Memoir

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John Crighton Bramwell

John Crighton Bramwell, emeritus professor of cardiology in the University of Manchester and consulting physician to Manchester Royal Infirmary, died on 8 September 1976 at the age of 87. He was one of the small group of physicians who laid the foundations of cardiology as a speciality in Britain; to him the Cardiac Club, the British Cardiac Society, and the British Heart Journal meant a great deal and to all these he gave devoted service.

He came from a well-known Edinburgh medical family (his father was Sir Byrom Bramwell and his elder brother the distinguished neurologist Edwin Bramwell). It seemed appropriate that he should go south and, when he left Cheltenham College, he became an Exhibitioner of Trinity College, Cambridge and, in 1910, graduated Bachelor of Arts with first-class honours in the Natural Science Tripos. The following year he devoted to research with Keith Lucas with whom
he published his first paper (on the refractory period in nerve) in the *Journal of Physiology*. He had already decided to spend his professional life in Manchester on the basis, he said, that at that time it had the largest population within the sphere of influence of any single medical school in Britain, and, therefore, offered the best opportunity for the development of the then-young speciality of cardiology, to which he had already decided to devote himself. In 1912 he was awarded a Graduate Entrance Scholarship to the Manchester Medical School and began his clinical studies. In 1914 he volunteered for military service, and in 1915 was given two months' leave to sit his final examinations. He then went to France with the 23rd Division and served until the end of the war. Back in Manchester, after a period as house physician at the Manchester Royal Infirmary he was appointed Medical Registrar in 1919 and the following year took charge of the newly-formed Electrocardiographic Department. The next four years were devoted to clinical teaching and to experimental research with A. V. Hill. In 1923 he was awarded a gold medal for his M.D. dissertation, and elected one of the first four Rockefeller Travelling Fellows. During the same year he became the first elected member of the Cardiac Club (founded the previous year). He held the post of secretary from 1928 to 1932; he was chairman in 1931 and again in 1937, when he presided at the meeting which changed the Cardiac Club into the British Cardiac Society. He was chairman of the Society in 1955 and was elected an honorary member. He constantly supported the *British Heart Journal*, he was a member of the Editorial Board, and made many contributions to its pages. On the occasion of his election as an Honorary Member of the Society, the members dedicated a number of the Journal to him; in that issue Maurice Campbell wrote an appreciation of his contributions to cardiology.

During his year in the United States as Rockefeller Fellow he worked in Joseph Erlanger's laboratory at Washington, St. Louis, at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in New York, and spent two months visiting the principal medical centres in the United States and Canada. In 1926 he was appointed to the staff of the Manchester Royal Infirmary. In 1946 the Electrocardiographic Department was incorporated into the new University Department of Cardiology, in a new building, and he was director of this department until he retired in 1954. From 1940 until 1946 he held the post of part-time Professor of Systematic Medicine; the chair then became whole-time, and he was appointed to a personal chair as Professor of Cardiology, the first such chair in this country. He continued his interest in general medicine, however, for he maintained that cardiology could be practised wisely only with a continuing background knowledge of general medicine.

From 1911 to 1954 he made important contributions both to the physiology of the circulation and to clinical cardiology. He was never more happy than with a small group of students at the bedside, and he was in great demand both as a lecturer and as an examiner. It would be impossible here to enumerate the many distinguished lectures he gave or the range of his research work, or his many other activities in the Royal College of Physicians, the Association of Physicians, and elsewhere. He published 9 books and some 70 papers. His work on the transmission of the arterial pulse and arterial elasticity, his contributions to the study of heart disease in pregnancy, and to the features of the circulation in athletes are well known. But his interests ranged much more widely, and he was always as interested in his patients as in their diseases.

A factual summary of even so distinguished a career does less than justice to the man. I knew him as his patient, assistant, colleague, and successor; in all these situations Crighton Bramwell exemplified for me many admirable qualities: sympathy, devotion, skill, wisdom, and integrity, but he possessed one gift that enabled all his other qualities to fructify richly: the art of advocacy, most essentially in what Lord Birkett once described as 'the art of attractive and persuasive speech on all occasions that call for its exercise' adding 'but the price to be paid is one of taking pains and exercising much patience'. Bramwell's mastery of this art is evident even in his writings, but his spoken word added the charm of his personality, the restraint of his character, and a speaking voice of persuasive clarity and distinction. His easy use of graceful and simple English played a most significant part in all aspects of his life, whether as physician, mentor, examiner, lecturer, colleague, host, or friend. It allowed the effective expression of his wisdom, understanding, and sympathy; it made his bedside teaching and lectures an invariable pleasure to his audience, and it gained him the willing collaboration of his colleagues in those well-conceived projects to which he had set his mind. He maintained the highest standards of professional and personal integrity, yet rarely criticised others and then only by a rather pointed omission to praise. Inevitably, he set an example hard to follow, but few who knew him will fail to carry his principles and standards as a model, perhaps impossible to achieve but always worth the striving.

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