

OBITUARY

NORMAN PURVIS WALKER, Kt.

M.D., LL.D., F.R.C.P.E.

WE regret to record the death on 7th November of Sir Norman Walker in his eighty-first year at his residence in Balerno. Like many medical men who have reached eminence in the profession he was a son of the manse, and was born in Dysart, Fife. He was educated at Edinburgh Academy and graduated in medicine at Edinburgh University in 1884. After acting as resident physician to Dr Claude Muirhead in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh he was in general practice in Dalston, Cumberland, for five years. Having decided to devote himself to dermatology he went abroad and studied at Vienna and Prague. In the latter city, in addition to clinical work, much of his time was devoted to the study of the pathology of skin diseases in the laboratory of Professor F. J. Pick. After returning from the Continent he started practice in Edinburgh as a consulting dermatologist, and in 1892 he was appointed assistant physician to the Skin Department of the Royal Infirmary, which was in the charge of the late Dr Allan Jamieson. When Dr Allan Jamieson retired, fourteen years later, he was appointed full physician, and became Lecturer on Diseases of the Skin in the University and Royal Colleges. He very soon built up a reputation as a dermatologist and teacher. For some years he worked in the laboratory of the late Dr Alexander Bruce, and I think it is known to only a very few that whilst doing so Bruce and he were the first to cultivate the so-called influenza bacillus (Pfeiffer's bacillus) from the throat and nose of patients suffering from that disease. Unfortunately they did not consider that they had sufficient evidence at the time to claim the organism as the probable cause of influenza, and so did not publish their finding at once. Some weeks later, Pfeiffer published a paper describing the same organism, and to this day his name is associated with it. About this time Walker published articles on the pathology and etiology of rodent ulcer and other diseases of the skin. He translated from the German Hansen and Looft's book on Leprosy and the huge volume on the Histopathology of the Skin by Unna. Both of these tasks, especially the latter, must have involved a tremendous amount of work. In 1899 he published his *Introduction to Dermatology*, which has been the stand-by in matters dermatological of countless students and medical practitioners. This book soon grew in size and popularity and is now in its tenth edition. For several years he was Editor of the *Scottish Medical and Surgical Journal*, and later, after its amalgamation with the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, he was joint Editor of the latter for some time. In this way he kept in touch with all aspects of medicine and surgery. In addition to all his activities in hospital, private practice, laboratory, and editorial



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[Drummond Young, Edinburgh

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work, Walker also found time to take a very keen interest in medical ethics and education. He was elected a member of the General Medical Council in 1906 as direct representative of the practitioners in Scotland. He was re-elected every five years for thirty-five years, during eight of which (1931-1939) he was President. For all these years he travelled regularly to London, scarcely ever missing a meeting. Few realised what a great expenditure of energy and time this involved. On the retiral of Sir James Russell, Walker was appointed Inspector of Anatomy for Scotland, and for many years carried out the duties of that office. For nearly twenty years he also acted as Treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians. Here he had scope for his great business abilities, and the College has reason to be thankful for the masterly way in which for so many years he supervised and guided its financial affairs. He was President of the College from 1929 to 1931. During the Great War he acted as Convener of the Scottish Medical Services Emergency Committee. All those who were associated with him then know the enormous amount of work which this entailed and how ungrudgingly he gave of his time and energy.

Shortly after the war his health began to give concern and he was found to be suffering from diabetes. In spite of all the efforts of his medical colleagues, his condition slowly deteriorated and it looked as if his days were numbered. In spite of this he would not give in, but continued to attend hospital and do his other work although reduced to the point of extreme emaciation and muscular weakness. Fortunately the discoverers of insulin heard of his condition and sent over from Canada some insulin before it could be bought on the market. This saved his life. The transformation was nothing short of marvellous and in a few weeks he had put on several stones in weight and looked as he had done before his illness. For the rest of his life he was never capable of much physical exertion, but mentally he was as alert as ever and continued to be so almost up to the day of his death.

In his younger days Walker's chief recreation was cycling on the old "penny-farthing" high bicycle. Later he played golf, and in winter curled whenever there was ice, but from middle life onwards he had neither the time nor energy for any kind of sport.

As a dermatologist he was in the front rank, and by his writings was known all over the world. He was not so interested in rare skin diseases as in the treatment of the commoner conditions, and was always keen to try new methods. He was the first to treat ringworm of the scalp with X-rays, but as a sufficient dose was not given to bring the hair out, cures were not obtained and so the treatment was abandoned. Some years later Sabouraud published his method of cure by X-ray depilation. Walker was especially interested in the patients with lupus vulgaris, many of whom, on account of their facial disfigurement, were more or less social outcasts. For these he established a special clinic on Wednesday afternoons at the Infirmary, where they attended regularly for treatment.

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As they met only those afflicted like themselves they were not afraid to come. By means of tuberculin, X-rays, and later by general ultra-violet ray therapy, many cures were obtained, and by the cure of the disease these patients were transformed again into happy and useful citizens. After Walker retired from his post as physician to the Skin Department he continued for some time to attend the lupus clinic and supervise the ultra-violet ray treatment.

Walker was a good teacher. He always gained and kept the interest of his class. Whilst not a fluent speaker he was emphatic and deliberate, with a felicitous way of expressing himself which always appealed to his audience. One was seldom left in any doubt as to the meaning which he meant to convey.

During his long life he received many honours. I know that none of these gave him more satisfaction than the LL.D. degree which he received from St Andrews University. He also received this degree from Edinburgh and Bristol Universities and an Honorary M.D. from Dublin. He was a member of the British Association of Dermatology and a corresponding member of the New York, American, French, and Danish Dermatological Societies. He was also the founder of the North British Dermatological Society. He was awarded the Boylston Prize of Harvard University in 1894 and the Victoria Jubilee Cullen Prize of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1922. In 1923, after his return from India, where he had been on matters relating to medical education on behalf of the General Medical Council, he received the honour of knighthood.

To those who did not come much in contact with him, Sir Norman Walker seemed aloof and rather unapproachable, but behind that reserve was a mind full of wisdom and understanding, and many a medical man has benefited by his sound advice on the problems of life. He had a keen sense of humour and always enjoyed a good story. He was a man of determination and indomitable courage. The way he fought his illness and refused to give in, where many a man would have given up the struggle, showed this. It was not easy to get him to change his opinion on any subject, but he was always ready to give full consideration to the opinions of others. He was eager to discuss both sides of a question by negotiation, as he held that, if one could not get all one wanted, a working scheme could nearly always be evolved by means of mutual compromise. He had a clear, logical, judicial type of mind, and at the end of a long discussion no one was better at summarising the essential points. His passing is a great loss to British medicine and to the Edinburgh Medical School in particular. His long life of devoted public service in medical and educational matters in a variety of spheres will remain a shining example and an inspiration to others.

Sir Norman had a long and happy married life and celebrated his golden wedding in 1939. To Lady Walker and his family we would tender our sincerest sympathy in their bereavement. R. C. L.