

Obituary.

ROBERT BARNES, M.D.

DR. ROBERT BARNES was born at Norwich in September, 1817. His father was Philip Barnes, who founded the Royal Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park. Dr. Barnes's early schooldays were spent at Bruges, where he learned to speak French fluently. He was apprenticed to Mr. Griffin, surgeon, of Norwich. One of his boyhood's friends was the late Dr. George Roper. He studied medicine at University College, London, and at St. George's Hospital. He learnt chemistry at the Royal Institution, where he took the first prize. Having become a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, he went to Paris in 1842, and there remained, supporting himself by his pen, living on £1 a week, and studying medicine, surgery and obstetrics (the latter under Paul Dubois) for a year. He became M.D. of London in 1848. He started in general practice at Notting Hill. He was determined to be a teacher; and after some disappointments and much hard work he was appointed Lecturer, first on Forensic Medicine and then on Obstetrics, at Dermott's School (one of the private medical schools of London). In 1850 he was appointed Physician to the Western General Dispensary, Marylebone, and removed from Notting Hill to Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park. He obtained an appointment on the staff of the Dreadnought hospital ship. In 1857 he joined the Metropolitan Free Hospital. These were, however, only temporary steps in his life. The opportunity which determined his life's chief work came in April, 1859, when he was appointed Assistant Obstetric Physician to the London Hospital, and went to live in Devonshire Square and then in Finsbury Square. He became full Physician in 1863. Dr. F. H. Ramsbotham was Lecturer on Midwifery in the London Hospital Medical School during Barnes's connection with it, and at that time the slender emoluments associated with the teaching of midwifery all went to the lecturer. Moreover, the London Hospital was then a very small school. In 1865 the post of Obstetric Physician to St. Thomas's Hospital and Lecturer in Midwifery, became vacant by the death of Dr. Waller. The Assistant Obstetric Physician, Dr. Gervis, was then a very junior man, had held office but a short

time, and had therefore but little clinical experience. The St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School was then a larger one than the London, and there was some direct remuneration attaching to the senior post. These were among the considerations which induced Barnes to accept it, for consulting practice was slow in coming to him. About this time he removed to Grosvenor Street. He held office at St. Thomas's till 1875. He felt strongly that those who were responsible for the treatment of diseases of women ought to be allowed fully to carry out such treatment, and therefore to be untrammelled in their judgment; in other words, that obstetric physicians ought to be allowed to operate. At St. Thomas's liberty in operating was denied to the obstetric physician; and therefore Barnes transferred his services to St. George's Hospital, where he was given a free hand in this respect. He became Consulting Obstetric Physician in 1885. Dr. Barnes became a member of the Royal College of Physicians in 1853, and the esteem in which he was held is indicated by the fact that he was elected a Fellow as early as 1859, and that in 1877-78 he served as Censor. Only three Fellows senior to him remain. He died at Eastbourne (where he had been for some years living in retirement) on the 12th of May, in his 90th year.

Dr. Barnes first became widely known to the profession by the publication in 1869 of his "Lectures on Obstetric Operations." In this great work the author described not only operations, but the conditions which call for operations. If for nothing else, this book would have a permanent value from the fulness with which the history and literature of the subject are given. But it is much more than a bibliographical compilation. Barnes brought original thought to bear on each subject, and expressed himself in a clear, vigorous, and yet graceful, style. The book attracted, nay charmed, its readers at once. It was translated into nearly every European language, and brought Barnes a world-wide reputation. The weakness of this brilliant book was that the author sometimes theorized in his arm-chair without testing his thoughts by actual experiment. He described a method of delivery by cutting the foetal head into slices with an *écraseur*, which neither he nor anybody else had ever done in an actual case of obstructed delivery. Barnes wrote easily and sometimes hastily, as when he said: "Surely no one can doubt that the traction power, and therefore the compressive power, acquired by pulling on the legs and trunks, is greater than can be exerted by the strongest forceps." Matthews Duncan had, before this was written, found by experiment that a traction power of about 120 lb. would

sever the neck of any child, but the force that can be applied by a properly applied forceps is unlimited. But notwithstanding occasional slips like these, the work as a whole was a great one.

In 1874 appeared Barnes's greater, though perhaps less popular, work, that on "Diseases of Women." The subject of this work was more extensive and less simple than that of "Obstetric Operations." This book, no less than the former one, showed the author's wide acquaintance with the work of those who had preceded him in the field. There were books by other authors of which the same thing could be said. But Barnes did more than quote books. He ransacked the shelves of museums, and interrogated the specimens. Where he found a specimen that answered a question he drew it (for he was a good draughtsman) and put the drawing in his book. At the time the book was written operative gynæcology was in its infancy. Barnes himself had not begun to operate. The practice of gynæcology then consisted too much in the use of the speculum and caustic and of pessaries; and this feature was reflected in Barnes's book. But, whilst recognizing this, the book must be acknowledged to be a great one; it involved enormous labour, and was richer in pathological and clinical information than any book on the subject that had previously appeared.

On these two books his fame rests, and it rests on a firm and solid foundation.

Dr. Barnes was a facile and prolific writer. He delivered the Lettsomian Lectures on Placenta Prævia, the Lumleian Lectures on the Convulsive Diseases of Women, and many other papers, lectures and addresses. He was for many years on the staff of the *Lancet*. He was always interesting, for his style was clear and vigorous, and he theorized easily and ingeniously. His best work is incorporated in the two great works mentioned above. He published, in conjunction with his son, a work on "Obstetric Medicine and Surgery," but this, mainly from deficient proof correcting, was not a success.

Robert Barnes was one of the founders of the Obstetrical Society of London, and was its fourth President. For many years his masterful individuality dominated the Council and the debates of that Society. He took the leading part in the proceedings which purged the Society of Mr. Baker Brown. In the early eighties influences arose which weakened the sway of Barnes at the Council. He therefore in 1885 founded the British Gynæcological Society, of which he became the Honorary President, and practically ceased to attend the meetings of the Obstetrical Society of London.

At the time when the Royal College of Surgeons gave a diploma

of "Licentiate in Midwifery" to those who could pass an examination in midwifery, Barnes, Arthur Farre and Priestley were the Examiners. Some women, not qualified to practise, proposed to present themselves for this examination, and the College was willing if they passed it to let them have the diploma, thus creating an order of persons qualified to practise midwifery alone. As soon as this came to Barnes's knowledge, he at once resigned his examinership, and his colleagues, Arthur Farre and Priestley, when they heard what he had done, followed his example. The President of the Obstetrical Society, to whom fell the melancholy duty of delivering an obituary notice of Arthur Farre, in dealing with the above-mentioned episode, only stated that Arthur Farre had resigned, and did not say that his resignation followed that of Dr. Barnes. This omission so wounded Dr. Barnes that a few years before his death he resigned his Fellowship of the Obstetrical Society, because the Council of the Society could not discover a way of rectifying what Barnes chose to consider a mis-statement, although it was perfectly accurate so far as it went.

Barnes was a big man, physically and mentally. He had a strong will, great power of work, large knowledge, independent judgment, fluent and vigorous speech. He had a great belief in himself. He was frank and outspoken, indeed a little brusque in manner. He was not remarkable for manual dexterity, and for these reasons his practice was never so large as from his great reputation might have been supposed. He was a man of much public spirit, and this led him to take a prominent part in many matters of controversy not specially relating to his own line of practice, such as hospital administration, vivisection and the constitution of the University of London. For several years he was Medical Officer of Health for Shoreditch, and during this time he threw himself with zeal into the study of sanitation. He was an honour to his profession, and his profession honoured him.

He was twice married, and children of each marriage survive him.

G. E. H.



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