

## Sir James Ormiston Affleck. By Dr Alexander James.

(Read January 8, 1923.)

To those of us medicals who have lived long enough in Edinburgh, and who, during our life's span have had the privilege and good fortune to acquire the intimacy and friendship of Sir James Affleck, his loss must appear little short of irreplaceable, for the simple reason that men of the type of which he was such a unique example are now no longer being bred.

As a physician, Affleck was self-made, in the truest and in the highest sense of the word. In the truest, because the position which he attained, the esteem in which he was held, and the honours which were accorded to him, were gained, not only by his own unaided industry and effort, but by industry and effort in the performance of which all ideas of future recompense or reward were as completely absent from his mind as is humanly possible. In the highest sense of the word, because esteem, honour, and position, as they severally all came to his lot, made absolutely no difference to him. To all who knew him, Affleck was the same simple, upright, kind, and self-sacrificing man in the second half of his life as he had been in the first.

Born in Edinburgh in 1840, and having made up his mind early to become a doctor, Affleck qualified in 1867, taking then the M.B.,C.M. at the University, and the Licence at the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh. He was thus later than most of his fellows in entering the profession, but this was simply because he had first to earn for himself the means required to carry him through the curriculum. For the same reason, after qualifying, he settled down at once to general practice in the Stockbridge district of the city, and there he worked conscientiously and untiringly for the first ten or twelve years of his medical life. From the beginning, however, it was evident that he was destined for more responsible work than that of general practice, for, combining evening study with his daily toil, he wrote his thesis on "Functional Disorders of the Heart," and took the M.D. degree in 1869. About the same time he obtained the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, and, having thus qualified himself for the post of a dispensary physician, he obtained this, and indeed, for some years, combined with it the duties of public vaccinator at the New Town Dispensary.

But in these early days of his medical life a piece of real and deserved

good fortune came to him. As he had distinguished himself in the class work of his student days, and as at his graduation his thesis had obtained commendation, it goes without saying that he had been earning for himself the recognition and approbation of all his teachers. But among these, the late Professor Sir Douglas Maclagan had so clearly discerned his character and talents that he selected him as his Assistant in the Public Health and Medical Jurisprudence Department of the University. This opened out for Affleck the opportunity to acquire what everyone desiring to attain to any eminence in medical circles in Edinburgh must possess, viz. capacity to perform scientific work and practical experience in teaching. In both of these lines he soon gained for himself a solid reputation; and as the Professor of Medical Jurisprudence was in those days also one of the clinical teachers in the Royal Infirmary, Affleck, as his Assistant, soon found himself becoming as well known and respected in the wards of the Infirmary as in the Medical Jurisprudence Laboratory and Classroom. About this time, also, his acknowledged literary leanings found expression in the contribution by him of the medical articles required for the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Bearing all this in mind, we can easily understand that the amount of work which Affleck managed to get through in the twenty-four hours of each day for the first ten or twelve years of his medical life must have been enormous. Yet he never flinched; and though his rather slight frame might suggest fragility, he hardly ever showed fatigue, and he never was really ill.

Having obtained the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, in 1875, Affleck was in 1877 appointed Assistant Physician to the Royal Infirmary; and inasmuch as this meant to him a future in which his energies would be concentrated upon purely medical work and teaching, he in the early eighties changed his domicile to Heriot Row, and gradually relinquished his general practice and other appointments. About this time also he started as Lecturer on the Practice of Medicine at Surgeons' Hall; so that when, in 1885, he became one of the Ordinary Physicians to the Infirmary, he was able to prove himself almost at once one of the foremost teachers and clinical physicians which the Edinburgh Medical School possessed. On the expiry of his term of office in the Royal Infirmary in 1900 he was appointed Consulting Physician to the City Fever Hospital, thus continuing his active teaching work till 1908. But there were other institutions which were indebted to him for most valuable service, and in which he took keen interest. Foremost amongst them was the Longmore Hospital for Incurables, to which he acted as a Physician and as a

Director from its foundation, and to the welfare of which he ministered with a lifelong devotion. He also acted as a member of the Board of Management of the Royal Infirmary, of the Royal Asylum for the Insane, and of the Sick Children's Hospital. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1896; in 1905 he was President of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh; in 1908 he received the Honorary Degree of LL.D. from the University; and in 1911 he was knighted by the King at Holyrood.

As a consulting physician Affleck was pre-eminent alike as regards perception of the significant points in any case of disease and as regards direction towards, and resourcefulness in, treatment. For this he was undoubtedly largely indebted to the medical experience of his earlier years. In the practice of medicine, as in every other walk of life, the things that matter most must be got at by personal experience alone, and during the first ten or twelve years of his medical life, when he was daily and hourly meeting with diseases of all kinds—medical, surgical, and obstetric—and when, with his keen sympathy and intense conscientiousness he was, by study and thought, straining every nerve to discover how and when he could best treat them, he had built up on a solid foundation a truly solid framework of medical knowledge and insight. Affleck was one of those who well grasped the truth of the old saying, "There is no curing of diseases by art, without first knowing how they are being cured by Nature." And so, in the plethora of new methods and processes for the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of disease, which the last few decades have brought into notice, he was invariably recognised as the man who might be trusted to discern among them those which would stand the test of time and those which would not.

As a teacher he was very highly appreciated; he was lucid and clear in exposition, and the thoughtfulness which was evident in everything which he said or did brought out the best in the minds of the students who listened to him. He was a fluent writer, and during his long life contributed largely to the various medical journals. At the meetings of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh his frequent communications and demonstrations were always welcomed.

Emphatically not a diner-out, and shunning society functions of all kinds, when he found himself in congenial surroundings Affleck showed himself a most interesting and well-informed conversationalist. All his life he read largely, and in the latter half of it he assiduously added to his intellectual and artistic endowments the fruits of Continental travel. Though not a performer, he was artistic and musical through and through.

Quiet, earnest, and perhaps even solemn in manner, Affleck yet had a very keen sense of humour; and stories of little mishaps, misadventures, or foibles displayed in lecture-hall, laboratory, classroom, or consulting-room he could retail or listen to with real and intense enjoyment: they only required to be good-natured.

A lifelong abstainer and non-smoker, Affleck was neither a bigot nor a pussyfoot. He was no bigot, because he knew human nature and frailty, and he knew how much individual circumstances and surroundings can alter cases. He was no pussyfoot, because he knew that, humanity being what it is, stealth must play a part in it, and to his heart stealth was as repugnant as to his head it was impotent as a factor for any real good. In olden times I was often with him in Ward X. (the D.T. ward of the Old Infirmary), and with others I have been present when he was severely laying before a delinquent the inherent wrongness of his conduct, and the inevitably evil consequences of its continuance. What impressed us all was that though it frequently appeared that his love for the sinner made him almost forget the sin, yet his advice and admonitions lost none of their efficacy thereby. This of course was due to Affleck's personality: his boundless human kindness and sympathy were irresistible; indeed, it may truthfully be said of him that only one thing could make him rage, and that was cruelty.

For over a year before his death indications of heart weakness had been making themselves known to him, but he never let them interfere with his work to any appreciable extent. He died quietly in his sleep in the morning of Sunday, 24th September 1922.