Obituary

Sir Stewart Duke-Elder, GCVO, MA, MD, PhD, FRCP, FRCS, FRS

With the death of Sir Stewart Duke-Elder on 27 March, at the age of 79, the world of ophthalmology has lost one of its greatest men, and British ophthalmology her most famous ambassador.

Stewart, a son of the manse, was born on 22 April 1898 at Tealing, near Dundee. He entered St. Andrews University as a foundation scholar in 1915, graduating MA, with first-class honours in natural science. He then became a bachelor of science, with special distinction in physiology, and in 1923 graduated MB, ChB, and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in the following year. Not content with this he graduated MD of St. Andrews, with a gold medal for his thesis, and immediately followed this with a doctorate of science and a PhD (London). He was also president of the University Union of St. Andrews, an office which he held with distinction and with the same zest and enjoyment of life which he retained till he died. All this was achieved by the age of 27. It is not surprising that such an intellect should later flower into genius.

Physiology of the eye was his earliest interest and he embarked on this aspect of research at University College, London, under the direction of Professor Starling. It was at this time that he met Sir John Parsons, who had a profound influence on the path which Stewart followed in his chosen career. In 1927 he began a private practice in London, and in the following year he married his life-long partner, Phyllis, who played no small part in the production of his first major contribution to our literature—his *Textbook of Ophthalmology* in 7 volumes (1932–1954). This was a stupendous task for one man even with the help of a talented wife.

During the second world war Sir Stewart was consultant surgeon to the Army. During a whirlwind tour of the Middle East it was amazing to see the effect his warm smile and approachability had upon all those he met, and for the young stranded in the far off desert lands an opportunity to discuss with him their thoughts for the future meant more than can be expressed in words. After the war honours were showered upon him; medals from 16 universities; the presidency of the Faculty of Ophthalmologists, which he founded; presidency of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom; honorary life presidency of the International Council of Ophthalmology; and the honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

Through his drive he was responsible for the creation of the Institute of Ophthalmology, of which he was director of research for 17 years and as a consequence of the stimulus which he gave to research he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1960—a reward very rarely given to a clinician, however brilliant. In 1958 he decided that his original textbook needed to be brought up to date and he started on his *System of Ophthalmology*

Photo by G. Argent

in 15 volumes, the last being published in 1976. The first volume, on 'The Evolution of Vision', written entirely by himself, is perhaps one of the best examples of Stewart's intellectual mastery of his subject and command of the English language. In several of the succeeding volumes he enlisted the help of some of his colleagues, but the inspiration and direction were his—and what a slave-driver he was!

His other abiding interest was the Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem. First as Hospitaller and later as Bailiff Grand Cross he offered his services with characteristic enthusiasm and was the prime architect of the magnificent hospital which still hoists its flag in Jerusalem.

Although he walked and talked with kings and queens, having been surgeon-oculist to the Royal Family over a period of 29 years, he never lost the common touch or his interest in the younger generation. Stewart, with a rich legacy of Scottish genes and married to a gifted and charming Sassenach, exerted a unique influence on the progress of ophthalmology throughout the world. He was a man the like of whom we are unlikely to meet again. To Stewart, and Phyllis, we are for ever in debt.

G. I. SCOTT