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 VICTOR BONNEY

1872-1953

VICTOR BONNEY died in London on July 4, 1953, at the age of 80 years, after a relatively short illness. To say that he was the brightest star in the English gynaecological firmament is an understatement. His reputation was world-wide and his work was acknowledged and respected in the United States and on the Continent of Europe as well as throughout the British Commonwealth of Nations.

He was born at Chelsea in London on Dec. 17, 1872, the son of Dr. W. A. Bonney, a well-known and highly respected general practitioner. He received his medical education at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, graduating in 1896 with the M.B., B.S., London University degree. In 1898 he proceeded to the M.D., and in 1899 to the M.S. degree, and in that year he was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, of which he was later to become a Vice-President. Not content with these qualifications he obtained in 1900 Membership in the Royal College of Physicians, and in 1904 he further distinguished himself by obtaining the B.Sc. degree in anatomy with first-class honours. He held resident appointments at the Middlesex Hospital and the Chelsea Hospital for Women. He won the Emden research scholarship in the Cancer Investigation Laboratories of the Middlesex Hospital. Later he was appointed obstetric tutor, and in 1908 he became Assistant Gynaecological Surgeon to his parent hospital. In 1930 on the death of Sir Comyns Berkeley he became chief of the department, a post he held until his retirement.

His association with Sir Comyns Berkeley extended to both the Chelsea Hospital for Women and the Middlesex Hospital. These two great men made up an ideal partnership—Berkeley, the classical scholar, senior in age, and Bonney, the brilliant younger enthusiast full of ideas and ideals and a tireless worker. The work they did together was outstanding both in quantity and in quality. They showed that radical abdominal hysterectomy for cancer of the cervix could offer reasonable results even before the use of modern anaesthesia, antibiotics, blood transfusions, etc., and Bonney personally performed more than 600 such operations. Their work on vulval lesions was well ahead of its time, and Bonney's outstanding work on gynaecological conservatism—myomectomy and ovarian cystectomy—is a masterpiece of clarity of thought and logic.

His writings were extensive on all gynaecological subjects, and his *Text-book of Gynaecological Surgery* is a delightfully personal treatise on the subject, and has world-wide appeal.

He was a Hunterian Lecturer at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1908, 1930, and 1931, a Bradshaw Lecturer in 1934, and a Hunterian Orator in 1943. To his great joy he was elected an Honorary Fellow of the American Gynecological Society and he held Honorary Fellowships of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, and the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland. During his lifetime he examined for the Royal Colleges and many British Universities, and in 1923 he was President of the Section of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association.

“Victor,” as he was affectionately known by all his many residents and associates, was a lovable man, a loyal master, brilliant surgeon, and a great teacher. His interests professionally were entirely gynaecological. He was disinterested in obstetrics except when the obstetric patient became also a gynaecological one.

He showed no mean ability as a painter, and he himself illustrated his own textbooks with very clear line drawings. He was a keen salmon fisher, and this proclivity was partly responsible for the great friendship that developed between him and the late Dr. George Gray Ward. He retired to a lovely home on the banks of the Wye river in Herefordshire.

In 1905 he married Annie, daughter of the late Dr. James Appleyard of Tasmania. Mrs. Bonney survives him. There are no children.

His loss is a very personal one to us all in England, and I cannot do better than pay tribute to him by quoting the reviewer of his 1943 edition of *Gynaecological Surgery*.

“Scattered throughout the British Commonwealth of Nations there is a band of younger men whose privilege it has been to serve an apprenticeship at the Chelsea Hospital for Women, London, where they have become imbued with the Berkeley-Bonney tradition. They are the disciples of the Bonney technique and the Bonney conservatism, and to them as to many others, Bonney is the greatest living exponent of gynaecological surgery. They remember him as an exquisite surgeon, a stimulating thinker and leader, and a rare and generous teacher.”

*Charles D. Read*