OBITUARY.

WALTER DICKSON, M.D., R.N.

It was on the 9th November 1894 that Dr. Walter Dickson, who held the Presidential Chair of the Epidemiological Society of London during the years 1885-1887, passed away from among us, leaving deep footprints on the sands of time and much regret to those who knew and valued him.

Born in Edinburgh on the 1st February 1821, he was educated at the High School of that city. It was at the University of Edinburgh that he received his medical education. His early youth gave promise of his future; for his assiduity, his love of work, during this period of his life, were such as to augur well for that future. He graduated in 1841 with first-class honours; his Thesis on "The Pathology of Dropsy" being the third in order of merit.

His choice of the Royal Naval Service as a career, in preference to any other, arose from association, linked with a spirit of adventure and enterprise; for having a paternal uncle in that service and believing it to be a soil of hopeful promise, he made a choice of it and embraced it.

He entered the Naval Service in the month of August 1841, and served as Assistant-Surgeon from that period to the year 1849, on Home, Cape of Good Hope, and Mediterranean stations; and as Surgeon he served on West Coast of Africa, North Sea, North-American, and West Indian stations, and East Indian and China stations.

The services he rendered during this period of his Naval career were marked with a sense of duty and of fulfilment which won for him the approval of the authorities, and the respect and esteem of those with whom he came in contact and with whom he served.

In the Naval operations in China in 1859; in the Antarctic Expedition of 1844-45, of which he has left a pleasing and interesting account; on the fatal shores of West Africa where for four years he was stationed; in the Baltic Sea during the Russian war; in that fearful convulsion, the Indian mutiny of 1857, which threatened the integrity of the British Empire; in the sanguinary onslaught and attack upon the Paku forts on the Peiho river, on which occasion he was specially mentioned in despatches, and for his care of the wounded—being then the principal medical officer of the expedition—he received the special thanks of the Commander-in-Chief. In all these
eventful periods of his career, he proved himself equal to, and in touch with, his position. His medical history of H.M.S. *Chesapeake* in India and in Arabia in 1857-58 won for him the Blane gold medal and placed him intellectually high in esteem. Besides this blue-ribbon of the medical department of the Navy, he received a medal of Honour and Merit from the French Maritime Sanitary Congress for his writings and works on Naval Hygiene. These honours, together with the medals that were conferred upon him by the British Government, were valued by him chiefly as expressive marks of the esteem in which the work he had performed was held.

It was in 1844 that he was selected as medical officer in charge of H.M.S. *Pagoda*. This expedition, under the command of Commander (afterwards Admiral) T. L. Moore, was intended to supplement the work so ably done by Sir James Ross in the *Erebus* and *Terror* during the years 1839-43 (a work which Sir Roderick Murchison characterised as "the most remarkable and important expedition of discovery since the days of Cook"). In the two months engaged in this duty—of which Dr. Dickson has left record in his work, *The Antarctic Voyage of H.M.S. Pagoda*—the *Pagoda* completed successfully one-third of the Antarctic circumference between the meridians of Greenwich and 110° east longitude, and between the latitudes of 60° and 70° south—that is to say, the Polar Sea directly south of the Indian Ocean for a distance of more than 5,000 miles.

In a letter to the Editor of the *Standard*, dated 10th September 1886, Dr. Dickson writes as follows:

"Proceeding from the Cape of Good Hope to 60° S. lat. we sailed south-east, and traversed a hundred degrees of longitude, seldom without seeing ice, and most often in a sea crowded with enormous icebergs, which appear to be more numerous and of greater dimensions, especially between 80° and 100° E. long., than in any part of the world. We crossed the Antarctic circle in long. 31° E. on the 8th February 1845, but had to recross it on the 15th, having been brought up in lat. 68° by heavy pack ice, forming an impenetrable wall forbidding all further approach to the Pole. Winds also which were fair to the northward of the circle were now adverse, rendering sailing slow and hazardous; and in calms the sea-water temperature of 28°+0. Fahr. and the pancake ice around the ship gave warning of the extreme peril of our position. Gales and snowstorms were of frequent occurrence the nearer we approached the land,* which doubtless exists throughout the Antarctic circumference, but which except in open summers is probably very rarely accessible. We saw large icebergs as far north as 53° S. lat. in the longitude of the Cape of Good Hope, and as 51° S. lat. in the longitude of West Australia. But they are most abundant from the 60th parallel to the 65th. The most
lofty we saw was about one hundred and eighty feet high; the largest were three miles long, with an average height of one hundred feet. Their sides were precipitous and washed by a tremendous surf.”

How delighted would he have been had he lived to have shared the pleasures, joys, and anticipations which possessed the breasts of the many celebrated and distinguished members of the International Geographical Congress assembled in the Hall of the Imperial Institute in the latter days of July and the first days of August of this year. For his pride and his love of country were centred in the hope that the triple cross of England’s flag would one day float proudly over that land, now covered by the mighty cap of ice, which like a miser hoards and hides beneath its selfish grasp many mysterious and hitherto unknown secrets, blotting out with its icy mantle a tract of land covering more than 3,000,000 of square miles.

Well and truly would he have warmed at the inspiring words of hope expressed by the President of the Royal Geographical Society in his admirable address to the assembled geographers on the eventful evening of the 26th July 1895.

He was nominated in 1862 (on the lamented death of Dr. McWilliam) Medical Inspector of Customs, and though high on the list of promotion in the Naval Service, he accepted the post. For much and valuable work in connection with the legislation for the improvement of the Mercantile Marine, he received the thanks of the Board of Trade, and on several occasions special thanks were given him by the Board of Customs for services to that department. The care and attention he gave to the quality of the lime juice and the suggestions offered by him, saved many a ship from scurvy, “that dreadful plague of the sea and the spoyle of mariners”.

Early in his civil career he joined the Metropolitan Counties Branch of the British Medical Association, of which he was President during the year 1885, and was for many years honorary treasurer to the branch.

He was also a Surgeon Lieut.-Colonel in the rifle volunteer force.

He served on the Committee on Cholera and Quarantine, 1865, and gave evidence to the Admiralty Committees on enthetic disease, on the Arctic Expedition, 1877; on scurvy and other hygienic subjects.

He was elected President of the Epidemiological Society, and occupied the presidential chair from 1885 to 1887,
being for that time "its directing mind, its guiding spirit, and its controlling adviser". He was proud of his position, esteemed it as an object of laudable ambition, and gave to it a prestige and éclat.

Earnest in all things, he entered heart and soul into all he undertook. Of a frank, open, and candid nature, he made himself welcome everywhere. Possessed as he was of that spirit of religious reverence which characterises the man whose life is passed between two immensities,

"Quo cumque adspicias, nil nisi pontus et aer",

he showed the influence that spirit had in the exercise of his thoughts and actions. He used that sense with intelligent discernment, and with such reverence and respect as to cause it, as a placid stream, to run through his life, a guide and rule of his conduct. He felt the import of the Basque proverb,

"Othrizeu estaquienia Jaincoiri Berraio itasoari"

(the man who knows not how to pray to God should go to the sea to learn), and deeply profited by it.

Of refined taste, both literary and aesthetic, he cultivated that taste with method and system, and when imparting the information derived from his extensive reading, observation, and love of art (all which he guided with thought and an educated mental training), his store of knowledge issued in words rounded in pleasing phrase, and in periods gently and ably cadenced. It was not in the blaze of sunshine, but in the calm quiet routine of a life of duty, and by the bedside of his patient, that he won for himself universal esteem; and men, who thus knew him, spoke of Walter Dickson with affection and approval, and as of one whose example they longed to imitate, and in whose footsteps they would willingly tread. One who knew, loved, and valued him, said of him that "he was as near perfection as possible". In his professional observations and experience, he followed the essentially useful and philosophic precept inculcated by Morgagni:

"Nulla est alia pro certo noserudi via, nisi quam plurimas et morborum et dissectionem historias, tum aliorum, tum proprias collectas habere, et inter se Comparare." (De sedibus et causis morborum.)

In all he undertook, in all he did, he was actuated by a stern sense of duty; and in all he witnessed and observed, he bowed down and confessed—with deep reverence—the manifestations of an Almighty Majestic Design.

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