

Obituary

Sir Geoffrey Jefferson

Sir Geoffrey Jefferson, Emeritus Professor of Neurosurgery in the University of Manchester, died on 29th January 1961 at the age of 74.

Jefferson's childhood was spent in Rochdale, Lancashire, where his father became a well-known general practitioner and surgeon. He received his schooling at the Manchester Grammar School and his undergraduate medical training at the University of Manchester. He qualified M. B., B. S. from London in 1909. During his student years he won numerous awards and at the time of his graduation received a distinction in surgery. By 1913 he had become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and had won the gold medal in the Master of Surgery examination.

It was while he was a Demonstrator in anatomy under Prof. *Elliot Smith* at Manchester that he first seriously considered making the surgery of the brain his career. But his course was not finally set in that direction until a few years later. Meanwhile he moved to British Columbia in Canada to build up a practice in general surgery influenced in his decision, no doubt, by his marriage in 1913 to Dr. *Gertrude Flumerfelt*, a native of Victoria, B. C., and of Anglo-Dutch descent. The outbreak of the war made him change his plans and he returned to Europe to join the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Anglo-Russian Red Cross hospital under the command of *Sir Herbert Waterhouse* which was set up at St. Petersburg.

As *Jefferson* many years later wrote, quoting his friend *E. W. Twining*, "It's remarkably easy to get on in life. You don't have to do much really because there's such a powerful suction that pulls you forward. I suppose that there was a deal of suction in front of me." *Jefferson* was "sucked" into neurosurgery by *Waterhouse*, for while in Russia he gained first hand experience of head injuries and brain wounds and later, in France, came under the influence of *Harvey Cushing*. From that time his determination hardened and after the war he began his civilian neurosurgical career at Salford Royal Hospital.

Before settling down in the Manchester area he spent a short period with *Cushing* in Boston. His Salford appointment was in general surgery and although he developed a special interest in neurological surgery he was not able to pursue his chosen course to the exclusion of non-neurosurgical distractions until the Manchester Royal Infirmary set aside enough beds for neurosurgery and appointed *Jefferson* to the honorary staff as neurosurgeon. This did not come about until 1934 and it was not until 1939 that his unit was recognized by the University as a Department and he was created

Professor of Neurosurgery — the first in the British Isles. His eminence was such that he was appointed honorary consulting neurosurgeon to the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Queen Square, London, an unprecedented distinction for a provincial surgeon not living in London. However, his ties and loyalties were with Manchester where he remained, eventually severing his active connection with Queen Square.

During the second world war he was adviser in neurosurgery to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Pensions, which involved him in much arduous travelling at a time when he had the least clinical assistance with which to share the burden of a busy neurosurgical service at Manchester. In 1947 he was elected to a fellowship in the Royal Society, an honour he valued highly since it had seldom been conferred before on a practising clinical surgeon. From 1948 to 1952 he was a member of the Medical Research Council where his opinions continued to be sought after his term of office had expired. He was knighted in 1950.

The mainspring of *Jefferson's* success was his intellect. This combined with his amiability and wit made him irresistible. He cherished his foreign neurosurgical connexions and through the years after the second war when neurosurgeons were multiplying fast he strove to maintain a sense of international unity and friendliness amongst them all. He was probably the only man who could have hoped to achieve this since he was everywhere respected on account of his works and loved for his own sake.

One dare not guess at this time which of his writings will survive. He had a particular interest in the clinical manifestations of lesions in the region of the pituitary and his articles on chiasmal gliomas, Circle of Willis aneurysms, pituitary tumours, trigeminal lesions, third ventricle tumours, and lesions of the cavernous sinus were the product of it. He did not follow the contemporary trend in his clinical investigations but himself set the pace. He was a skilful and elegant writer whose idiosyncracies of style, which were often reflections of his speech, gave to the reader who had met him a liaison as intimate as it is unusual in medical writing. The other type of paper he wrote and in which he excelled was the sort that has often been dubbed "philosophical" (a term he always avoided when applied to himself), but which he said were "general". This included biographical articles on various pioneers from the whole field of neurology, and ruminative discussions — he called them Reflections — on such fundamental subjects as cortical localization, the search for the locus and mechanism of consciousness, and the impact of modern neurophysiological techniques on concepts of brain mechanisms. Through all these writings his own personality obtrudes, unconscious but irrepressible. With his unerring eye for humbug he knew he was no philosopher in the sense reserved for professional academic thinkers of that title, but with his consuming interest in the tangible and intangible aspects of brain function, his wide reading and his never ending interest in the lives, experiences and opinions of people from all walks of life he was an unusually well-informed and ardent lover of wisdom.

He had no enemies even amongst his closest contemporaries. If ever rumour hinted at discord or rivalry it would be silenced with such a disarming declaration as, "You know, the reason A. B. and I have never for a moment been jealous of each other is because each one of us has secretly believed himself to be the better of the two!" His facility for friendship spread to all ages. The reception he was accorded at scientific meetings was rousing. He will be remembered by many for his zest for new friends and experiences, for conversations with young neurosurgeons and neurologists far into the night at his home, in the surgeon's room, at a cafe table, or strolling down Basin Street.

As we passed the time of day in his company it was hard to realize that for many of the later years of his life he was cursed with ill health. He bore his numerous painful illnesses with remarkable stoicism. *Lady Jefferson's* protracted last illness, from which she died shortly after *Sir Geoffrey*, added deeply to his distress. Their mutual understanding and affection was unruffled by *Jefferson's* denial of time's passage and of the frailty of his physique. In part, *Lady Jefferson* became reconciled to the former and strove, often vainly, to protect the latter. Their professional interests were interlocked, for *Lady Jefferson*, with her infinite compassion for people in distress, had used her psychiatric training and experience in founding and developing the Family Welfare Service which was subsequently taken over complete by Manchester Corporation.

He was an inevitable target for the student caricaturist and wit: his peculiar stance, cigarette poised, a dreaminess that belied the inner activity, his imperturbability; the pause before he spoke, the soft yet fruity intonation; his laughable attempts to keep on time; above all his friendliness. The *Medical Student's Journal* at Manchester once carried a cartoon of him that was penetrating but affectionate. Its caption, written boldly down one side of the picture, may serve as our envoi: *Good Old Jeff.*

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