

OBITUARY

ALAN CHURCHILL WOODS, 1889–1963

One by one the giants of our generation are stepping off the stage; but the death of Alan Churchill Woods is not only a loss to our profession but a personal tragedy to the great circle of his friends, a company whose members are to be found in most countries of the world. Great in stature, great in mind and great in achievement, his death leaves a blank which to those who knew him well can in no way be filled.

The son of an ophthalmologist, Hiram Woods, he was born and educated in Baltimore. He spent all his life at Johns Hopkins University apart from short residencies in the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston and the University of Pennsylvania; there were two war-like interludes—in 1916 as a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Medical Corps to the Punitive Expedition in Mexico, and in 1917–19 as a Captain and later a Major in the First World War during which he saw active service in Europe. In 1919 he returned to Johns Hopkins and became Assistant Professor in 1926, Acting Professor in 1934, Professor in 1946, and, on his retirement, Emeritus Professor in 1955. For Johns Hopkins he lived and moved and had his being; and in it he died.

His life was busy and full, spent lavishly at a terrific pace. During his active years he gave an immense amount of time to teaching, training his residents and interesting himself in University affairs. Research on a grand scale never ceased and his work initially on sympathetic ophthalmitis and all through his active life on uveitis in all its aspects, both in the laboratory and in the clinic, was superb and will always remain classical; it produced order out of a subject which had hitherto been chaotic and elevated to a factual level an aspect of ophthalmology which before had rested largely on unsubstantiated hypotheses. For work of this nature, which embraces not only ophthalmology but much of medicine and immunology, he was perfectly suited. The broad sweep of his knowledge could embrace it in its entirety; his intensely critical faculty combined with his punctilious insistence on accuracy and the adequacy of controls provided ideal equipment for assessing a subject so elusive and complex; and his immense capacity for hard and sustained work carried him through a vast and intricate field of research the mere contemplation of which would have daunted most. His classical book, "Endogenous Uveitis" published in 1956, was a magnificent assessment of these endeavours, and its successor, "Endogenous Inflammations of the Uveal Tract", written in the greater leisure of his retirement and published in 1961, is unique as an integrated presentation of a life's philosophy. In the scope and extent of its ideas, in the originality of its thought, and in the restraint and effectiveness of its writing it is comparable in our generation to Sir Thomas Lewis's equally classical treatise on "The Blood-vessels of the Human Skin and their Responses". It was with acclamation that his colleagues throughout the world through the International Council of Ophthalmology awarded him for his work the accolade of the Gonin Medal in Brussels in 1958.

But his interests in research were not confined to his own particular field. Perhaps the greatest single influence he had on the development of ophthalmology in the United States was his service on the National Health Council which he joined in 1943 and of which he was Chairman from 1947. In assessing the merits and demerits of candidates for the support of public funds for research and evaluating the fruits of their labours he was unequalled and, particularly after the death of Jonas Friedenwald, he did more to encourage and mould on the right lines the quite phenomenal volume of original work undertaken in ophthalmology in that country during the years of his office. For this alone his influence in America will be sorely missed.

It is obvious that many honours would fall his way. He was President of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology (1947–8), of the American Ophthalmological Society (1956) and of the Johns Hopkins Medical and Surgical Society (1957).



He delivered every major American lecture that exists—the Jackson (1946), the Doheny (1947), the Gifford (1951), the de Schweinitz (1953), the Howe (1957), and the Proctor (1957) Lectures. In Britain he was well known, and was equally at home with us as we were with him; he delivered an inaugural address at the opening of the Institute of Ophthalmology in London (1948), was an honorary member of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom (1953), and is the only non-Scottish ophthalmologist to become an honorary F.R.C.S. Edinburgh (1950). He was awarded the A.M.A. Research Medal (1948), the Howe Research Medal (1953), the Honour Award of the American Academy (1955), the Johns Hopkins Distinguished Service Medal (1955), and, above all, the International Gonin Medal (1958).

In all ophthalmology there was no more striking personality than Alan Woods. As a teacher and in the training of his residents he will never be forgotten by the generations of young men in whose development he played so great a part; their experience is to be envied. As a writer—and he usually had two or three papers simultaneously in preparation on his desk—he was factual and highly controversial. He had decided

opinions, arrived at only after much thought, and he revelled in their vigorous defence; if the world agreed with him, much of the spice went out of life; and on paper or in conversation among friends a scientific (or other) argument never languished. In all this, and in assessing the work of others, his complete integrity was outstanding; any suggestion of chicanery was to him anathema; and once in his life, on stepping down from the rostrum at the New York Academy of Medicine, he was served with a 50,000 dollar libel suit (which came to nothing) for saying exactly what he thought.

As a companion he was inimitable. Gay, enthusiastic and hearty, he enjoyed life to the full with a multitude of interests—sailing, fishing, duck shooting, football and the rest. His knowledge of English (and American) literature was quite unusual. He was an untiring raconteur of interesting stories, the only disadvantage of which was the extreme difficulty his listeners had in understanding his curious slurred and tumbled Southern growl cascading like a waterfall as the speed of the narrative increased—the only time each word he said was fully understood was in his Gonin oration delivered at Lausanne in French. Communication with him, indeed, presented numerous problems, for his left-handed script was quite illegible to anyone but his secretary. He revelled in good company, good food and, above all, in good wine in which (for an American) he was—and certainly considered himself to be—something of a connoisseur. Altogether, quite a person—kind, genuine, lovable and, whether at home, in hospital, in his laboratory or abroad, always tremendous fun, to whom you and the world were good.

To his wife and constant companion, Powell, and to his three children, ophthalmologists from many lands will extend their sincere sympathy.

STEWART DUKE-ELDER

Our readers will be sad to learn that Robert Foster Moore died on March 1, 1963, and also that Conrad Berens of New York died on March 2, 1963. Obituary notices will be published in a later issue.

NOTES

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

Ophthalmology Prize and Travelling Fellowship

By the terms of the Ophthalmology Fund of the Royal Society of Medicine, a sum of £50 per annum has been set aside to form a prize to be awarded by the Council of the Society, on the recommendation of the Council of the Section of Ophthalmology, to the ophthalmologist of any nationality not of consultant status judged by them to have done, in the British Isles, the best piece of original work published during the 12 months ended December 31, 1962.

Application should be made, with six reprints of the article, or articles, to the Honorary Secretary of the Section of Ophthalmology of the Royal Society of Medicine, 1, Wimpole Street, London, W.1, *not later than May 1, 1963*.

A biennial Travelling Fellowship is provided to help British ophthalmologists travelling abroad to further the study and advancement of ophthalmology. Travelling Fellows may be required by the Council to lecture at a meeting of the Section of Ophthalmology on their experiences during the period of the award.

Applicants should submit details to the Honorary Secretary of the Section of Ophthalmology of the Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London, W.1, of the subject to be studied, the applicant's personal relation to it, the centres to be visited, the duration of the visit, and an estimate of the expense to be incurred. A sum of £400 will be available, but the amount awarded will be decided by the Council. Applications for the period October 1963–64 should be received *by May 1, 1963*.