OBITUARY

JAMES BIGGAM, M.C., M.B., Ch.B., D.O.M.S.,
late Colonel R.A.M.C.

The late Dr. James Biggam was born on December 1, 1891, in Wigtownshire and was one of four brothers who made the R.A.M.C. their careers. Graduating in Edinburgh in 1914, he went straight into the R.A.M.C. and served until the end of the Second World War. After the Great War in which he was awarded the Military Cross and Bar for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty and was twice mentioned in dispatches, he was seconded to the Egyptian Army. On his return to England he became lecturer in ophthalmology at the R.A.M.C. College at Millbank and won the Alexander Memorial Prize in 1930 and the Parkes Memorial Prize in 1937 for his investigation into the lighting of barracks and the designing of a spectacle frame for use with the service respirator. When the War Office decided to bring the Army medical equipment up to date, he advised on the equipment of an eye department. Thus he was responsible for the very fine set of surgical instruments which delighted the hearts of army ophthalmic surgeons during the Second World War.

During the latter war he served in India, Persia, and Iraq (where he served as Ophthalmic Consultant to Pai Force). He then took command of the 23rd Scottish General Hospital in Palestine, brought the latter home, and then went with it to North-West Europe.

In the course of his journeying round the world he was reputed to be accompanied by some seventy trunks, boxes, and suit cases, each numbered and each bearing on its lid a list of contents. As one would gather, he was a most methodical man, but he was not in the least pernickety. He was generous and gave unsparingly of his means and of his time to his fellow-men.

When his soldiering days were over, he settled in an hotel in Glasgow and decided, having slept in many an uncomfortable billet to have the most comfortable bed that money could buy. This was supplied by a Glasgow firm complete with a red, amber, and green light to indicate the temperature of his electric blanket.

When he came to work at the Glasgow Eye Infirmary he was nearing the end of his professional life. He chose to work in the Out-Patient Department, but this was no hum-drums duty to be performed as quickly as possible; each patient to him was a human being with a problem and he made it his task to solve that problem to the best of his ability. His reports on patients were a joy to read and one could be certain that every aspect of the case had been carefully investigated and weighed up. He brought all his great store of experience and philosophy to bear on his judgment, for he was a great philosopher and a man with a well-balanced mind.

He became a kind of “Big Brother” in the out-patient department and young ophthalmologists brought their problems to him, so that he gradually became recognized as the trainer of the young refractionist. He was also a great authority on ophthalmic instruments, and his examination cubicle was stocked with all manner of appliances for the better investigation of his patients.

He was a very humble man and it was very characteristic of him that, when his time came to retire, and his colleagues wished to recognize his great services to the Eye Infirmary, he contrived to slip quietly away into his well-earned retirement. He returned to the land of his birth and bought a house in Stranraer, but he was not destined to enjoy it for very long and less than a year after he retired was told that he had an incurable disease. Once again he quietly put his affairs in order and on March 9, 1960 he died in an Edinburgh Nursing Home.

Dr. Biggam never married, but he has left behind a host of friends who will remember his quiet modesty, his helpfulness, his great skill, and the lovely sense of humour which carried him through many trials. He was a truly great man.