Obituary

SIR GEOFFREY JEFFERSON
1886–1961
Sir Geoffrey Jefferson, C.B.E., F.R.S., Emeritus Professor of Neurosurgery at Manchester University and consulting neurosurgeon to the Manchester Royal Infirmary, died on January 29th, 1961, at the age of 74. His death is mourned with affectionate respect by a host of friends and colleagues the world over. Our sincere sympathy is extended to his sons, Dr. Michael Jefferson and Mr. Antony Jefferson, and his daughter Lady Monica Bruce Gardner.

Geoffrey Jefferson was born in Rochdale, Durham, on April 10th, 1886. His father, Dr. A. J. Jefferson was a general practitioner and surgeon in Rochdale. Jefferson’s education at the Manchester Grammar School was, he often indicated when discussing schools, a great and fortunate experience. He studied medicine at the University of Manchester where he won the Sidney Renshaw prize in physiology and the University of London prize in anatomy. He graduated with a London degree in medicine in 1909, passing with honours. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1911. In 1913 he was awarded the Gold Medal by Manchester University when he was graduated as Master of Surgery.

Jefferson served as house surgeon at the Manchester Royal Infirmary under Professor G. A. Wright, and in London at the Royal Cancer Hospital and at the Victoria Hospital for Children. A term as demonstrator in the Manchester University Department of Anatomy, under Professor Elliot Smith, initiated his interest in neurology. He published several papers on the anatomy of the cerebral convolutions.

In 1914, he was married to Gertrude, daughter of A. C. Flumerfelt of Victoria, British Columbia. Dr. Flumerfelt was a former medical student at Manchester. They went to Victoria anticipating a good opening for the practice of surgery. Shortly, World War I began and he returned to Britain to join the R.A.M.C. In 1915, he was invited by Sir Robert Waterhouse to join an Anglo-Russian hospital and to go to Russia. This Jefferson did, working with the hospital in St. Petersburg in the palace of the Grand Duke Dimitri on the Nevski Prospect until the Revolution. Viewed from the vantage point of a balcony of the hospital-palace the clashes between the crowds of people and the Cossacks on the Nevski Prospect left indelible memories and created for him an unusual awareness of sociological problems. The Marinsky Theatre, the Ballet, and Karsavina whom he visited in London after a return trip to Russia in 1936 with the British Medical Association, left equally vivid and more pleasant memories.

Following his return from Russia in 1917, he was sent to France to the 14th General Hospital of the R.A.M.C., and in 1918 he was made responsible for the casualties with head wounds. After the war, he studied the pathological material from these casualties with Sir Arthur Keith. From this experience emerged two valuable publications, “The Physiological Pathology of Gunshot Wounds of the Head,” and “Gunshot Wounds of the Scalp with Special Reference to the Neurological Signs Presented.” This work proved its value in World War II.

After World War I, he spent time visiting Cushing at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston and on his return to Manchester was appointed as a general surgeon to the Salford Royal Hospital in Manchester. In 1926, he became the first neurosurgeon to the Manchester Royal Infirmary with but four beds at his disposal. Gradually, Jefferson’s reputation grew and his unit expanded.

In 1933 he received an invitation, rare for any physician or surgeon outside London, to join the staff of the National Hospital, Queen Square. Until World War II he visited London every two weeks to consult and operate. The resident staff came to anticipate keenly the consulting, operating and leisurely thought-provoking conversation associated with Jefferson’s visit. Jefferson later spoke of the pleasure and profit he derived from “rubbing brains” with this group of young men.

At the Manchester Royal Infirmary, between 1926 and 1939, with limited facilities and amid pressures generated by his own skills and by the paucity of neurosurgeons in the north west of England, Jefferson continued to think and to contribute with originality. He wrote some 40 papers during this period gaining recognition on the international scene as a leader in neurosurgery. In 1939, Manchester University created the first chair of neurological surgery in Britain, with him the first professor.

The year of his appointment to the Manchester Royal Infirmary saw the founding of the Society of British Neurological Surgeons, for which he was primarily responsible. He was the first secretary and continued in office until 1952. He was President in 1934–36 and again in 1954–56. His personal influence upon the growth and development of the Society was a major contribution to British neurosurgery. The tradition that the discussion of papers read before the Society should be candid and critical, yet informal and unfettered by time, is attributable to Jefferson. Not uncommonly a paper provoked an exceedingly valuable discussion and very often Jefferson’s original way of thinking, great experience and sense of humour provided its central direction. In no small measure his efforts helped to establish liaison between the British Society and its European counterparts.

In World War II, Jefferson served as Consultant Advisor in neurosurgery to the Ministry of Health and the Emergency Medical Service. In Britain the Emergency Medical Service treated the great majority of neurosurgical casualties caused by enemy action, members of the armed forces and civilians alike. The responsibility of
achieving early and effective neurosurgical treatment of air-raid casualties and members of the armed forces treated by the E.M.S. following the invasion of Europe, fell in large measure upon Jefferson. The success achieved by the various neurosurgical centres reflects his efforts in achieving the necessary administrative arrangements in the Ministry and in hospitals throughout Britain.

He gave generous loyal professional support to each neurosurgical centre. The magnitude of this contribution was recognized by his appointment as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1948. In 1947, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, an honour rarely received by a surgeon. He was elected also in this year, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. In 1948 he was awarded the Lister Medal of the Royal College of Surgeons. He was knighted in 1950.

Following World War II, Jefferson carried on as Professor of Neurosurgery at Manchester until 1951, when he became Professor Emeritus and Consulting Neurosurgeon to the Manchester Royal Infirmary. The new neurosurgical unit had been opened in 1951. A measure of his deep pleasure and satisfaction concerning the achievement is provided by the fact that "the new unit" was a topic of conversation at least as early as 1940. Following retirement he continued for some years to operate in the unit that he had created.

During the 1945-1960 era, limited only by physical ill-health towards the end, Jefferson's intellectual vigour was sustained and his interests included the contemporary scene. He was in demand as a lecturer throughout Europe, the United States, and the Commonwealth, receiving honorary degrees from Universities and honorary membership in learned Societies throughout the world. In 1957 Jefferson was President of the first International Congress of Neurological Surgeons at Brussels, a tribute to his internationally recognized eminence.

From 1948 to 1952 he was a member of the Medical Research Council of Britain. From 1953–1960 he was the first Chairman of the Medical Research Board. His efforts in support of the M.R.C. and M.R.B. he found to be satisfying for he felt that he was continuing to contribute to the cause of medicine.

Jefferson's neurosurgical career was interwoven with two world wars, enhancing a natural interest in trauma and the nervous system. The neurosurgical environment in Manchester for many years demanded careful selection of the patients who would occupy the relatively few beds available. This situation resulted in Jefferson developing most extensive personal experience in pituitary adenomas, meningiomas, acoustic neuromas, and later aneurysms. His active neurosurgical career encompassed the introduction of cerebral pneumography by Walter Dandy and cerebral angiography by Moniz. He lived and worked amid the years of rapid development of neurological surgery, in fact he played a leading part in this era. Jefferson's paper on "Fractures of the Atlas" in 1920 was the beginning of a number of contributions to spinal injuries which appeared throughout his life. His study of pituitary adenomas, his collaboration with Twining in the study of ventriculography of the fourth ventricle, and his work concerning saccular aneurysms in the cavernous sinus are three examples of major contributions to neurological surgery.

Jefferson's scholarly interest over many years of the increasing understanding of brain function, together with his philosophical probing into the mind of man, are superbly portrayed in his Selected Papers; a source of inspiration to neurosurgeons and scholars, young and old.

Jefferson's warm and friendly rapport with American and Canadian neurosurgeons was unique and allowed easy and most profitable exchange of information and opinions. It began with his visit to Harvey Cushing after World War I, progressed with his friendship with his North American contemporaries and progressed again through the association he had and the friendships he made with the generation of neurosurgeons serving in the United States Medical Corps and the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps in Britain in World War II. Succeeding generations of neurosurgeons visited him at Manchester. He loved to travel and delighted in visiting America. His affection for his American colleagues and friends and his admiration for the United States were tremendous. He was an honorary member of the Harvey Cushing Society, the American Academy of Neurological Surgery, the American Neurological Association and an Honorary Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

To Geoffrey Jefferson's tremendous intellect was joined great personal strength. He had a huge interest in people and affection for his friends and students, and rich delight in all sorts of human affairs. His interests ranged far and wide, from cricket to hockey, from fishing to philosophy, from abstract art to good food—and always books. He had great enjoyment of conversation with his many friends, young and old. His letters were as apt, stimulating and charming as his conversations. He was blessed with a whimsical and unpredictable sense of humour. He was a scholar.

Geoffrey Jefferson's contribution to life goes on. His sons and daughter, the men who trained with him, the Neurosurgical Unit he developed, the ideas he evolved and recorded all will continue to influence men and medicine. His warmth and friendship and human understanding given to so many cannot fail to be passed along to others. Yet his death is a grievous loss.

E. Harry Botterell, M.D.