

Professor J A Simpson—an appreciation

BY IAN D MELVILLE

Had Iain Simpson elected to remain at the head of his department in Edinburgh in 1964 and declined to move back to Glasgow all would have understood his reasons. He had supervised that department's development over many years and was deeply involved with its administration and teaching. He would have been readily forgiven had he decided to forego the problems of building up yet another new clinical and academic department of neurology, admittedly on his home territory, and in a city where he had trained and in which he was already well known and respected. Challenge is made to be met, however, and it was no surprise to those who knew him that he accepted it, and applied to his new Chair his own work ethic, from an old-fashioned Scottish tradition, of sustained endeavour and dedication—"Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might". To have shared with him from 1965 all the adventures and opportunities of the University Department of Neurology, and to have observed with him the development of the Institute of Neurological Sciences, Glasgow, has been a rare privilege.

The early days were indeed adventurous. The department was housed in three separate hospitals, and at first had to cope with makeshift office and laboratory accommodation. Traveling between them brought additional problems for Killearn Hospital lay some 16 miles from the University and the Western Infirmary where the main clinics were, and in winter time the roads required skills more suited to the Monte Carlo Rally. In 1967 Iain undertook the organisation of the International Congress of Electromyography in Glasgow, a conference which proved outstandingly successful. Apart from the many scientific achievements, this meeting gave to Elizabeth Simpson the opportunity to demonstrate her support for Iain's department in the most practical way. On the final evening of the conference over 100 guests arrived at the Simpson household (not all of them expected) and somehow all were entertained, all were wined, all were dined, and none would forget the warmth of their welcome.

From 1971 the Institute has been more centrally situated in Glasgow, having its own building within the campus of the Southern General Hospital, and under the shadow of the Clyde shipyards. Beside its clinics and wards the department of Neurology had a laboratory wing designed and purpose-built for the continuation of Iain Simpson's research programmes into neural transmission, the neuro-muscular junction, movement control, epilepsy, and his major contribution towards the understanding of myasthenia gravis. Trainees and research assistants have come to him from "a' the airts" and so many have gone on to their own higher appointments. Steadily he has built his department so that, sensibly, all the consultant neurologists who work in Glasgow and the West of Scotland have attachments to the Institute and are teachers in the University department, and so that all of the citizens near to the Glasgow conurbation enjoy a high and uniform level of neurological service. Perhaps this is his greatest achievement, namely the assurance that all the facilities, the techniques and the services of the department are widely available in and around the city.

Apart from departmental, research, administrative and editorial duties Iain has found time for other activities. The Chairmanship of the Scottish Epilepsy Association over many years has enabled him to supervise the educational, social and industrial sides of the Association's work. Perhaps this kind of voluntary work is just seen as part of the neurologist's role in a major industrial city. Some of his other activities are more properly diversionary, like bridge. Curling on the other hand is a more serious matter (where is there a Scot who does

not like to win?); then there is his great love of music, a participatory love, a love which allows him to fiddle for fun at a Burns' supper, or to play in concert with the Glasgow Chamber Orchestra, with equally evident enjoyment and pleasure. But there is one consuming interest alongside which even these are but trivia, and at the tiller of his yacht Iain Simpson has been heard to mutter "This beats working", and were it not for the evidence around him he might be believed. He has a tremendous relish, and not a little skill, in piloting his boat around the Clyde racing buoys, or in cruising the Kyles to Tighnabruaich, or Loch Fyne to Crinan and distant Tobermory. He also has tremendous tolerance and patience with the succession of novices and tyros who crew for him, and who are so readily caught in the enthusiasm.

Perhaps standing at the helm epitomises the man. He spends so much of his professional life, and of his leisure life as the pilot, combining distant forward vision with appreciation of current needs, revealing an outstanding ability to muster the crew and to supervise their training, and with the humanity to enjoy their success as his success. To his department the leadership that he brings has been Glasgow's enormous gain; from his department the regard and affection of his Glasgow colleagues may be part of his own personal reward.