

OBITUARIES

SIR J. HALLIDAY CROOM, M.D., LL.D.

THE passing of Emeritus Professor Sir Halliday Croom, full of years and honours, has removed a distinguished landmark in the medical world as well as a prominent citizen of Edinburgh. His tall commanding presence has been well known in our streets for a generation and attracted attention wherever he went, much in the same way as the late Professor Blackie, Lord Ardwall (Croom's schoolfellow of early days), Lord Kingsburgh, and other outstanding men impressed their individuality by their mere appearance.

Sir Halliday Croom, like the late Sir James Affleck, was one of the few remaining links between the present generation and the last. He had all the courtliness, punctiliousness, and dignity of the older school, coupled with the modern equipment of the twentieth-century physician. Born in Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire, in 1847, a son of the United Presbyterian Manse and of parents of a peculiar saintliness of character, young Croom inherited high traditions. His father was transferred to Edinburgh while Croom was yet young, so that from his boyhood Edinburgh has been his home. Educated at the High School, he subsequently entered the University as a medical student and graduated in 1868, afterwards studying in London and Paris.

Trained as he was under such men as Sir James Y. Simpson, Syme, and Laycock (to mention only a few), he imbibed from his teachers the great principles of medicine and surgery which enabled him, with his singularly receptive and impressionable mind, to keep ever in the forefront of the advances that were continually taking place.

As a young graduate Croom first assisted Professor Laycock for a short time and subsequently acted in a similar capacity to the late Professor Sir A. R. Simpson, who had just been appointed to the Chair of Midwifery and Gynæcology in the University.

While acting as Simpson's Assistant, Croom's remarkable teaching powers developed, and it was then he first acquired the insight into that complex microcosm, the mind of the medical student, which gave him such a power over and influence with his pupils as few teachers have had. He rapidly acquired a large general practice in these early years, an experience which he always regarded as having been of great value to him. As gynæcology and obstetrics advanced and became more specialised branches, he gradually dropped his general work, to the great regret of a wide circle of patients, and devoted himself exclusively to those departments of his profession

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in which he subsequently made such a great reputation by his skill and ability.

The departure of Dr Thomas Keith to London in the early eighties, and the death of Dr Angus M'Donald (then in the zenith of his fame) about the same time, gave Croom the clinical opportunities of which he was so well able to take advantage, and he rapidly became a finished and successful gynaecological surgeon and acquired an enormous consulting practice. Croom's individuality and his enthusiasm for his department have undoubtedly done much to raise obstetrics and gynaecology to the high place they now hold in medicine, and to rescue them from the neglected and somewhat despised position to which in times past they were apt to be relegated.

It was in 1878 that Croom began to lecture as an extra-mural teacher of Midwifery and Diseases of Women in a classroom in the Heriot-Watt College, Chambers Street. He shortly removed to more commodious quarters in Minto House, Chambers Street, where he continued to teach without a break until his appointment as Professor in the University in 1905. It was during these years that he made his unrivalled reputation as a teacher, for it is as a great teacher and clinician that he will be remembered. Minto House, which will ever be inseparably associated with the names of Syme and Dr John Brown in the days when it was a hospital, and in more recent years in its lecture-rooms with John Chiene and George A. Gibson, has now another worthy name to be added to its roll of honour—the great teacher who is the subject of this notice. During these Minto House days Croom was in the full vigour of his mental and bodily activity—he filled his classroom to overflowing by his sheer forcefulness and personality, and without the glamour of any academic influence. For, be it remembered, his class was not a necessary one for the curriculum, but it came to be regarded by the student not only as a necessity but as a privilege. No student's course was complete if he had not attended Croom! The spell of Minto House was a compelling one. The teaching of such a man was an asset to his school, and not only to his school but to his country, and through Scotland to the whole world. His pupils from literally all the ends of the earth rise up to-day and call him blessed. The affection, admiration, and gratitude which he evoked were a wonderful tribute to the personality of the man.

In addition to his enthusiasm, which he had the gift of imparting in no small degree, he had a great sense of humour, which served to mellow and give point to his lectures, and an instinct which to the student seemed at first uncanny, but which was recognised later as being the result of shrewd observation and experience.

Teaching was as the breath of his nostrils to him, he gloried in

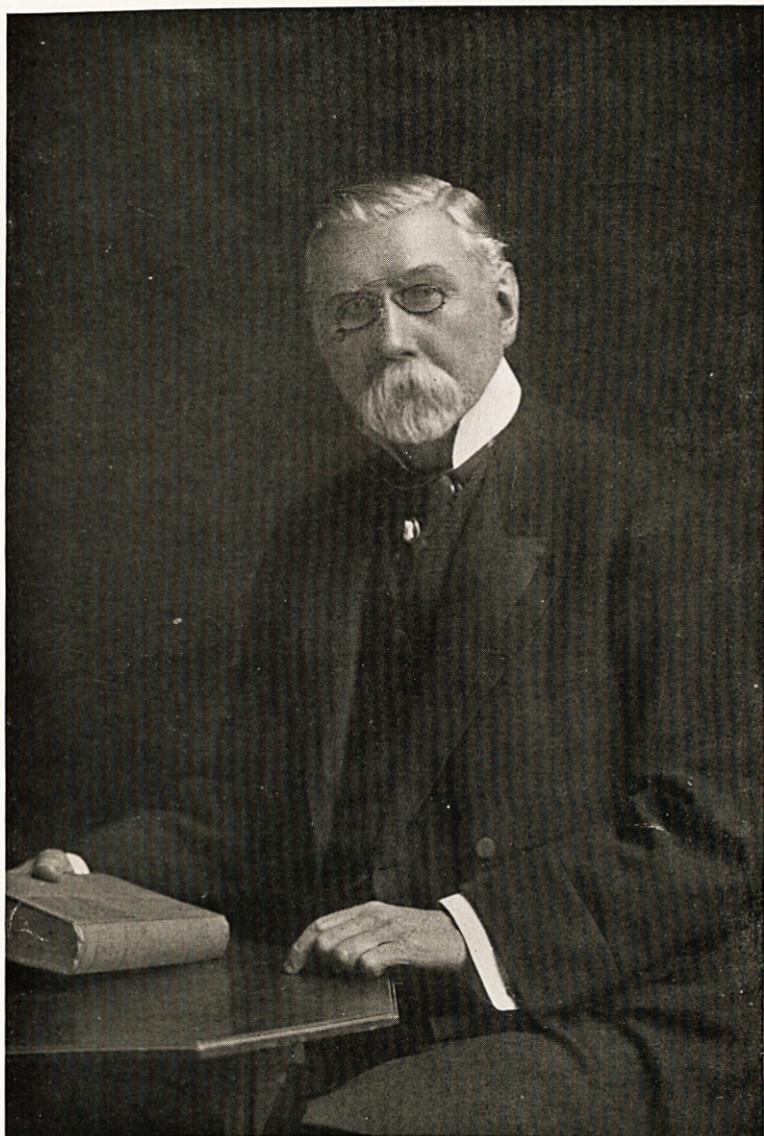


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it, and it seemed to come to him so easily. Yet only those who were associated with him knew what infinite trouble he took to prepare his systematic lectures, even down to the smallest details. He put his whole soul and mind into their preparation and delivery. His eloquent and felicitous illustrations were always telling, and culled as they were from a ripe experience, many of them have become aphorisms, indelibly fixed in the minds of the thousands, who in the course of his fifty years of teaching, have had the privilege of passing through his hands. It was characteristic of the unaffected simplicity of his nature, the pleasure which the appreciation of his students always gave him.

No record of Croom would be complete which did not refer to his clinical teaching in the Royal Infirmary and in the Maternity Hospital. He it was who first instituted clinical teaching in the latter, in spite of considerable opposition at the time, and the success which has followed his initiative is ample justification of his wisdom and prescience. He loved the Maternity Hospital and gave to it at all times of his best. For nearly half a century (from the days when it was in St John Street) he served it faithfully and well. No one realised better than he the inadequacy of the present building in Lauriston Place for modern requirements and for its increased work. Surely now is the time for making some special effort to build a new hospital, a step he always advocated. It would be a worthy memorial to the man whose death we now deplore.

When Sir A. R. Simpson resigned his Professorship, in 1905, Croom was rightly regarded as the man to succeed him, and for sixteen years he added lustre to the Midwifery Chair of the University of Edinburgh. He devoted his whole energy to making the Chair a success during his tenure of it, and he fully succeeded in doing so. The claims of teaching were now such that he had to relinquish much of his operating and consulting work. Fortunately, when he succeeded to the Chair, his term of office as Gynæcologist to the Infirmary had come to an end, which lightened his burden considerably. The Chair during his occupancy was entirely confined to midwifery, gynæcology being overtaken by a separate lectureship. It was always a characteristic of Croom that all his life he regarded his teaching and hospital duties as having the first claim, even at the time when his consulting work was large.

In the midst of all his engrossing duties he did not neglect to contribute largely to the literature of his department. Seldom a year passed without some paper or papers issuing from his pen. His writings always received the attention they so well deserved. They were chiefly of a practical nature, and were characterised by lucidity of style, shrewdness of observation and sound common sense, which

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rendered them singularly valuable as records of his wide experience. Two books he wrote attracted much notice: *The Bladder during Parturition* and *Minor Gynæcological Operations*, the last of which ran through many editions both in this country and in America. In this connection it may be noted that a synopsis of his systematic lectures was translated into Chinese—a fact which was a source of gratification to him.

As a speaker he was forceful and interesting. His contributions to debates at the Obstetrical and other Society meetings were always to the point and his intervention in discussions never failed to brighten them. He was invariably kind and encouraging to the younger men who read papers or brought forward records of cases, and many of his juniors are glad to acknowledge warmly the friendly assistance and criticism which he was always so ready and willing to give them. He it was who first recognised the exceptional genius of the late Milne Murray, whose untimely death was an untold loss to obstetrics.

Croom was three times President of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society, an eloquent testimony to the esteem and regard which his colleagues had for him, and it is not long since the Society honoured itself by adding his name to the select roll of its Honorary Fellows. He was also a past President of the British Gynæcological Society and an Honorary Fellow of the American and Belgian Gynæcological Societies. He was President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, in 1902, and received the distinction of knighthood during his occupancy of the Chair. The University of Dublin conferred on him the honorary degree of M.D., and two years ago his own Alma Mater laureated him as LL.D., in recognition of her cordial and grateful appreciation of the services he had rendered.

He was the first Chairman of the Central Midwives Board for Scotland, in the affairs of which he took the deepest interest. He used his great influence in furthering the passing of the Scottish Midwives Act, and the Board is under deep obligations to him for all he did to promote its efficiency and welfare.

In his private life, Sir Halliday Croom was blessed with a wife who was a true helpmeet in every sense of the word, a lady of charming personality, whose lamented death, twenty-five years ago, was an irreparable loss to him. The death of his eldest daughter, fifteen years later, was also a terrible blow which affected him keenly.

Always a loyal member of the United Presbyterian Church, he was for years a leading elder in that denomination and subsequently in the United Free Church. He had a deeply religious mind, and though sensitive of speaking much on such matters to any but a few of his intimates from time to time, he always endeavoured to frame

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his life on his firmly-rooted belief in the religion of his fathers, which was his bedrock. His outlook was of a most practical kind and he had a horror of all hypocrisy and cant. His good deeds and his charities were many and widespread, and so unobtrusively done that their full extent will never be known. Though a distinctly sociable man and an ideal and most hospitable host in his own house, he did not go out much into society, and it was difficult to persuade him to leave his happy domestic circle in the evenings. When, in 1921, he retired from the Chair into private life, it was hoped that he might still be able to contribute to literature either medical or general, but his failing health made that impossible. Reading was his chief occupation and he covered a wide field in his choice of books. He also greatly enjoyed discussing current events, as well as the days that had been, with the friends whose visits gave him so much pleasure. His last illness was mercifully short and the end peaceful. To his only son, who is a well-known physician in Edinburgh, and to his two surviving daughters, who lived with him and devotedly cared for him since his wife's death, sincere sympathy will be extended at this time.

J. H. F.

THE LATE DR FORD ROBERTSON.

THROUGH the untimely death, in his 56th year, of William Ford Robertson, M.D., Edinburgh has lost one whose life was wholeheartedly and devotedly given over to research. The study of pathological and bacteriological problems concerning the cause and treatment of nervous disease, insanity, and cancer had preoccupied him ever since his student days; they had filled his thoughts to the exclusion of other pursuits; and his last days were shadowed by the fear that he might not be spared to bring his studies to a conclusion. Robertson was born on the Borders in 1867; he was a student in Edinburgh from 1886 to 1891, and even during his undergraduate course he showed his bent towards pathology and his originality in technique in the work he did under Prof. William Russell, who was then pathologist to the Royal Infirmary. After graduating he held several Resident appointments, and in 1893 became pathologist to the Royal Asylum. His papers, between 1894 and 1896, on the morbid anatomy of mental disease attracted much attention, and stimulated fresh interest in this branch of research. Their value was recognised by the creation, in 1897, of the Laboratory of the Scottish Asylums, with Robertson as its head, and to the opportunities which it afforded him he consecrated the rest of his working-days. As the years wore on his interest turned more towards bacteriology as an explanation