he is still amongst us, living in retirement in York and now exceeding the four score years. Always facile with his pen he has not been idle in his leisure years as he has given us to read his *Riddle of Personality* and his *Philosophy of Sport*, both subjects on which he was well qualified to write.

In the summer of 1922 we elected five Honorary Members. The occasion justified our action : the British Medical Association held its annual meeting in Glasgow towards the end of July and to supplement the single day sessions of the Sections of Laryngology and Otology, our Society held a special meeting. An excursion to the Trossachs had been arranged by the Glasgow members and accompanied by our guests and lady friends we visited Loch Katrine which

> In all her length far winding lay,
> With promontory, creek, and bay,
> And islands that, empurpled bright,
> Floated amid the livelier light.

There, after tea, on the deck of the steamer, the honorary membership was conferred upon our Laryngological Knights, on Sir St Clair Thomson, Sir James Dundas-Grant and Sir William Milligan, on Dr. Dan McKenzie and Dr. Holger Mygind of Copenhagen : truly a rare environment and a charming and romantic setting for such an academic ceremony ! Since that date eight further honorary memberships have been conferred ; and of the fourteen men so honoured and honouring us we have to mourn the death of two, Sir William Milligan, in 1929, who more than once enlivened our meetings with his genial presence, and, in 1930, Dr. Holger Mygind, an impressive, Nordic figure.

With the passing of the years we have necessarily lost other original members. John Macintyre, who died in 1928, aged 71 years, belonged to the older generation of laryngologists.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although to the majority of us he is little more than a name, he was essentially a pioneer in the specialty and a personality in Glasgow. As a young man he worked as an electrician, a training which in later life strongly influenced the direction of his thoughts and studies. He brought the introduction of the metal filament lamp into practical application in the exploration of the air passages, and, with the discovery of the Röntgen Rays in 1895, he at once recognized their future value, not only in diagnosis, applying it to the study of the paranasal sinuses, but also as a therapeutic agent in malignant disease. He organized the installation of the radiological department at the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, replacing all the old methods then in use. At a time when the *Journal of Laryngology and Otology* was not so prosperous as it is to-day, he was not only an editor but a joint-proprietor, and contributed both to its literary and financial support. He was honourably recognized by many Laryngological Associations and his Alma Mater conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

I cannot close these obituary notes without brief reference to three of our original members who, till comparatively recently, were active members of the Society and known to us all. William Smith Syme, our genial and energetic secretary for ten years, died in August, 1928, at the age of 58 years. Born in Newfoundland, is it not possible that he owed to his contact with the mountains and rivers and rugged coast of that oldest island possession of the British Empire some of his energy and breezy outlook on life? After taking his degree at Edinburgh, in 1891, he engaged in general practice in England. But his restless vigour sought an outlet in some more vigorous occupation than that which practice in the Cambridgeshire Fens provided: so, seeking the busy centre of Glasgow with its medical school, and coming under the influence of Thomas Barr and Walker Downie, he then laid the foundation of his future career. We, his colleagues in this Society, learned to know and appreciate his worth, his cheerful disposition, his keen sense of humour and his ready gift of repartee. He was essentially a man who enjoyed life, and the Society has been the poorer since he left us.

John Lindsay Howie died on July 26th, 1930, aged 67 years. After taking his degree at Glasgow he settled in general practice at Annan in Dumfriesshire, where he remained for eleven years, his long experience as a practitioner contributing to his future

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

success as a specialist. On his return to Glasgow, in 1905, he was appointed to the Victoria Infirmary, where his happy disposition and his never-failing good temper endeared him alike to his colleagues and his patients.

James Galbraith Connal died in 1931, aged 71 years. To him the Glasgow Ear Hospital owes a deep debt of gratitude. He served its interests faithfully for forty years, becoming its senior surgeon on the death of Thomas Barr. A man of determination of purpose he was a source of strength in the work of reconstructing the hospital, guiding the directors with his professional knowledge in the many important changes which converted the old, dingy, poorly-equipped building into the modern hospital now standing in St. Vincent Street. I can recall the justifiable pride with which he conducted me through the new Ear Hospital and showed me all the arrangements shortly after it had been opened.

Fellow Members, let me close on a brighter note. I have made no attempt to give a detailed account of the history of our Society, preferring to entitle this short address, " Some Impressions that Remain ". The history of a young Society is closely linked with the history of the professional career of its members, and I have endeavoured, however imperfectly, to touch upon the lives of a few of those who have passed from amongst us and to glance at one or two events in the Society's past. If errors of fact have inadvertently crept into my remarks, I ask you for the necessary corrections.

The life of the Society has been coterminous with the reign of our beloved Sovereign King George V, so that our Silver Jubilee Year has thereby acquired an added importance and distinction. Our discussions, if on occasion they may have tended to languish, have been on the whole remarkably alive and sometimes conducted with a freedom and candour which have added a spice to our debates. And in this connection, allow me here to express our deep regret that illness has recently prevented J. S. Fraser from taking part in some of our meetings ; but you will all, I know, join with me in extending a hearty welcome to him on this occasion.

Of the future we cannot speak with precision, it rests in the hands of the younger members of to-day and of those of future years, some of whom are still unborn. We rejoice to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press

see the sons following in the footsteps of their fathers. No fewer than six of our original members have been, or are, thus represented—a Barr, a Christie, a Connal, a Howie, a Syme and a Brown Kelly, names inseparably linked with the early days of the Society. Thomas and young Stoddart Barr together attended our first meeting in 1910 : we still have two Christies amongst us ; and to-day we have just welcomed to membership Derek Brown Kelly to join his father at our Jubilee Meeting. Obviously Glasgow flourishes ; how remiss Edinburgh and the two other cities have been !

Since 1910, death has taken toll of twenty of our active members, twelve of the original thirty-one, seven of those joining later, and one corresponding member. Nevertheless our active membership—including one lady, still holding this unique position—is sixty-three, double the number originally enrolled and an indication of the flourishing condition of the specialty. Of this total forty are ordinary members elected at intervals since the Society was founded, seven are corresponding members, and of the original group fifteen still remain on the active list. Against the names in this last group on the printed list the Secretary has been careful to prefix the letters O.M., so that no one can possibly misconstrue their meaning and read into them the honourable title of " Order of Merit ". On the contrary, we are definitely but tactfully dubbed the " Old Men " ! But as " elder statesmen " we have tried to set an example worthy of being followed and have endeavoured to contribute something to the sum total of our knowledge. If the same zeal and earnest endeavour be displayed by the members in the years to come, we may envisage the jubilee of the Society, in 1960, with confidence and hopefulness that all will then be well.

Floreat res Otologica et Laryngologica.

Footnote.—Through the death of Dr. Albert A. Gray on January 4th, 1936, the Society has lost another of its original members, thus reducing the total to fourteen.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215100042286 Published online by Cambridge University Press