OBITUARY

ARTHUR JAMES BALLANTYNE

Arthur James Ballantyne was born in 1876 and educated in Glasgow where he remained throughout his long professional life. A few years ago he retired completely from active practice and went to live in the quiet village of Killearn where he died after a long illness on November 10, 1954. He graduated M.B., Ch.B. at the University of Glasgow in 1898 and thereafter became the first house physician to Dr. T. K. Monro, who had just been promoted to the senior staff of the old Glasgow Royal Infirmary. He maintained his medical associations with T. K. Monro and John Cowan all through his active clinical years. His term as house surgeon was spent with John Barlow, who was also an extramural teacher of physiology. Such dual appointments were possible in those less highly specialized days, and Ballantyne continued this tradition by teaching physiology in Anderson’s College; his predecessor in this appointment was another ophthalmic surgeon, Ernest Thomson.

At the end of the 19th century the University of Glasgow contained within its walls many very remarkable people. John Caird, Gilbert Murray (the sole survivor), Sir Henry
Jones, Lord Kelvin, Sir William Gairdner, Sir William MacEwen, and George Buchanan, who had been a civil surgeon to the Army in the Crimea, were among the men whose influence remained potent throughout Ballantyne's life. On the centenary of the discovery of the ophthalmoscope he remarked that he had celebrated the jubilee of his own use of the instrument several years before. His first ophthalmic teacher was Thomas Reid, who had been a pupil of William Mackenzie, but the greatest and most far-reaching influence was that of George Coats. In 1901 Ballantyne graduated M.D. and the subject of his thesis was contusion injuries to the eyeball; in 1906 he was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. His first papers, written in collaboration with Ernest Thomson, were presented as card specimens to the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom, which he joined in 1903. A long review article on the pupil was published in the Ophthalmoscope in 1909 and a most detailed article upon the pulsation of the retinal arteries in 1913.

As a young man Ballantyne became a member of the British Medical Association and the Royal Society of Medicine; he lived to become President of the appropriate section of both these national bodies as well as President of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom. He was a foundation member of the Oxford Ophthalmological Congress and the Scottish Ophthalmological Club of which he was also President. This Club, which originated in the drawing room of his friend Ernest Thomson, was designed to improve the social and professional relationships of ophthalmologists in Scotland, an objective which it certainly achieved. He was for many years the secretary of the Fin de Siècle Club, which was open to medical graduates of the years 1895-1899 and in the terms of its constitution was based upon loyalty to the University of Glasgow and its Medical School. Until quite recently he served upon the editorial committees of the Glasgow Medical Journal, the Ophthalmoscope, Ophthalmologica, and the British Journal of Ophthalmology.

The first world war upset many of his hopes and plans. In August, 1917, he was appointed ophthalmic surgeon to the 67th General Hospital in Salonica, and after the war resumed his private practice in Glasgow and his devotion to the Glasgow Eye Infirmary. In 1920 he was appointed Lecturer in Ophthalmology to the University of Glasgow, and when the Chair of Ophthalmology came into being in 1935 he became the first professor, as well as the first director of the Tennent Institute of Ophthalmology. Ballantyne held this office for only 6 years before he retired in 1941 under the age-limit rules, and the university conferred upon him the title of Emeritus Professor and an honorary degree of LL.D.

The quinquennia before and after his official retirement formed the most active and fruitful period of his life. From 1936 until 1948 he served on the Board of Management of the Glasgow Eye Infirmary and the Royal Hospital for Sick Children. He continued to work as consulting ophthalmic surgeon to the Glasgow Royal Maternity and Women's Hospital, a position which he had held since 1915. He lectured in Basel, in the United States of America, and in Eire. He gave the Doyne lecture in 1946 on the state of the retina in diabetic retinitis, a subject which he had studied in great detail, and in 1950 he was awarded the Edward Nettleship Prize. He collaborated with Professor Michaelson and Professor Loewenstein in the study of retinal mitaiae, and was a strong advocate of the meticulous correlation of clinical and pathological data. The resources of the Tennent Institute were designed with this objective in view, and he did his utmost to live up to the high ideals which he had set himself. On an occasion of great personal strain he wrote to a junior colleague, "These have been sad days for us, but work and service remain to make life worth while ". These were brave words and he lived in that spirit to the end.

W.J.B.R.