

Johnson Symington, M.D., F.R.S. By Lt.-Col.
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WITH the passing of Johnson Symington this Society has lost a once familiar figure, science a most devoted follower, and Anatomy one of its foremost exponents during the last half-century.

He was born in 1851 at Taunton in Somersetshire, but his father was an Ayrshire man. The father had planned out a business career for the son, but, fortunately for Anatomy, the call of science was too strong for young Symington, and accordingly he was entered as a medical student at Edinburgh in 1872. Thereafter his life is one continuous record of untiring industry, faithful work, and solid achievement, in the capacities of student, teacher, investigator, and administrator.

He graduated in 1877 with first-class honours, sufficient testimony of his industry as a student. Speaking of his undergraduate days, he was wont to dwell with pleasure on the inspiration for research which he was privileged to receive when working under Lister.

Almost immediately after graduation we find him at work at Anatomy, which he seems to have chosen for his life's work without hesitation. For a couple of years he was a demonstrator in the University of Edinburgh at a time when Turner was Professor and Cunningham Senior Assistant. Doubtless from two such leaders in his own subject he learnt much.

The next step in his career was to the Anatomical Department of Minto House, where he remained as Lecturer for several years. Minto House at that time was one of the vigorous Edinburgh extra-mural schools, and Symington one of its most successful teachers. He quickly acquired a great reputation as a teacher, and attracted a very large following, and his department was a scene of great activity and life. In spite of the fact that teaching work absorbed a large amount of his time and energy, Symington in his Minto House days, by his unquenchable zeal, got through a large amount of original work. His success as a teacher was due, among other things, to a genial personality, to a delight in imparting instruction, and to a perseverance in demonstration.

He had been working at the *Topographical Anatomy of the Child* for some years, and in 1885 he presented this work as his thesis for his

M.D. degree. It was a splendid piece of work and was awarded a gold medal. It was subsequently published in book form, received most laudatory criticism, and is now a classic in the subject.

He was elected a Fellow of this Society in 1885, and later served as a member of Council.

In 1903 he left Edinburgh for Belfast to take up the appointment of Professor of Anatomy in the then Queen's College there, and from this time till compelled by illness to retire in 1918, he gave of his best to Belfast, and the latter gratefully acknowledges the debt. Of his work in Belfast as a professor and administrator, there is eloquent evidence in the resolution passed by the Senate of the Queen's University on the occasion of his retirement.

The Irish University Act of 1908 involved Symington in much work. He became Professor of Anatomy in the new Queen's University, and was one of the Commissioners appointed to frame its statutes; and in its Senate, Council, and Committees his services were always willingly given. He was also appointed the representative of the University on the General Medical Council, but his service in this office was only of brief duration, being cut short by the supervention of his serious illness.

He was the recipient of many academic and scientific distinctions: President of the Anthropological Section of the British Association, 1903; F.R.S., 1903; President of the Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1904-06; F.R.C.S., England, 1915; and LL.D., Belfast, 1918.

He was also well known as an examiner in Anatomy in the Universities of London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Glasgow, and Manchester.

His contributions to Anatomy cover a very wide field, and from first to last are recorded in about sixty articles, papers, and books. His classic on the *Topographical Anatomy of the Child* has already been referred to, and it may be said that the field of Topographical Anatomy in general was one in which he had few rivals. His last work was an atlas illustrating the "Topographical Anatomy of the Neck, Thorax, Abdomen, and Pelvis." The atlas consists of a series of plates of sections. The plates were made detachable and convenient for the use of surgeons, radiographers, and others actually at work in hospital. Symington looked upon this work as his special contribution to the war, and it proved of great use in the war in the localisation of bullets and other foreign bodies. This atlas was published in 1917, and there is little doubt that the strain of seeing the work completed at the earliest possible moment very seriously taxed his strength.

He was also a high authority in neurology and splanchnology, including

the teeth, being one of the editors of *Quain's Elements of Anatomy* in these branches, and the author of many papers relating thereto. His work on cranio-cerebral topography is especially noteworthy. Beautiful sets of his casts illustrating this research can now be seen in the museums of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh.

The last phase of his life was appropriately spent in Edinburgh; for he always considered himself a Scot, and Edinburgh was the city of his adoption. He was now an invalid, but although unable to take any active part in discussion, it was a source of great pleasure to him to attend the meetings of this and other societies, and to meet once more old friends and pupils. He had resolved to make a home in Edinburgh for himself and his daughter (his wife predeceased him), and in fact he had taken a house, but he was not destined to live in it, for just prior to the time fixed for occupation, he passed away. He died on the 24th February 1924 in his seventy-third year.

Symington was a great anatomist. He was not merely an anatomist of high distinction in his day, but he has a right to a place in the roll of the outstanding anatomists, who have handed down the tradition of the illustrious Vesalius. More than this, it can be written of him that he loved his fellow-men, and was much beloved by them.