F. G. HOBSON

Frederick Greig Hobson was born at Hampstead on August 6, 1891, and died at Oxford on June 26, 1961. He came from Westminster to Oxford as a science exhibitor in October 1910. He and the writer were among the small number of medical students at New College, so saw a great deal of each other, both in College and at his home; for his father, who was a barrister, had been forced by increasing deafness to give up much of his work and had moved to a lovely country house at Drayton not far away.

It was our privilege to learn our physiology under such great men as Francis Gotch and C. S. Sherrington, successive Waynflete professors, and also Walter Ramsden and J. S. Haldane; and to attend the rounds of Sir William Osler at the Radcliffe Infirmary and to dine at his house where he showed us some of his wonderful collection of old medical books and spoke about them so lovingly. During our fourth year when reading physiology we were allowed to help Haldane and Douglas in their investigations—at that time on the response of the respiratory centre to increased CO₂ and reduced O₂ pressure in a closed chamber, and on the respiratory exchange during exercise. I can still see Fred Hobson pedalling at a steady pace on the bicycle ergometer, while I collected samples of his expired air.

Within a few weeks of finishing our Physiology Schools, the first world war started. Hobson owned a motor bike and within two days of the outbreak of war he had enlisted as a despatch rider. Almost at once he was in France with the British Expeditionary Force and took part in the retreat from Mons and the successful Battle of the Aisne (September 1914) when he was promoted to be sergeant. In October he was at Givenchy, north of Ypres, and was mentioned in despatches for the first time.

His friends were not surprised at the successes that followed, for Fred had great courage and devotion to duty and inexhaustible energy—qualities that he showed through life. In June 1915 he became an officer in the West Yorks. Regt., and in September he was at the battle of Loos. In July 1916 he was at the battle of the Somme and in April 1917 at the battle of Arras—all names that were well-known to every Englishman of that day. His promotion had been rapid and for some time he had been a Brigade-Major, for a time acting as G.S.O.I., and was marked to be a battalion commander where I am sure he would have been most successful. He had been mentioned in despatches five times and won the much-coveted D.S.O. on the Somme, with the citation “During thirty hours he continually organized parties for water and bomb carrying and also for carrying the wounded.”

Hobson was, I think, happy in the Army, but doctors were in great demand and those who had started their medical work were urged to return and complete it. In May 1916, Fred had married Audrey, the eldest daughter of Professor Gotch, and their elder daughter was born the next year. After some trouble with his knee Hobson, therefore, returned to England in May 1917 and continued his medical studies at St. Thomas's Hospital, qualifying in 1919.

After holding house appointments at his hospital, he returned to Oxford. At first, as Theodore Williams Scholar in Pathology, he worked with Professor Dreyer on basal metabolism, and his paper on this subject contained some pungent and deserved criticism on the apparatus that was then provided for the purpose (*Quart. J. Med.*, 1923, **16**, 363).

F. G. Hobson, 1961

But Hobson was not made for a laboratory. He had been influenced towards medicine and the care of patients by Osler, though at one time his manual dexterity and his love of an active life had inclined him towards surgery. Soon after his return to Oxford he started general practice and after a few years moved to 20 St. Giles, a beautiful old house just by the Assize Judge's Lodgings. Here he was to practise till 1957, and here he and Audrey made an interesting and happy home for their three children and for many friends, including students and colleagues and many others. I would like to quote from one colleague, Dr. Robb-Smith, who wrote: "It would have been as appropriate at 20 St. Giles as it is at Lambaréné to see the inscription—Here at whatever hour you come, you will find light and help and human kindness."

In 1921, Hobson became M.R.C.P. and early in 1922 he was appointed Assistant Physician to the Radcliffe Infirmary, proceeding to the degree of D.M. the following year. He became physician to many of the surrounding hospitals—Wallingford, Savernake, and Marlborough—and to many schools, and was consultant to the Territorials. It was not long before his services as a consultant were in great demand and this was not surprising. His experience of general practice helped him to know just what was wanted; he had a wide knowledge of medicine and of cardiology in particular and worked hard to keep himself up to date in every direction; to this he added a rare diagnostic skill and meticulous care for detail, and found nothing too much trouble if it would help his patients; and, perhaps most important of all, he had a fund of common sense and understood people and their problems and treated them as friends. No wonder the demands for his services as a consultant spread over a wide area. He became F.R.C.P. in 1933.

There were few sides of Oxford medical life in which he was not deeply involved, its medical societies, the British Medical Association—he was at one time president of the Berks, Bucks, and Oxford branch—and most of all the Radcliffe, to which he was devoted. He served as secretary or chairman of many of these bodies in turn, including many Radcliffe committees. In 1936, the B.M.A. held its 104th Annual Meeting at Oxford under the presidency of the Regius Professor, Sir Farquhar Buzzard: Hobson, as local general secretary, showed his great gift for organization and with seemingly effortless ease, created one of the most successful meetings on record.

When Lord Nuffield gave his princely donations to the University to found new professorial chairs and departments in the Radcliffe Infirmary, it was inevitable that there would be some anxiety as to how these would fit into a hospital that had been mainly for the benefit of the local sick. It was Hobson as secretary of the medical staff committee who played a large part in allaying these anxieties and integrating the old and the new into a whole that has served equally well for the care of patients in a large and scattered hospital and for teaching and research.

Hobson was one of the original members of the Cardiac Society when it was expanded from the older Cardiac Club. He was our Chairman for the Oxford meeting in 1946. Apart from this occasion, I do not remember him speaking: in spite of his confident manner, so necessary in a successful doctor, he thought very humbly of his ability and felt that he had little to contribute worthy of the Society. I wonder sometimes if such members as Hobson with their wide experience of clinical medicine should not be invited to take more part in discussions of everyday problems. The Cardiac Club heard too little of the new work of younger men: the Cardiac Society in recent years has perhaps heard too little about the experience of its older members.

In addition to all these activities, teaching occupied him increasingly, especially after the development of the medical school and the expansion of the Radcliffe into the United Oxford Hospitals. With his clear precise mind, he was an excellent teacher and a popular lecturer, and was appointed Litchfield lecturer in clinical medicine in the University of Oxford. When the time came for him to retire from the active staff in 1956, he had been senior physician of the Hospital for more than ten years.

With his general practice at first and the large consulting practice that developed so quickly, there was no early period of leisure for clinical research. But later, Fred made time to write of his experience and his work was always clear and of practical importance. Medical writing did not come to him easily, but he laboured at it till the text reached the high standard he had set

himself. Fevers, especially scarlet fever, were one of his special interests and he wrote several papers on them. His book *Medical Practice in Residential Schools* (1938) can justly be called a classic and will continue to prove useful for a long time.

From 1954 to 1957 Hobson played a large part in planning and carrying out a field study of glandular fever. As well as the city of Oxford, most of Oxfordshire and North Berkshire were covered for nearly three years. His team examined and kept under observation nearly 350 patients with proved glandular fever and nearly 800 contacts or suspected cases. Their findings are of considerable interest (*Brit. med. J.*, 1958, 1, 854).

A study on the hazards of infected teeth or fragments of teeth in 45 patients with subacute bacterial endocarditis showed a significantly high relapse rate. Hobson and Juel-Jenson thought that too little attention was paid to possible sources of infection and too much expected of the antibiotic alone, and the paper is certainly of much practical importance (*Brit. med. J.*, 1956, 2, 1501).

Fred had many interests outside his work. He had a wide knowledge of natural history and, from an early age, his children remember his enthusiastic talks on many aspects of this. He continued to keep and enjoy the bees that he had started during the war in 1940, and was very successful with them. He read few novels but many books about natural history and sailing, on biography and on history, especially about the two world wars. Physical activity was, however, the important element in his recreation. He had always been good with his hands and never lost his enjoyment of carpentry. Perhaps he preferred work on a big scale but he was a good craftsman and during his wife's illness completed a lovely model of a ship.

Fred was happy in his garden, both at Oxford and in the cottage at Chichester where many of the family holidays after 1930 were spent. Perhaps he was happiest when there was some work of reconstruction to be done. At Chichester he was able to indulge in his enthusiasm for sailing, and I think the mastery of the boat and overcoming the difficulties of the elements were the aspects that attracted him particularly. His first experience of sailing had been a holiday five of us spent on a large heavy boat on the Broads about 1911.

His dark hair and brisk upright figure did not change greatly with the years, though his face became a little more lined. He looked what he was—an alert and competent doctor with a kindly smile. I hope that this account will have given some impression of his character as well as of his achievements. His qualities did not change fundamentally in the fifty years I knew him, though he developed them and used them to good purpose, and acquired a broader sympathy with views from which he differed. He was a Radical in his early days, not only in politics, but this became less evident. There was no change in the high ideals and high standards that he set before himself or in the energy and determination that he applied to carry them out.

As a young man during the war, Hobson had shown his courage and in his last years he was called on to show it again. In 1951, he had a severe and complicated cardiac infarct but after some time made a good recovery and did not allow it to interfere with his life. But it was not very long before the arterial blood supply to his legs began to trouble him and later this progressed until one leg had to be amputated in November 1958. Some months after, he had an arterial graft to the other leg, and about the same time he learnt that his wife had an incurable disease. She lived till December 1959 and in spite of all, I believe, they spent a serene and happy time together after forty-three years of such close companionship, through which her vivid interest in people and her sense of humour had mellowed some of his opinions without detracting from any of his sterling qualities.

During his last eighteen months he still did some insurance practice and work as a medical referee. He wrote a charming picture of Sir William Osler at Oxford, acknowledging the great influence that Osler had had on his life (*Oxford Medical School Gazette*, 1961, 13, 93). In speaking of Osler's last two years after his only son had died of wounds received in France in 1917, he wrote: "The sparkle of life had left him." When he wrote these words, I feel that he was thinking of himself

also, since he knew then that his remaining leg was getting worse.

He spent some time writing an autobiography but became so interested in his war service that only this part was completed. Characteristically, he finished it with a section "Lessons I have learnt from the War" and among these was "Only by the exercise of the maximum effort and concentration upon detail, can one reasonably expect to attain an average good result." This was a maxim he frequently employed for his family and for himself. I am sure he applied it in thinking of his own achievements—a humble view of the life of one who was on the way to becoming a great soldier by the age of 26, and a great doctor and successful consultant for more than forty years afterwards.

Hobson leaves an elder daughter who is married, a son who is Physician at the West Middlesex Hospital, and a younger daughter who is a physiotherapist. I am greatly indebted to them for a happy visit talking about their father and reading parts of the autobiography he had started.

MAURICE CAMPBELL