

Obituary

Gordon Roy Cameron

Kt., M.B., D.Sc., Ll.D. Melb., Ll.D. Edin., P.C. Path.,
F.R.C.P., F.R.S.



Roy Cameron was appointed Professor of Morbid Anatomy at University College Hospital Medical School in 1937 and the clinical staff quickly realized that they had gained an outstanding teacher and colleague. Cameron had already worked for seven years in the Graham research laboratories and his benign bespectacled figure was well known in the School but it was not until he took over teaching in the post-mortem room that his learning, profound interest in pathology, and kindness were generally appreciated. No-one could have been more encouraging to young house physicians and surgeons when first faced with the awe-inspiring task of expounding the clinical history and diagnosis in the necropsy room. Professor Cameron was so modest and unassuming that it was not until his knighthood in 1957 that those not intimately associated with him had their attention drawn to his truly formidable attainments.

Before leaving Australia as a young man he had already been deputy director of the Walter and Eliza

Hall Institute in Melbourne. In 1928 at the age of 29 years he spent a year with Aschoff at Freiburg and came from there to work with A.E. Boycott in the Graham research laboratories at U.C.H. Within two years of his appointment as Professor he had to leave his department on the outbreak of war and go to the Chemical Research Station at Porton to take charge of pathology.

The war years at Porton, where Cameron worked with a team of scientists, including Barcroft, Douglas, Gaddum, and Carleton, represented a turning point; he showed how basic experimental pathology had a vital part to play in problems of a primarily biochemical or physiological nature. The long evenings during the blackout at Winterslow gave time for the collection of the vast amount of factual and bibliographical detail that were published in 'The pathology of the cell', his largest single work.

Returning to U.C.H. with this wide experience of pure scientific investigation, Professor Cameron set to work to rebuild his department of morbid anatomy. Though grateful for his earlier work in Aschoff's laboratory in Freiburg, which he always recalled with affection, morphological pathology was to be used mainly as a tool for the study of dynamic pathological processes. A steady stream of young pathologists, almost all from overseas, came to his Graham laboratory to study, by simple techniques, basic problems in pathological reactions. All received, in addition to guidance, much detailed help, the benefits of Cameron's tremendous capacity for quick and lucid writing and his vast knowledge of the pathological literature, which was remembered, not card indexed. The liver was the organ to which Cameron kept returning, and by the early fifties he had established his interest in inter-relating microscopical changes with biochemical processes. This was his greatest and most satisfying work, linking the dynamic processes of pathology with the newly determined biochemical metabolic pathways.

In natural and rapid sequence there followed recognition by the Royal Society, public honours, and his wise, quiet counsel on many committees, at one time over 50 in all, including the Medical and Agricultural Research Councils. His knighthood left Sir Roy slightly surprised, even ill at ease, as he was simple and unassuming and did not readily take to the new title. At this time his research laboratories were crowded, though modestly equipped, for Cameron believed, and proved, that good work was not dependent upon expensive apparatus or new buildings. It might be thought that this experimental

emphasis and the large volume of public work would take Sir Roy away from student teaching and hospital routine, but the Tuesday 'wet meat' class and the surgical histopathological sessions were zealously preserved. Both were opportunities for demonstrations of the living processes of pathology, not the end stages of disease.

For several years before his retirement ill-health interrupted, but never stopped, the flow of Cameron's pen. Reading and writing were his main activities in the home he shared with Mr. and Mrs. Fred Crew, his closest friends, who provided to the end the domestic background he needed. Interest and detailed knowledge of visual and musical arts, especially of the Italian Renaissance, were coupled with an astute observer's interest in people, in Association football, in the early history of medicine and pathology. Cameron mistrusted the go-getter, and his honesty was the reason for his caution of new applied knowledge but his complete integrity was at home with basic problems. With his own hand he kept in touch with the large number of old pupils, now leading teams of pathologists throughout the world.

His last public appointment came at a time when his health was far from good and it cannot have been easy for him to accept. It must have been clear to him, however, that pathologists from all disciplines were unanimous in their wish to appoint him first President of the College of Pathologists and he willingly accepted. He attended many meetings even though in the premises recently vacated he had to climb a short flight of stairs to reach the Council room. There is no doubt that his presence and wise counsel influenced the College in its early days. He was able to conduct all general meetings until May this year when he was unfortunately too ill to attend the second Roy Cameron lecture given by his friend Lord Florey.

Pathologists all over the world will mourn him and we in Britain are proud to claim him as the first President of the College of Pathologists.

JOAN STOKES
R. A. B. DRURY

J. W. HOWIE, President of the College of Pathologists, writes of Roy Cameron as Foundation President of the College:

Roy Cameron was the ideal man for Foundation President of our College, and he was very proud of holding this office. He was not personally involved in the debates about whether there should be a College but those who had privately sought advice from him as a respected senior knew that he thought there was a need and a place for

such a College as we now have. His nomination as President, first of the Provisional Council and later of the College, was carried unanimously and by acclaim at the two general meetings of subscribers which led to the formation of the College. This was not surprising, for Roy Cameron was a man of great scientific distinction and of correspondingly great modesty. He was a warm-hearted Australian not greatly interested in the goings-on of London society; but he captured a secure place at the very centre of the Establishment. He had a sincere interest in all affairs of the mind and spirit, and he had made a thorough study of some aspects of church history but he never pushed or paraded religion. When he was at the height of his powers his spoken and written communications were models in their content, style, and construction but as an editor he was as considerate of authors' feelings as he was conscious of readers' needs. He always drew a clear and necessary distinction between a good article and one that was merely well written, a point whose importance editors are often tempted to miss. He always held that serious matters demanded proper consideration; but his judgments, though often gravely delivered and weighty, were never ponderous or wrapped up either in tedious obscurities or clever ambiguity.

Although, even when he accepted office, his health was far from good, he undertook his duties as President very seriously and gave them a great deal of thought and study. When failing strength prevented his doing all that he wished, he was punctilious in seeing to it that someone else both accepted and understood what was delegated.

In his dealings with those who were closest to him he made it very clear that the work he did for the College brought him a real sense of accomplishment and of fellowship with office bearers and members.

He knew that he was the man for the job; and he made no secret of his conviction. 'I couldn't do it,' he said, 'unless I thought I could.' His ability to identify the essentials and concentrate on them was truly impressive. Once, during his days on the Agricultural Research Council, he set aside an evening to discuss with me what looked like being a tedious and troublesome problem. But it was analysed and dealt with inside an hour. We then spent the rest of the time more profitably discussing different kinds of liver injury. Even this did not need all of our time so he took to straightforward discussion of various persons known to us both. His analysis of character, although never frankly uncharitable, was certainly free from illusions of every kind. He rejoiced both in directness and in subtle understatement. 'Yes,' he said a little doubtfully about one acquaintance, 'I'm told that he tends to grow upon you.'

To us of this College it was a great thing that he gave us so good a start and so fine a lead, equally based on insight and on ideals. It was a great happiness too, for us, that he was able so long to stand against ill-health and to defy every pessimistic omen. It is also a matter of sadness that so near the end of his term of office he was taken from us before we could publicly thank him for the great services he did for this college.