Professor J A Simpson—an appreciation

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It is a pleasure and a privilege to write this short appreciation of the work of my friend, Professor JA (Iain) Simpson, upon his retirement from the editorship of the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* at the end of 1979, as an introduction to this Festschrift which is being prepared in his honour.

After a distinguished school and university career during which he was awarded many undergraduate prizes, Iain graduated with commendation from the University of Glasgow in 1944, becoming a Doctor of Medicine with Honours in 1964, a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1949, a Fellow of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1950 and an MRCP(E) in 1958. He subsequently became a Fellow of all three Colleges (of Glasgow in 1950, of Edinburgh in 1961 and of London in 1963). I first met him when he was working as a Medical Research Council Fellow in 1953 in the Neurological Unit at the National Hospital, Queen Square, with the late Dr Arnold Carmichael, as I myself had obtained a travelling fellowship from my own University to join that unit at the same time. At once I recognised in Iain someone who was not only to become an invaluable and respected colleague but also a close and valued friend. He was clearly a man well trained in the fundamentals of general medicine with an aptitude for the practice of clinical neurology, but equally with a searching and original mind which he quickly applied to a variety of problems in both clinical and basic research. We had several common interests when we worked together under Arnold Carmichael's wise tutelage and guidance. He was particularly interested in muscle disease, largely from the clinical and neurophysiological standpoints, while my interests were similar but were based more upon clinical and neuropathological techniques of investigation. We had many fruitful discussions and even some spirited arguments at that time. I clearly remember his immense sense of achievement and satisfaction when he succeeded in penetrating with a microelectrode a single muscle fibre in an animal preparation in order to measure the membrane potential. To some extent our major interests subsequently diverged slightly as Iain became particularly interested in myasthenia gravis and I in muscular dystrophy. Nevertheless, in many ways we have remained in close contact since those early days and I have come to admire increasingly his skill as a clinical neurologist, his teaching and lecturing ability, his wisdom and judgement and his continuing contributions to neurological science. It was no surprise to me or to any of his colleagues, in the light of his many sterling qualities, that he was appointed as a consultant physician to the Western Infirmary in Glasgow on returning to his native city, only to be translated soon afterwards to the senior lectureship in neurology at the University of Edinburgh where he built up an outstanding neurological unit in the Northern General Hospital and at the same time assisted in the provision of neurological services at the Royal Infirmary.

When a Chair of Neurology was first established in Glasgow in 1965, it was inevitable that Iain should have been the obvious candidate to be invited to it, and since taking up his appointment he has gone on from strength to strength. His continuing collaboration with Professor Bryan Jennett and with other able colleagues in both neurology and neurosurgery has led to a situation in which in their new premises in the Institute of Neurological Sciences at the Southern General Hospital, they have created one of the most impressive and outstanding departments of clinical neurological science, not only in the United Kingdom but anywhere in the world. Iain has been instrumental in developing not just an outstanding clinical and teaching service, but also a lively and vigorous departmental environment from which many young

neurologists have emerged to take their due place in other departments in the UK and abroad; several of them are clearly potential future leaders in neuroscience.

During this period Iain has been a James Watson Lecturer at the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow, a Honeyman Gillespie Lecturer in the University of Edinburgh, an Abbott Lecturer in the University of Newcastle, and has become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He has also been appointed as an Honorary Consultant Neurologist to the Army and to the Civil Service Commission, is at present Chairman of the Scottish Council for the Neurological Services and of the Scottish Epilepsy Association, and a member of the Research Committee of the Muscular Dystrophy Group of Great Britain. To the readers of this Journal, he may be best known as having been for the last 10 years the efficient, capable, wise, judicious but firm editor of a periodical long known, in the most friendly way, to generations of neurologists in Great Britain and overseas, as “the green rag”. He has also become a member or honorary member of many distinguished societies in the UK and overseas and has been an external examiner in several universities in the United Kingdom.

If one turns to Iain's contributions to clinical neurological science and to laboratory research, these are equally impressive. After writing in the early days after qualification a number of important papers, including a classical description of the neurological manifestations of idiopathic hyperparathyroidism, he turned his interests more and more to clinical neurophysiology and was the first to describe clearly in 1956 some of the electrophysiological manifestations of the carpal tunnel syndrome. His paper published in *Brain* in 1958, in which he evaluated the results of thymectomy in myasthenia gravis, was the culmination of years of painstaking assessment and of massive effort in the analysis of clinical data derived from patients seen both in Glasgow and at the National Hospital, Queen Square. He also found time to write a number of important contributions on the treatment of epilepsy and on various aspects of electroencephalography, as well as contributions to some of the most popular and successful textbooks of medicine, notably that edited by Sir Stanley Davidson. However, there can be no doubt that his most important and original contributions have been those on myasthenia gravis. It was his paper published in the *Scottish Medical Journal* in 1960 which first demonstrated clearly the emerging evidence of a clinical relationship between myasthenia gravis on the one hand and other autoimmune diseases on the other, an association which was clearly more than could be accounted for simply by chance. In subsequent publications he continued to develop this hypothesis which soon achieved world-wide acceptance. Before long, support for his views began to emerge from more fundamental and laboratory-based investigations, some of which were conducted in Iain's own department. Now the whole neurological world recognises that his postulates and hypotheses relating to the pathogenesis of this disease have been validated almost completely. This alone would have been enough to establish Iain's reputation on a lasting basis in the annals (with a small “a”) of neurology. However, he has not been content to rest upon his laurels but has continued, in association with a succession of collaborators, to make many important and original contributions to our understanding of many other neurological disorders and to clinical neurophysiology. While his lasting reputation will undoubtedly rest upon his work on myasthenia, he has befriended many young men and women working in neurology, both from the United Kingdom and from overseas, and has established a school of neurological medicine in Glasgow which has played an important and continuing role in training not only clinical neurologists but also clinical research workers.

I am grateful for being given the opportunity to contribute to this Festschrift prepared in Iain's honour which acknowledges his 10 years of devoted service to one of our most important and respected neurological journals. No doubt he will find many more ways in which to serve his profession and his specialty and I hope, perhaps, a little more time will be available for him to indulge in his other love of sailing on the Clyde.