JOHN HAY

John Hay was born at Birkenhead on November 25, 1873, and died at his home at Bowness-on-Windermere on April 21, 1959. He had been an influential figure in the medical life of Liverpool for almost half a century.

His father was an architect of distinction, and both his parents were Lowland Scots, Non-conformists, and ardent temperance workers—two loyalties their son maintained all his life. It may seem strange that someone who was so essentially a countryman at heart should have been born in Birkenhead; but in those days it was possible to walk down to the river through green meadows, which now are covered by endless warehouses and traversed by the dock road. Before the turn of the century the family moved to Heswall, then a delightful village on the banks of the Dee.

He was educated at the Liverpool Institute and at the University College which was then a constituent college of the Victoria University of Manchester. After a brilliant career as a student, he qualified with the London Conjoint Diploma in 1895 and became M.B., Ch.B. of Manchester the following year.

The older physicians often had a broad training that we should remember in our modern planning. When holding the Holt Fellowship, John Hay was able to do physiological work with Sherrington and this led to a lasting friendship; as demonstrator of anatomy he adorned the walls of the department with his own drawings of dissections; and as pathologist to the David Lewis Hospital he had a wide experience of post-mortems, so that he was well trained in the three basic sciences. He obtained his M.D. in 1901 and the M.R.C.P. in 1903. From 1900 to 1903 he was medical tutor and registrar to the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, and was the first to introduce artificial pneumothorax to Liverpool.

About this time Hay became a disciple of James Mackenzie, and he had many tales of those exciting Sunday visits to Burnley. He was unashamedly a hero-worshipper and recognized Mackenzie with gratitude as one of his heroes who had influenced the most important stage in his professional life. He became keenly interested in the graphic methods of registering cardiac activity. The exchange of ideas was by no means in one direction, from master to pupil, and the early association ripened into a firm friendship between the two men and their families, which lasted until Mackenzie's death in 1925.

Hay (1905) was the first to report a necropsy with changes in the A-V bundle of a patient in whom block had been clearly recorded during life. He was the first to point out that ventricular beats may be dropped without a preceding change in the A-V interval (1906) and he, and also Wenckebach, showed that complete heart block could develop suddenly without any warning sign. Hay (1907) also gave one of the earliest accounts with polygraphic tracings of auricular paroxysmal tachycardia.

He was interested in the health and welfare of children and took part in a review that revealed in half the poorer children in Liverpool a degree of malnutrition that was sufficient to interfere with their education. This review was partly responsible for the start of the school health service.

In 1907 Hay was appointed Assistant Physician to the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, and with his experience of the polygraph it is not surprising that he soon started a special heart department—one of the first in the north of England. He became F.R.C.P. in 1915. He served with the 1st Western General Hospital in the 1914-18 war and became a Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.M.C. Later he was regional adviser in medicine and cardiology to Western Command and to the Ministry of Pensions, and was also senior medical officer to the Royal Insurance Company. He was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of the County Palatine of Lancaster.
In 1924, he became Professor of Medicine (part-time) in Liverpool University and threw himself with enthusiasm into his new duties. He had always been a great teacher; his wide learning, his clinical acumen, and his simple clear teaching made him popular with his students, and he taught them to develop a balanced judgment and reasoned optimism.

His presidential addresses to the Liverpool Medical Institution were in 1928 on William Harvey—another of his heroes—and in 1930 on Sir James Mackenzie. He wrote several papers on coronary thrombosis, especially about its natural history and prognosis, and was quick to realize that the prognosis might be relatively good. This was the subject of his St. Cyres lecture at the National Heart Hospital in 1933. He served on the Council of the Royal College of Physicians from 1930 to 1932.

Apart from his own work, he was a constant inspiration and stimulus to others working in his department. As professor of medicine and senior physician of the hospital he exercised his authority with wisdom and foresight in helping to establish the Associated Voluntary Hospital Board, which later became the United Liverpool Hospitals. He will, perhaps, be remembered best as a great consultant and as a great teacher. It was an invaluable experience for his junior associates to watch him taking a history, and to observe his success in making a friend of a shy or awkward patient. He would ferret out the physical signs with zest and inspire us all with his enthusiasm. To the discussion that followed he brought a keen, analytical, and well-stored mind, backed by a wealth of clinical experience, and in conclusion he would recount one of his many humorous and apposite stories designed to imprint the whole case on the memory. As a physician he was remarkably kind and thoughtful, and would often visit the wards alone to unravel a case of unusual complexity or to help a patient under the stress of emotional or domestic difficulty. He was skilled in the science of medicine and a supreme master of the art. The warmth of his personality, helped by his friendly appearance and often by the silver grey suits he was fond of wearing, inspired confidence and gave his patients fresh strength and courage.

We are indebted to Lord Cohen of Birkenhead for permission to quote what follows. "To me John Hay’s passing is the end of an era. Forty years ago he was my teacher and twenty-five years ago I succeeded him in the Chair of Medicine. At that time he seemed as young as any of his colleagues though he had been a resident before any of them were born. No one could have had a more loyal and helpful master and friend, or a wiser counsellor. He was devoid of malice and guile. His tact, integrity, and selflessness were seen in many delicate and successful hospital negotiations. In committee his sense of fairness, his ability to grasp the core of the problem and often, by his intuitive understanding of people and things, to solve it led to his being our accepted leader; but in this role he never sought to dominate; his sole aim was to help. Nor shall we forget his restless energy."

John Hay was one of the dwindling band of original members of the Cardiac Club, in which he played a prominent part. He gathered the early experiences of the members with quinidine and established some of the principles for its use. In 1937, when the club changed to the larger British Cardiac Society, he had already retired from the Chair of Medicine but he remained a popular figure who was always at the centre of a group anxious to talk to him and to hear what he had to say. His last paper read in 1941, was about the treatment of coronary thrombosis, but for many years he remained in great demand as an after-dinner speaker: his felicity of speech, his wealth of reminiscence, and his ability as a story-teller and as a mimic were warmly appreciated. He was Chairman of the Society in 1928, 1932, and 1948, when he was also President of the Association of Physicians. He was elected an Honorary Member of both societies—a double distinction that gave him particular pleasure.

Extensive as they were, his professional activities were only part of his life, though we often wondered how he found time for anything else. He was a great lover of beauty—in music, in painting, in flowers, and in life. He was a capable musician and rarely missed a Philharmonic Society concert, though perhaps he got even greater pleasure from the more intimate charm of chamber music. He played the violin and viola with great enthusiasm, and when he was 75 he had to...
change the time of a consultation with E.W.J. because of a music lesson, since as leader of the family quartet he said he had to set a good example.

His sensitive artistic nature found an outlet in painting and his delicate water colours were exceptionally attractive and adorned the rooms of many of his friends. The subjects were usually country scenes in his beloved Lake District or some notable piece of Georgian architecture among the older houses in Liverpool. Many of us will cherish his distinctive Christmas cards drawn by hand. At one time he was president of the Liver Sketching Club.

An enthusiastic photographer, he had a happy knack of catching a characteristic pose and several of his photographs have been used in this Journal to illustrate the memoir of a member. He kept a comprehensive record of all his “firms” and their later careers were carefully entered. No wonder they all loved him, and his last ward round brought out a demonstration of spontaneous affection and enthusiasm that must have been unique in the long history of the Royal Infirmary.

His love of the countryside was another abiding interest, dating back to walking tours in Ireland (literally travels with a donkey) and Scotland. Later he developed a deep attachment to the English Lake District that remained to the end of his days, and fell-walking was undertaken with the same enthusiasm as all his other activities. In later years he became an expert bee-keeper, and was able to devote time to aid the Friends of the Lake District. He had always loved his garden, even in the Liverpool days, but his retirement to the Lake District gave him the time and opportunity for gardening on a more ambitious scale. This ambition was fully gratified, at the cost of hard physical effort, at Knott End and again at Underfell.

Those of us who visited him at his home in Bowness knew that his supremely active mind had achieved serenity. The time came when the colours he had loved and captured in his paintings could no longer be seen, and the step that had retained its boyish spring for over 80 years at last began to falter: his interest in the garden passed imperceptibly from brisk activity to tranquil enjoyment. He faced the increasing limitations of the last few years with fortitude and equanimity. But in spirit and conversation he remained youthful to the end.

In 1906, he married Agnes Margaret, daughter of William Duncan of Tyldesley, Lancashire, and they had two sons and two daughters. His wife died in 1947. His elder son is professor of child health at the University of Liverpool and the younger is physician at the Royal Lancaster Infirmary.

MAURICE CAMPBELL
E. WYN JONES

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We should like to thank Messrs. Burrell and Hardman Ltd. of Rodney St., Liverpool for permission to reproduce the photograph.