

OBITUARY NOTICE.

Sir James Alexander Russell, Kt., M.A., M.B., F.R.C.P.E., B.Sc. in Public Health, LL.D., J.P., D.L. By **THOMAS R. RONALDSON, M.B., F.R.C.P.E.**

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ABOUT fifty years ago the writer, then beginning his medical studies, paid his first visit to the dissecting-rooms of the Anatomical Department of the University of Edinburgh. The experience was trying, but curiously and greatly relieved by the sight of a tall, alert figure moving from group to group of students, the impression of activity and power being emphasised by a pale face of arresting brightness and intelligence. Such was the writer's introduction to Sir James A. Russell, then Junior Demonstrator of Anatomy under the late Sir William Turner, and the beginning of a valued friendship, ending only with his death.

It is a matter of common observation that the country owes much to its manses, from which, with their plain living and high thinking, so often issue those who do yeoman service in their day and generation. Sir James was one of them. He was the eldest son of the Rev. A. F. Russell, Free Church minister of Kilmodan and South Hall, Argyllshire. He was, however, born on 6th April 1846 in Skye, at Glassellan House, the home of his maternal grandfather, Mr Munro. A few weeks after his birth his mother brought him to Glendaruel, and the old Inn of Tighmor-na-clach became their home until the following year, when the manse was ready for occupation.

There, on the Kyles of Bute,—one of a band of brothers—his boyhood was spent, the strong physique was built up, and the seeds of mental and moral qualities were planted which were so beneficently to bear fruit in after years. Yarn, spun by his nurse from the wool of Highland sheep to the accompaniment of Gaelic folk-song, and woven by the local weaver, was made into kilts by the tailor who came to the family from Skye at stated intervals for the purpose. Education, secular and religious, was carried on at home and in the Stronafian F.C. School, where rumour has it that the excellent and energetic teacher took at times undue advantage of the native garb. Much of boyhood's spare time was spent in boating and sea-fishing. In the later period of his home education he

had, in addition to his father's training, the advantage of the help of Mr Adam Lang, M.A., Aberdeen, and of M. Henri Mouron, a cultured Swiss gentleman, from whom he gained the knowledge of French which was of interest and use to him ever afterwards.

Thus equipped, doubtless with the added responsibility of being the eldest son of the manse with brothers to follow, he proceeded in his sixteenth year to the University of Edinburgh, where he began his studies in 1861 in the Faculty of Arts, and graduated as M.A. Thereafter he entered the Faculty of Medicine, and after a distinguished course graduated in 1868 as M.B., C.M., taking the first place in First Class Honours.

Sir Halliday Croom, in an admirable obituary notice in *The British Medical Journal* of February 1918, says: "Those who remember him recall him as a keen student, fond of all sorts of scientific problems, careful and exact in argument, and ready of speech."

Among the eminent Professors of his time Goodsir influenced him most, and it was to Anatomy that he attached himself after graduation, acting as Demonstrator under the late Sir William Turner, and rising to the post of Senior Demonstrator before demitting office in 1876.

During part of this time he became famous as a "coach" for the professional examinations, few of his students being known to fail.

Recognition of his eminent qualifications as an anatomist and teacher was shown by the offer to him of a professorship of Anatomy in New Zealand in 1874. This, however, he did not see his way to accept.

Although in 1875 he was an applicant for the Chair of Medicine and Anatomy in St Andrews—an unsuccessful one, fortunately, for the future of Edinburgh,—there are clear indications that Anatomy was too exact a science, and presented too limited a field, to satisfy the wide and varied interests of his mind. In a letter dated 14th May 1874 he writes: "I am working two hours a day in the Chemical Laboratory this summer. Turner lets me away for that time. I wish to qualify for getting an appointment of Officer of Public Health should a chance turn up."

To enable him to carry out this wish he graduated in 1875 as B.Sc. in Public Health with First Class Honours—the first B.Sc. in that department.

While Demonstrator of Anatomy he kept in touch with Medicine and Surgery by attending clinical lectures in the Royal Infirmary. In an interesting letter to a medical friend he showed how clearly he grasped the principles of antiseptic surgery and realised the revolution in the treatment of wounds that had begun with Lister.

It is an admirable custom that the inhabitants of Edinburgh should show hospitality to ministers who come from a distance to attend the meetings of the General Assemblies of the Churches. Sir James's father was in this way allocated to Woodville, Canaan Lane, the home of Miss Marianne Wilson, daughter of a well-known naturalist, Mr James Wilson, and niece of the celebrated Christopher North. Thus a friendship began between the families, which finally led to the marriage of Sir James to Miss Wilson in 1876. Having retired from the teaching of Anatomy the same year, and being now in a settled home, where he lived until his death, he was free to follow the natural bent of his mind, which, as has been indicated, was towards Medicine and General Science and their application to public life rather than to the more limited field of Anatomy. The next year was accordingly spent in France and England studying sanitation and the problems of Public Health, the scientific treatment of which was then in its infancy, hoping eventually to get a post as Officer of Public Health.

Returning to Edinburgh in 1877, he inaugurated the class at the Heriot-Watt College on the Theory of Plumbing, especially in relation to sanitary work, and for several years he filled the position of lecturer, and in December of that year gave two lectures, afterwards published, on sanitary houses to builders and plumbers, under the auspices of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts.

How greatly his work in this direction was appreciated is shown in the minute of meeting of the Local Council for Edinburgh and the East of Scotland of the National Registration of Plumbers, held shortly after his death.

Alongside of this he carried on a practice as adviser in sanitary matters, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to plan and to supervise the carrying out of the sanitation and plumbing of a friend's house.

But the year 1880 was the real beginning of his public life. Elected to the Town Council that year, he became Bailie in 1885, and at the same time Convener of the Public Health Committee, of which he had previously been a member. Finally he was raised to the Civic Chair in 1891, and filled the position of Lord Provost with honour and acceptance for the usual term of three years.

From the date of his election as Town Councillor a new era began in the department of Public Health, which proved to be widespread and far-reaching in its results. It is not difficult to realise the effect of the entrance into a town council, largely composed of commercial men,

of a man of culture and science, trained in Medicine, and who was young, ardent, capable in affairs, single-minded in character and purpose, courteous in manner, and always easy of approach. Sanitary reform was beginning to stir in the minds of public men. The man had come for the hour, and his influence was rapid and decisive.

His association with the Public Health Committee, and the assistance of other public-spirited men, among whom should be specially mentioned the late Sir Henry Littlejohn, led to slums being removed, streets widened, and housing improved. The Fever Hospital, now one of the largest and best of its kind, was initiated and personally watched over in the old Royal Infirmary buildings; and notably the 1891 Act, which is the City's Magna Charta of Public Health, was passed, mainly owing to his foresight, sagacity, and knowledge. In 1881 the death-rate of the city was 18·8 per 1000; it progressively diminished until in 1916 it fell to 14·5.

The electric lighting of the city was installed during his Lord Provostship, and it was due to his scientific knowledge, and to his insistence that it should be kept in the city's hands, that it was the most successful of all town installations. Further, that great improvement, the widening of the North Bridge and of the street between it and the High Street, as well as the coincident enlargement of the North British Railway Station, were accomplished by his courageous shouldering of a great responsibility at a critical juncture.

These are probably the most prominent of his civic successes as Lord Provost. As a by-product of his term of office it has been pointed out by Sir Halliday Croom that during his Lord Provostship, "The profession of Medicine in Edinburgh came to its kingdom, for to every medical institution and to all medical charities he gave, not only his own personal encouragement as Lord Provost, but that of the civic authorities as well, and the members of the profession themselves enjoyed his generous hospitality. He was among the first, if not the very first, medical Lord Provosts of Edinburgh, and it would be a very great advantage to that city, and not to that city only, if men of his calibre, with his scientific and medical knowledge, who had leisure at their disposal, would grace such chairs again." The medical profession has always been held in high esteem by the Town Council, and, with a medical man as Lord Provost, its position reached high-water mark.

But it was not only in civic matters that his services were pre-eminent. His keen mind found outlet in many activities. At an early period he made an effort to have all the children at sea-coast schools, not only at home but in the Colonies, taught signalling by the Morse alphabet,

holding that not only would it prove useful for ships at sea, but that "by exercising a whole class together the children develop that sense of time and rhythm which is essential to all proper co-operation in combined movements, from the pulling of a rope to the marching of a regiment."

As a Volunteer he was a member of No. 4 Company, Q.E.R.V.B., from 1870 to 1877. He became H.M. Inspector of Anatomy in 1881, and in 1890 Assistant Inspector under the Cruelty to Animals Act for Scotland and the North of England, the latter appointment affording full scope for his qualities of tact, patience, and knowledge, and compelling him to the last to keep himself abreast of the developments of Physiology and Pathology.

He was a member of Edinburgh School Board, 1885-1888; Chairman of the Burgh Committee on Secondary Education, 1893-1902; Governor George Heriot's Trust, 1880-1903; ex-officio Chairman of the Board of Management Royal Infirmary during his Lord Provostship; a member of the Board of Management of the Royal Edinburgh Mental Hospital, 1907-1914. He was elected a Fellow and an Examiner of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh.

In 1880 Sir James Russell was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, whose meetings he attended with great interest and enjoyment. Although he never contributed a paper to the *Proceedings* or *Transactions*, he often took part in discussions of papers on subjects with which he was acquainted. His mental qualities were strong, not so much in the direction of original investigation and research, as in a marked capacity for understanding and expounding the results of research, and applying them to the good of the community. He contributed a valuable memoir of the late Sir William Turner, which is published in Vol. XXXVI of the *Proceedings*, and which is full of interesting reminiscences of University life. He was also a regular attendant at the meetings of the Royal Society Club, where he delighted his friends with many curious stories of the days when Professor Syme and Sir James Young Simpson added lustre to the medical faculty.

A man of affairs, he was director and chairman of various companies.

As an elder of the Barclay U.F. congregation, he was held in great esteem for faithful and detailed duty to his Church. In that office, as a director of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society, and as a member of committee of the French Protestant Church of Edinburgh, he found more outward expression for his simple but deeply religious nature.

Such and other eminent services met with their due meed of public recognition. Not only did he adorn the Civic Chair, but he became Lord Lieutenant of the County of the City of Edinburgh; his Alma Mater conferred on him the degree of LL.D. in 1894, and a few months later Queen Victoria bestowed on him the honour of knighthood.

Born by western seas, reared in a Highland manse, the eldest of a family of sons who—after school life—had to depend largely on their own exertions, early inspired to excel, Sir James was ever the hardest of workers, for whom, until his later years, the usual holiday was scarcely existent. Partly owing to his iron constitution, and partly from the variety of his mental interests, he did not seem to require the relaxations of the ordinary man. But latterly he keenly enjoyed his motor-boat on the Clyde, to the boating and line-fishing of his boyhood being added the mechanical interest of his motor-engine. Towards the end of his life he became subject to bronchitis and to heart weakness, and to these he succumbed on 22nd January 1918, at the age of 72.

To many, the news of his death meant little more than the passing of a useful and distinguished citizen, but to his intimates it meant the loss of a loyal, hospitable, and generous-hearted friend, who would spare neither time nor strength on their behalf, and whose memory will ever be cherished by them.

His first wife died in 1882. In 1897 he married Mary Ruth, daughter of Captain G. B. Prior, R.A., and widow of Captain MacKenzie, Bombay Cavalry, by whom and two daughters he is survived, and by Lady Russell's two daughters by her previous marriage. He was buried in the Dean Cemetery, where so many of Edinburgh's honoured citizens have their last resting-place.