Obituary
FREDRIC BATTINSON SMITH, M.C.

In the person of Fredric Battinson Smith, universally known to his colleagues as ‘F.B.’, death has removed one of the few remaining of that band of pathologists who played a major part in bringing the science of pathology, with its instrument the hospital laboratory, into its proper relationship with the practice of medicine.

F.B. was born in 1888 at Hipperholme in Yorkshire; in 1901 he went to Marlborough College and in 1906 entered King's College, Cambridge, which he left in 1908 with a First Class in the Natural Science Tripos; there he came under the influence of Sir Clifford Allbutt, who with T. R. Elliott and Sir Wilfrid Trotter, whom he met on passing on to University College Hospital, London, stimulated the views he was then formulating on the place of the basic sciences in the practice of medicine. After qualifying in medicine in 1912 Smith held various posts as house physician and surgeon; the outbreak of the First World War found him acting as R.S.O. to the Ancoats Hospital, Manchester. As quickly as he could he joined the R.A.M.C. and was attached to the East Lancashire Regiment. He was mentioned in despatches and was awarded the M.C. for gallantry in attending to the wounded during the great retreat from the Somme.

After demobilization Smith spent a short time as locum tenens in general practice; he then took a post-graduate course in pathology at U.C.H., and thereafter joined partnership with the late Dr. Sinclair Miller, D.S.O., M.C., in a private practice in pathology at Harrogate, where, jointly with Dr. Miller, he acted as pathologist to several neighbouring hospitals. Smith never appeared at home in private practice; of all men he was the readiest to place his service and skill at the full disposal of all requiring them. In 1930 the Board of Governors of the Preston Royal Infirmary made the bold and enlightened move of creating a post for a full-time pathologist who should serve both the hospital, the local authorities, and the general practitioners of the district. F.B. applied and was appointed.

The Department of Pathology at the Preston Royal Infirmary when Smith took it over consisted of one room with a staff of one technician. Like all the voluntary hospitals Preston Royal Infirmary was in a chronic state of financial stringency and the task of wringing from the Board the funds for what Smith regarded as the proper development and maintenance of his department involved a perpetual and sometimes acrimonious struggle; in spite of it all F.B. worked with dogged persistence and by the outbreak of the Second World War had built up a first rate laboratory with a department of biochemistry.

At the outbreak of the war, Smith was put in charge of the laboratory of No. 9 General Hospital at Chateau du Loire which was hastily evacuated through St. Nazaire after the German breakthrough. Smith was then released from the R.A.M.C. and returned to his department at Preston which was one of the first to be taken into the Emergency Hospital Laboratory Service. For the remaining years of the war Smith was in close touch with Sir Philip Panton. He was a member of the Committee formed, largely on the inspiration of the A.C.P., which met regularly at Whitehall under Panton’s chairmanship and which was the prototype of the present Central Committee in Pathology. The volume of work in Smith’s department at Preston increased at a rate far ahead of the facilities for performing it. In 1948, on account of what he considered to be unfairness to his department, he resigned and took a part-time post as pathologist to the Westmorland County Hospital, Kendal; from this he retired in 1954.

Smith was a meticulous worker. His post-mortem technique was the admiration of all who witnessed it. He published only about a dozen papers, mostly dealing with morbid anatomy and related to the clinical manifestations of the condition described.

Smith welcomed the foundation of the A.C.P. of which he became a founder member. He served on the Council of the Association from 1930 to 1931 and again from 1939 to 1943. In 1948 he became President Elect and President in 1949-50; in 1950 he presided at the memorable meeting of the Association in Cork. Of the Council he was a most active member; his services were particularly valuable in the preparation by the A.C.P. of the schedule of fees for laboratory procedures based on cost per pair of hands per hour; this was adopted by the British Medical Association and until the initiation of the National Hospital Service in 1948 served as the guide to fees for laboratory work under the National Health Service.

In 1915, F.B. married Mary Irvine Johnstone, and by her he had four children, three daughters and one son. All survive him.

As a pathologist in charge of a hospital laboratory Smith consistently kept in sight the purpose of his department as being to assist through all the disciplines at his disposal in the diagnosis and treatment of the patient.

On hearing of his death a colleague at Preston who later came to hold a professorial chair wrote of him: ‘He was admired by his fellow doctors and loved by his staff.’ No words could better sum the man, and no tribute could be greater.

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