OBITUARY NOTICE

S. A. KINNIER WILSON

The name of Kinnier Wilson is to be numbered with those of the masters of the past. His death in his sixtieth year when, with enthusiasm and energy unabated, he was still at the height of his powers and engrossed in the completion of his magnum opus, is indeed a calamity to neurological science.

Wilson was essentially a clinician. From the day he entered the hospital wards as an undergraduate he showed a clinical aptitude which was remarkable. The manifestations of disease, their meaning and significance, entranced him. A quite exceptional observer, he literally devoured, in those early days, all literature available to him which had a bearing upon his personal experience. After an apprenticeship of six months as house physician to Byrom Bramwell in the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, he proceeded to Paris to pursue the speciality to which he proposed to devote his life. Gifted with a flair for languages and an exceptional appreciation of the niceties of expression, he took advantage to the full of his period of study with Pierre Marie and acquired an insight into and a sympathy with the brilliance of the French school of thought which coloured his future. When later he was attached as Resident Medical Officer, Assistant Physician, and Physician to the National Hospital in London, with which his life work and reputation were so intimately associated, the played a prominent part in maintaining the great traditions of that institution.

As an original observer and thinker, Wilson was pre-eminent. Profoundly influenced by his contacts with, and the writings of, Dr. Hughlings Jackson, for whom he had an admiration amounting almost to reverence, his trend of thought was reminiscent of that of the great English master. Wilson was not content with the elucidation of individual problems, for his interests and activities covered the whole field of neurology. If he excelled in his studies of the organic disorders, his contributions to the functional disorders were none the less illuminating. He will be remembered for all time in connection with his splendid work on progressive lenticular degeneration, the disease which he isolated and which bears his name. But many of his other contributions—as, for instance, his several writings upon the basal ganglia, aphasia, apraxia, and a score of other subjects—will live and would in themselves have made him famous as one of the leading neurologists of his day.

As a clinical teacher, too, Wilson was outstanding. Although he was apt at times to show a little not unnatural impatience with a particularly loquacious or unintelligent patient, his keen powers of observation, remarkable clinical memory, and singularly happy gifts of description and apt quotation fascinated his audience.

When after the war it was decided to institute a new journal in succession to the Journal of Neurology and Psychiatry, founded by his father-in-law, Alexander Bruce, and continued by his brother-in-law, Ninian Bruce, it was singularly appropriate that Wilson should have been invited to act as Editor by the committee formed to discuss the continuance of a second British Journal of Neurology. He continued to act as such to the time of his death. During the last ten years the Journal was published under the ægis of the British Medical Association.

The Journal of Neurology and Psychopathology, the last number of which appeared a few months ago, had a character and complexion of its own determined by Wilson’s outlook.

A striking figure which compelled attention, a quick tongue and a ready repartee, Sam Wilson showed at times a certain intolerance, for he did not suffer fools gladly, and an egotism which, though usually quite justified, did not pander to popularity. These characteristics were, however, counterbalanced by a keen appreciation of humour and a ready wit, often directed against himself, and those who knew him well and understood him overlooked his superficial mannerisms, for they knew that deep below the surface there lay a warm heart which never forgot.

A great neurologist has passed away. We mourn his passing, but his work remains as an incentive to the coming generations.

E. B.