

## WILLIAM BLAIR-BELL

1871-1936

ON JANUARY 25, 1936, the gynecologic and obstetric world sustained a great loss in the death of William Blair-Bell, Emeritus Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Liverpool University, at the age of sixty-five years. He was born in Wallasey, Cheshire, England, September 28, 1871.

This distinguished English gynecologist's career was summarized in the *London Times* as follows:

"The son of Mr. William Bell, M.R.C.S., he was educated at Rossall, where he was afterward appointed a member of the council, and at King's College Hospital, London, where he gained various prizes and scholarships, graduated B.S. and M.D., London University, and was elected F.R.C.S. Eng. and a Fellow of King's College. In 1905 he was appointed to the staff of the Royal Infirmary, Liverpool, where he ultimately became consulting Gynecologic and Obstetric Surgeon, and was elected President in 1935. From 1921 to 1931 he held the Professorship in these subjects at Liverpool University, and retired with the title of Emeritus Professor.

"Dr. Blair-Bell was Arris and Gale lecturer and later Hunterian Professor of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ingleby lecturer at Birmingham University, and Lloyd Roberts lecturer at Manchester University. He was awarded the John Hunter medal and triennial prize by the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Astley Cooper prize, for original work on the pituitary body. His services to gynecology were many and varied, and he was active in the work of many professional societies and institutions. In 1911 he founded the Gynecological Visiting Society of Great Britain, and he was chairman of the foundation committee and First President of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; Past President of the section of obstetrics and gynecology of the Royal Society of Medicine, of the North of England Obstetrical and Gynecological Society, and of the Liverpool Medical Institution; chairman of the executive committee of the British Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology; and an Honorary Fellow or member of various medical societies, both British and foreign. He was formerly a member of the board of directors of the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the British Empire*; his book, *The Principles of Gynecology*

ology, reached a fourth edition in 1934; and he contributed to Watson Cheyne's and Burghard's *System of Operative Surgery* and to other combined works, as well as many papers to professional journals.

"In cancer research Dr. Blair-Bell will be remembered for his introduction of treatment by chemical agents, especially by the intravenous injection of colloid lead. In November, 1925, he delivered an address on the results which he had obtained to the Toronto Academy of Medicine. He said that out of 200 cases treated, mostly hopeless, 50 were well, and the late Dr. Adami, Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool University, in commenting on Dr. Blair-Bell's address, said that so many cases had been cured that the work done in Liverpool could not be kept private any longer. He pointed out, however, that the treatment was dangerous and had to be used with very great care. Unfortunately it cannot be said that the method adopted has altogether realized the high hopes which were at first entertained. Dr. Blair-Bell was Honorary Consulting Director of the Liverpool Medical (Cancer) Research Organization, and he edited *Some Aspects of the Cancer Problem* (1930), and contributed papers on malignant disease to medical journals.

"Dr. Blair-Bell was an honorary LL.D. of Glasgow and Liverpool, an honorary Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and a Commander of the Order of the Star of Rumania. He married his cousin, Miss Florence Bell, but she died in 1929, leaving no children."

The day after his funeral a memorial service was held in Liverpool Cathedral which the Lord Mayor, the medical profession of Liverpool, members of the University and the Royal Infirmery, as well as representatives of various scientific societies, and numerous former patients attended.

Blair-Bell twice visited this country: in 1922 when he was the official guest at the annual meeting of the American Gynecological Society, by which he was made an Honorary Fellow in 1923, and in 1925 as a guest of the American College of Surgeons when the Fellowship was conferred upon him.

In 1926 a joint meeting was held in Liverpool of the American Gynecological Club and the Gynecological Visiting Society of Great Britain of which Blair-Bell was the founder and leading spirit. Those of us who had the privilege of attending that meeting will well remember the wonderful and inspiring demonstration he gave us of his dexterity in operating and the perfection of his surgical technic, as well as his teaching methods, which he carried through brilliantly while suffering from a fever and painful symptoms. This was but an example of his dominant will power and energy in overcoming difficulties.

Out of the British Visiting Society was born the idea, first advanced by Fletcher Shaw, which resulted in the founding of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Blair-Bell was chairman of the foundation committee, and he threw all his indomitable energy into over-

coming the formidable obstacles that were encountered in launching the project and obtaining a charter, and he became the first president of the College which he visualized as becoming a great scientific body ranking with the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons.

My personal relationship with him was very close and I have the happiest memories of our motoring with him through Wales, and visiting him in his retirement at Eardiston, his home in Shropshire. The last time I saw him, which was a few months before his death, a happy day was spent with him at Eardiston in the company of Victor Bonney, Miles Phillips, and our wives. He was full of life and charm and courtesy, and had the enthusiasm of a child as he showed us his gardens, and his guns and dogs, even though he fully realized that his days were numbered.

It is with deep sorrow that I record the passing of Blair-Bell, a man of such remarkable genius and vision, who to all his friends was beloved as "B.B."

*George Gray Ward.*



WILLIAM BLAIR-BELL

1871—1936

## Obituary

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### WILLIAM BLAIR-BELL

SOME of us heard the tragic news a few hours after the completion of the College Council meeting, on February 25th.

On Monday, the 27th, the *London Times* recorded:

“Dr. William Blair-Bell, Emeritus Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Liverpool University, of Eardiston House, West Felton, Shropshire, collapsed in the train when returning home from London on Saturday. He was taken to the Royal Salop Infirmary, where he was found to be dead. He was 65.”

Thus, in somewhat crude introductory brevity the recital of the status and demise of a very remarkable man. Were it not for its loneliness—for he loved the company of friends—it is, perhaps, the end he would have chosen: the sudden switching of light and power from life's activities rather than the prelude of sunset and evening star.

As a conspectus of his career to find place in our *Journal* I like the following:—

“The son of Mr. William Bell, M.R.C.S., he was educated at Rossall, where he was afterwards appointed a member of the council, and at King's College Hospital, London, where he gained various prizes and scholarships, graduated B.S. and M.D., London University, and was elected F.R.C.S. (Eng.), and a Fellow of King's College. In 1905 he was appointed to the staff of the Royal Infirmary, Liverpool, where he ultimately became consulting gynaecological and obstetrical surgeon, and was elected president in 1935. From 1921 to 1931 he held the professorship in these subjects at Liverpool University, and retired with the title of Emeritus Professor.

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medal and triennial prize by the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Astley Cooper prize, for original work on the pituitary body. His services to gynaecology were many and varied, and he was active in the work of many professional societies and institutions. In 1911 he founded the Gynaecological Visiting Society of Great Britain, and he was chairman of the foundation committee and first president of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; past-president of the section of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Royal Society of Medicine, of the North of England Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society, and of the Liverpool Medical Institution; chairman of the executive committee of the British Congresses of Obstetrics and Gynaecology; and an honorary fellow or member of various medical societies, both British and foreign. He was formerly a member of the board of directors of the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire*; his book "The Principles of Gynaecology," reached a fourth edition in 1934; and he contributed to Watson Cheyne's and Burghard's "System of Operative Surgery" and to other combined works, as well as many papers to professional journals.

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## OBITUARY

This impressive record of recognitions and achievements represents a very heavy commitment of his time and energy. But one felt he was ever ready to enter vigorously upon further enterprises which enlisted his interest.

His work on cancer, of which Professor Walter Dilling has given a most interesting account in a recent issue of the *Lancet* (February 1st, 1936), focused for some years much of his endeavour.

This sphere of his work brought him some anxieties. He was disappointed at the lack of general acceptance of his views, and when the inevitable public demand arose for information in connexion with a new method of cancer treatment, some ethical problems were raised.

His attached friend, the late Sir Robert Jones, was, however, always available for help and advice, and I remember on one occasion when I was in Liverpool, being invited to discuss some of these matters with them. I was much impressed by the many evidences of the firm friendship which existed between these two men, in many ways so different from each other. The illness and earlier decease of Robert Jones was an irreparable loss to Blair-Bell, both in counsel and comradeship.

Blair-Bell was as easy to please as a guest as he was charmingly insistent as a host, and it was, naturally, in his adopted city of Liverpool that one gained the most vivid impressions of his radiant energies, together with their corresponding activities and the reactions thereto of friends and critics. Friend and critic, indeed, were often one and the same person, and nothing pleased him better than an intense discussion on a topic of keen interest. So far as I am aware, he did not allow, in more than one or two instances, even fundamental differences of opinion, or misunderstandings, to imperil and still less to rupture friendships, and I do know that the one or two instances in which estrangement occurred caused him the deepest regret.

It was, no doubt, the cardiac malady handicapping the later years which tinged his keenness with a measure of impatience, and almost cancelled the role in which, in brighter days, he was at his best and in which his friends liked him most, that of "the Happy Warrior."

In the days of his fuller activities one could not but notice the effortless ease with which he enlisted the devoted help of subordinate staff and junior colleagues in the laboratories and classrooms, and of the nursing staffs in the hospitals, private and public, which he served so brilliantly.

The traditional hero-worship of the medical student and the camaraderie of colleagues in the club and common-room were his, in full measure, as well as the esteem of his fellow-citizens.

It was in Liverpool I saw a good deal of his surgical craftsmanship. This included meticulous care in preparation and detailed planning in all but routine operations. His technique was perfect and his dexterity remarkable, notwithstanding the absence of the second finger of the left hand—the result of a severe septic infection during the war years. He would meet unexpected operative complications with an overcoming tenacity of purpose which was exemplary, and even when physically unfit the same quality would carry him through where men of less calibre might fail.

Some of our American and Canadian colleagues will recall the joint meeting of their Gynaecological Club and our Gynaecological Visiting Society in Liverpool in 1926. Blair-Bell had arranged a heavy full-day programme of demonstrations and major operations which, though himself suffering from urgent symptoms accompanied by a high temperature, he carried through to the end with scarcely a falter. He could not be dissuaded and, as the sequel proved, the effort cost him much. But it was a remarkable exhibition of his dominant will prevailing over very difficult conditions.

I think, however, it was as our Group leader in the Gynaecological Visiting Society that we appreciated Blair-Bell most. He rejoiced in undisputed captaincy. Particularly in our trips abroad, his buoyant gaiety, his rather simple sense of humour, and the unrestrained chaffing of confident friendship were infectious and pervading. These, with other retrospects of our tours, bind together in an enduring and treasured memory.

But he would not allow the professional purpose of our visits to be lost sight of. He was among the foremost in our discussions and as unsparing as any of us in criticism or praise of what we saw.

In matters concerning the Gynaecological Visiting Society dress occasions, as later in the framing of our College ceremonial, he was a stern ritualist. The man without the white tie at a Gynaecological Visiting Society dinner was in like case with the man without a wedding garment.

Especially, perhaps, the first generation of the Gynaecological Visiting Society cannot fail to remember him gratefully as its founder. Certain it is that the Society has saved many from the dulling effect of routine and complacency in their own immediate



spheres, and by the pooling of experiences, the inspection of actual work in various centres at home and abroad, and the free, unfettered and unreported critical discussions thereon, our branch of the art and craft of medicine has been benefited.

The membership of the parent society being limited at any given time in point of numbers—not arbitrarily but for reasons of practical utility—the junior society has come into being and is producing parallel results.

It was, however, at a business meeting of the Gynaecological Visiting Society that an enveloping movement to include those practising our branch of medicine found expression in the conception of the establishment of a British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. It was no merely academic proposition. Rather was it the product of an evolutionary process within the profession which, at last, was thus to find outward and visible sign. It was this fundamental reason for the phenomenon which those outside and in opposition failed to grasp. The remarkably rapid development of the Fellowship and Membership of our College, at home and overseas, cannot be interpreted otherwise than by regarding the College as having met an essential need at the right time.

The opposition to its establishment in the early stages, undiscerning though it was, raised formidable difficulties which stirred up Blair-Bell's combatant qualities in high measure and confronted him as chairman of the foundation committee.

I never heard him claim to have been the first to raise the proposal that such a college should be established—a distinction which belongs to Fletcher Shaw—but when once the die was cast he was indefatigable and relentless in pursuit of the objective.

Focusing his amazing energies, under his guidance obstacles were overcome, swept aside, or circumvented until, in the end, ably supported by Shaw and others, he won through to become our first President and benefactor.

Few would be inclined to assess Blair-Bell's status in gynaecology as being head and shoulders above his compeers, but that it was outstanding and international none will deny, and assuredly his memory will be for all time enshrined in the College House, wherever situate. In his will and testament, as yet unpublished, certain of the bequests affecting the College may elicit differing opinions as to whether they are well designed to ensure the fulfilment of his wholehearted purpose—the advancement of the College's prestige and development, immediate and future. But when, in due course, the bequests are made known, they

will best be judged in the well-founded belief that such, in fact, was his purpose.

After his retirement from the Chair at Liverpool University he became increasingly fond of country life at Eardiston House, his place in Shropshire where, as he wrote to Walter Chapman in December last, he felt comfortably "on the shelf" save for a few "decorative jobs." He was fond of his gun and very fond of his dogs. The black spaniel, "Rogue," was an especial favourite and almost an inseparable companion.

It was but a mile or two from Eardiston that he was buried. The service in St. Chad's Parish Church was simple and impressive, the little building being filled with relatives, friends, representatives of the University, the Southern Hospital, with other Liverpool Institutions, the Royal Colleges, and many Fellows and Members of our own College, including the President, Treasurer, and Honorary Secretary.

During the service it chanced that a shaft of sunshine for some moments rested on the gown and cap he had worn as President and which, in accordance with his desire, lay on the casket.

In the churchyard after the committal, wending our various ways, one could not but think of his great repute as enhancing with the passing years, and of himself as peacefully resting "until the day break and the shadows flee away."

Ewen J. Maclean.

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THE death of Professor Blair-Bell came as a great shock to his friends, for he died suddenly in the train on his way home to Eardiston, after attending a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Congress at which he appeared to be in his usual health. He was found apparently asleep in his carriage, and it was evident that the end had come quietly and peacefully. It had long been known that his life was precarious, but there had not been any recent change in his cardiac condition, and he died as he had wished, with all his physical powers still responsive to his will and with his splendid intellectual faculties undimmed by age or illness. The main outlines of a career crowded with effort and crowned with achievement are well known to the gynaecological world, for his writings, researches and professional activities have made the name of Blair-Bell a household word. He made great contributions towards the gynaecological progress

of his own generation, and he is assured of a niche in the Temple of Fame, but it is too soon to assess the abiding value of his work and the ultimate decision must be left to the verdict of posterity.

Liverpool has every right to claim Blair-Bell as one of her most distinguished sons, for although he studied medicine in London (and was ever ready to acknowledge the debt he owed to his teachers at King's College) he was born and bred in the North Country, educated at a public school in Lancashire, and spent the whole of his active professional life in Liverpool. Soon after taking his degree he returned North, and after a short time in general practice was appointed to the staff of the Royal Infirmary as Assistant Gynaecological Surgeon.

Here Blair-Bell came under the influence of F. T. Paul, Robert Jones, and later Adami, and began a lasting friendship with those distinguished men. At the outset of his career, he drew up a programme for present and future research work and he wrote down on a piece of notepaper, which is still extant, a memorandum showing that he intended to direct his attention to two main subjects, the physiology of the ductless glands and their influence upon the female sex organs, and the investigation of cancer.

To this end Blair-Bell devoted himself with a restless energy, a relentless determination and a tireless purpose which never abated throughout his whole life; and whether he was working in hospital, the University, or in connexion with his cancer organization, he never allowed any obstacle or illness to interfere with his progress towards his objective. Some of his early researches were conducted in collaboration with other workers, but his temperament was not suited to the dual control implied by a scientific partnership. His intense individuality of outlook and supreme confidence in his own opinions, made it almost impossible for him to subordinate his views to those of other people, and his best work was carried out either by himself alone or in conjunction with a team of which he was the acknowledged leader.

Towards the solution of any problem Blair-Bell brought to bear an immense industry, meticulous attention to detail, complete knowledge of the literature, and above all a highly trained mind which was rapier-like in its swiftness of perception. In spite of his intuitive faculties, he did not allow himself to leap to a conclusion, and his opinions were not formed without much thought and deliberation, but when his mind was once made up

he held to his convictions with the utmost tenacity, and the writer is unaware of any instance in which he completely changed his point of view or seriously modified his original opinion. With such a temperament he was bound to clash with those who opposed his views, but although he engaged in many controversies and was sometimes a severe critic, and occasionally a harsh one, he was never intentionally hurtful or unfair, and if he hit hard, he was always ready to take punishment himself. In so far as such polemical conflicts gave him an opportunity for the exercise of his logical and literary faculties, he enjoyed them, and he entered the arena with the zest for battle, but he was not activated by any desire for personal aggrandizement, and he derived but little pleasure from the downfall of a worthy opponent. At the same time, he could not bring himself to tolerate scientific heresy, and he was completely fearless in his attempts to expose what he considered to be a false doctrine.

Blair-Bell regarded himself in some senses as a crusader—his work for the College was indeed a crusade—and when his motives were misunderstood and his ventures miscarried or excited an opposition which he could not understand, he would hide his disappointment under a proud bearing which concealed his real feelings. But if he was occasionally hard on others, he was always hardest on himself, and he subjected his life to a rigorous self-discipline which was never relaxed. He was conscious of his own gifts, but he had no vain pride in his own powers of attainment. He was never satisfied with the quality of his own work, and he constantly strove for higher standards and greater achievements. His output of work was enormous, and it may truly be said of him that he never wasted a moment.

The daily routine in Liverpool included hospital and consultative practice with much operative work, professorial duties in the University, clinical teaching in the hospital, daily supervision of his research workers, a sedulous attention to correspondence, and a daily, or rather nightly, examination of the literature (which, like his correspondence, was never allowed to fall into arrears); and all the time there was a constant stream of literary work from his indefatigable pen. He was most punctilious in his acknowledgment of letters, and rarely omitted to reply by return of post; so particular was he upon this point that on the very day he returned from America, with the accumulation of six weeks' work awaiting his attention, he yet found time to send to the writer a personal acknowledgment of an insignificant reprint which had been sent to his house during his absence.

## OBITUARY

As a teacher, Blair-Bell was lucid and interesting, and by many generations of students he was regarded with feelings of the deepest respect and admiration, tinged with awe, and he was variously and affectionately known as "The Professor", "B.B.", or "The Author", and for years "Author's Modification" was a stock-phrase in the medical school. The form of his lectures and his lecture-material were both admirable, and although he was admittedly a gynaecologist rather than an obstetrician, and dwelt much upon evolution, genetics, and the scientific aspect of his subject, he always aroused the interest of his students and held the complete attention of the class.

As a clinical teacher Blair-Bell had less scope, and in the out-patient department, the wards, or the operating theatre, he concentrated his attention upon the welfare of the patient and the principles and technique of treatment in a manner which appealed most to the post-graduate. On his retirement from the University he was presented by the undergraduates with his portrait in oils, an almost unprecedented honour, which pleased him greatly. He was a constant supporter of many learned societies, and he rarely attended a meeting of the Liverpool Medical Institution, the North of England Gynaecological Society, or of the Royal Society of Medicine without taking some part, and generally a prominent one, in the discussion. He always spoke with authority and arrested the attention of his audience, but his unquestionable gifts of exposition and debate were qualified by the low tones of his voice, which did not carry well, and his public speaking never reached the flights of oratory.

As a leader in his own department in the hospital or the University, Blair-Bell was an inspiring example, although he was always severe upon his nurses, assistants, and junior colleagues, and never easy to please, for he set a standard which was all but unattainable. He had a most stimulating and provocative effect upon his staff from whom he was able to extract the last ounce of effort, and his personal keenness aroused feelings of enthusiasm and loyalty even from those who were most conscious of their inability to meet his demands.

Whatever the abiding value of his work may be, Blair-Bell has left an indelible mark upon his own school and upon all those who have had the privilege of working under his aegis. He was a dreamer and visionary, but equally a man of action, and many of his dreams—his books, the Gynaecological Visiting Society, the British College of Obstetricians—came true in his own lifetime; and perhaps his most cherished vision of the

conquest of cancer may some day take form and substance out of the methods and researches which he has bequeathed to us.

This stumbling tribute to his genius would be incomplete, if not misleading, unless some reference were made to the more personal qualities which entered into the composition of his fascinating and enigmatic character. His physical appearance was truly distinguished, and he could never be mistaken for an ordinary man. It is impossible to do justice to the refinement of feature and the concentration of expression which made up the intellectual beauty of his face, or to convey any adequate impression of the dynamic force pent up in his spare but graceful and athletic frame and the vitality which overflowed into his restless movements.

As a host, Blair-Bell was the very essence of courtesy and consideration, and with his few intimate friends he was always a sparkling and delightful companion. He was ever ready to provide facilities for those who desired to visit his clinic, and he never missed an opportunity for entertaining the many foreign surgeons who came to see his work in Liverpool. In his own home, and most of all at Eardiston where he spent his happiest years, he gave himself lavishly to his guests, and there he displayed a thoughtfulness and indeed a tenderness which brought to light a surprising and unsuspected depth of feeling.

Blair-Bell loved children and animals and quickly gained, and retained, their confidence and affection by his patient understanding of their wants and difficulties. He delighted in the companionship of a child, and was never happier than when he was demonstrating to one of his young visitors the wonderful accomplishments of his beloved spaniels. In the charming old English setting of Eardiston he followed with the greatest enthusiasm the pursuits of the country squire, and here, in his quiet house and garden, his conflicts forgotten, he revealed himself as the perfect host, the lover of animals and the friend of children.

And so, his journey ended, it was fitting that he should be brought to the little Shropshire churchyard, and after a service touching in its dignity and simplicity, laid to rest in the midst of the country that he loved so well . . .

May he rest in peace.

Leyland Robinson.

WITH the passing of Blair-Bell, Medicine loses one of its most acute brains and arresting personalities.

With his youthful figure and ascetic face, crowned with thick, iron-grey hair, and lit by piercing blue eyes, Blair-Bell could not pass unnoticed in any society. His eager, penetrating mind explored every aspect of his branch of medicine, but of all his activities the one which will form his most permanent memorial is the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. To this he gave for many years the full vigour of his mind and body, and but for his vision, energy and courage, this College even if it had been founded, would have been but a pale shadow of its present self.

From the time when he was persuaded that the foundation of a College was feasible he threw all the energy of his mind and body into the task, and there can have been few days in the remainder of his life when the College was absent from his thoughts.

He became chairman of the first committee, then of the signatories, and when at last registration was obtained and the College founded, he became the first President.

His vision saw a great College ranking side by side in equality with its older sisters—the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons—and doing for Obstetrics and Gynaecology what they had done, and were doing, for Medicine and Surgery.

He saw the College as a corporate body embracing all obstetricians and gynaecologists, not only of this country, but of the whole Empire, and he saw it as something more than a mere examining and registering body. It was to be a living force, an inspiration and a guide to all its members.

For this reason he developed its ritual and insisted that this should be carried out in due form. He persuaded the Council to adopt a coat of arms—largely devised by himself—and it was only after a struggle with the College of Heralds that he was allowed to use one of the emblems which appears on this coat. It gave him puckish joy to insert his own motto as the motto of the College without, as he thought, anyone noticing it!

He persuaded the Council to insist that each newly elected member is formally admitted by the President, and publicly swears to the oath of the College which Blair-Bell himself had composed. To make this and other ceremonies more impressive

he invented robes for the President, Fellows and Members—and, still more remarkable, he persuaded those concerned to wear them!

Ritual is never far removed from both the sublime and the ridiculous, and to carry out an age-long ritual with impressiveness requires dignity and feeling. To devise a new ritual and to carry it out in the presence of many who were openly scornful, in a manner so impressive that for the future it became part of the College, required the greatest gifts of courage as well as those of ability and dignity. Those of us who beheld them will never forget the impressiveness of the first admission ceremony in Glasgow, the first public ceremony in London when Honorary Fellows were admitted and two were welcomed in their own languages, with neither of which Blair-Bell had much acquaintance, and the culmination of his presidency when the new home of the College was opened by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York.

All this, which is now part and parcel of the corporate life of the College, demanded confidence as well as consummate art, but before this stage was reached the College owed much more to his courage and pertinacity than is generally known. In the early days many would have been satisfied with some form of association, and it required much determination to insist that anything short of a College would be useless. A little later there was an attempt to curtail the ultimate activities of the College, and there is no doubt that registration would have been obtained earlier and more easily if this had been agreed to. So fierce was the fight that many would have conceded this point in order to get on with pressing work—but not so Blair-Bell. Not only was it to be a College or nothing, but it was to be a College entirely unfettered and unrestricted in its development.

The movement for establishing this College began in the provinces, and it was realized by all that, if it was to retain the loyalty of the provincial members, the management must never pass wholly into London hands. At first, meetings of the College were held in the provinces as well as in London, but finally it became obvious to all that the College must have a home, and that the home must be in the metropolis of the Empire. To be convinced was with Blair-Bell merely a prelude to action. Many schemes were devised and many properties examined, until at last, realizing that none of the suggestions would come to fruition during his presidency, he found a suitable house in 58 Queen Anne Street, and bought it himself. During his lifetime he was



paid interest on the purchase money, but a deed was signed whereby the property passed unfettered to the College on his death.

Blair-Bell was a man ever to burn the candle at both ends, and during the last few years perhaps more than ever, as he knew that the number of his days was limited.

To a man of his temperament time was always short. His vision was so limitless, his enthusiasms so great, that life—however long it had been extended—could never have allowed him to reach his goal.

That the College had reached the position it had by the end of his presidency, a position which the most enthusiastic and optimistic could not have hoped for in this short time, was due in no small measure to his leadership and zeal.

To such a man life is not easy. That visionary goal must be reached, neither himself nor his friends must be spared. Any who failed to see his visions or faltered on the way, or pursued a line divergent from his own, were thrust aside, not from any conscious disloyalty or unfriendliness, but because, for the time being, his whole soul was absorbed in his great ideal.

Needless to say he made enemies—that this was so, surprised no one more than himself, and he was very hurt when any friend took exception to his criticisms. The expression of his views, sometimes very personal expressions, were made with the object and not the person in mind, and they were made with no intention of giving a personal wound. And yet no one was more susceptible to criticism than himself, or more hurt at the disagreement of friends.

Blair-Bell did not readily wear his heart on his sleeve, and it was only a few intimate friends who were aware of the depth of feeling below the surface. For eight years he and I worked intimately and incessantly together for the establishment of this College, and during all this time not a word of unfriendliness passed between us. Often we disagreed about details and always he was ready to discuss the point and often to adopt it. There can have been few partnerships carried through such long and strenuous times with such complete singleness of purpose: a partnership which began with acquaintanceship and ended with deep personal friendship.

To see Blair-Bell at his best, however, was to see him with young people, especially youths and young men. Never didactic or superior, he drew from them their best, as they did from him. Sport, games, work, philosophy of life—all discussed with

them as equals and with a charm and humour which made him irresistible. My own boys loved him, as did all young people brought into contact with him, and the sad part was that he had no young people of his own. There will be many young as well as old hearts saddened at the passing of B.B.

W. Fletcher Shaw.

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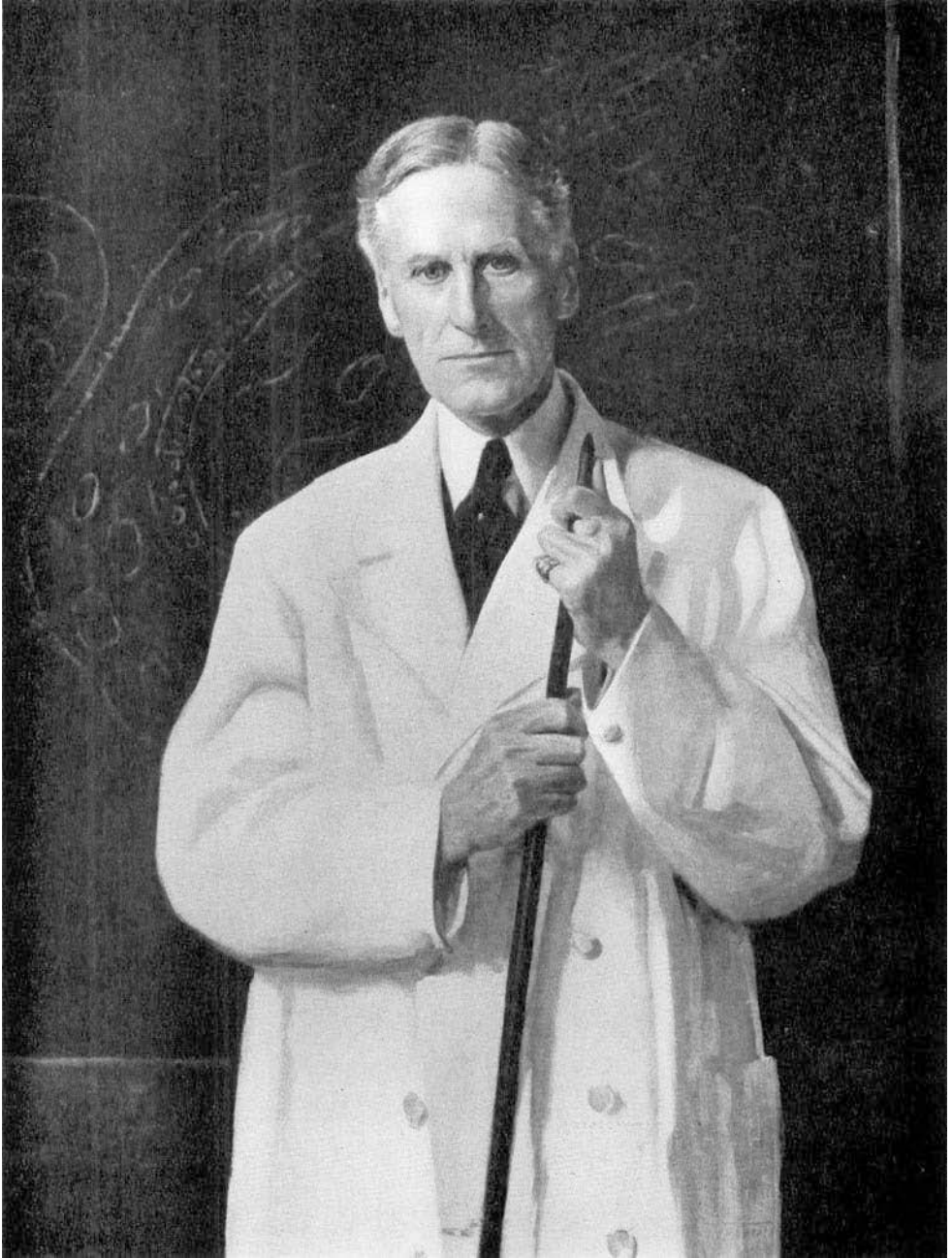
THE President of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has given a detailed record of the work accomplished and position attained by William Blair-Bell, and the onerous task of reaching a just assessment of a highly complex personality has been assigned to me. Lord Dawson's description of him at the Annual Dinner of the College in November last as "the restless, lovable torch-bearer who never forgot—or allowed anybody else to forget—that he was bearing a torch," together with the words in the *Lancet* (February 1st, 1936), "Blair-Bell was of the stuff from which great men are made," appear to be the most appropriate and concise summaries. In the stuff that went to Blair-Bell's make-up was included, among others, something from the pioneer, the dictator, and the visionary. He was certainly many-sided—a delightful and interesting companion; courageous and without fear of responsibility or opposition; a keen fighter, often rushing into the controversies of others as well as his own, and as eagerly with an intimate friend as with an unknown stranger.

His intellectual attainments, learning and industry, deservedly earned for him an influential position in his branch of medicine in this country and beyond it. His strength lay in his driving power and the singleness of purpose with which he pursued his immediate objective regardless of opposition and often with a ruthlessness that was immune to the feelings of those who stood in his way. His complete confidence in himself relieved him from any doubt or hesitation regarding his views and actions, but the pity was that he lacked the faculty of appreciating the point of view of those who did not see eye to eye with him. He was an autocrat to the last, but his enthusiasm was infective, and those who accepted his lead and could work with him were carried along by it. By his example and zest he accomplished much, but at undue cost to himself, in wear and tear, entailing loss of health and sometimes estrangement of friends from needless troubles arising from his uncompromising attitude.

## OBITUARY

But men of his calibre succeed where the more easy-going fail, and Blair-Bell's energy and push enabled him to do more than any other single individual in the foundation and establishment of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which will be a lasting memorial of his striking and forceful personality. Handicapped as he was by the serious condition from which he died, he continued to the end to exercise a weighty influence on all professional matters. That influence will urge others to continue what he began, and his name and his great services to British Obstetrics and Gynaecology will not be forgotten.

John S. Fairbairn.



WILLIAM BLAIR-BELL