

BMJ JUNE 5, 1897

JAMES GREIG SMITH, M.A., M.B., C.M.ABERD., F.R.S.E., Surgeon to the Bristol Royal Infirmary; Professor of Surgery, University College, Bristol.

WE deeply regret to have to record the death of Mr. James Greig Smith, of Bristol, after a few days' illness. The loss that the profession, of which he was so great an ornament, must suffer by his untimely death is not confined to the district in which his services were most in requisition; for though the city in which he resided and practised for twenty years must feel the loss most acutely, the profession of medicine all over the world, whether English-speaking or not, must mourn the death of this brilliant exponent of the science and art of surgery. To a large circle of friends, which his kindly nature had drawn around him, his death has come as a blow that will not be readily recovered from, for with all his faults-and the least of us is not without them-James Greig Smith was loved and admired as an honourable and upright man, and a true and trusty friend.

Born in 1854 at a small village a few miles from Aberdeen, James Greig Smith was sent at an early age to the Grammar School of that city, from which he proceeded in due course to the University, taking his Arts degree in 1873 with the highest honours. Having selected the profession of medicine, he applied himself to that course of study, and took the Bachelorship of Medicine and Mastership of Surgery in 1876. All through his university career his progress was marked by the highest distinctions that could be obtained, while the powers of application he displayed, the clearness and method of his reasoning, and the brilliancy of his intellectual powers gave early promise that he would leave a mark on the profession he had elected to follow, its culture, and its literature. His teachers did not fail to observe that among their students was a young man destined to rise to distinction, and the late Professor Pirrie spoke of him as a man after his own heart.

In the year 1876 he applied for and was elected to the post of Assistant or Junior House-Surgeon at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, and thus began his connection with the institution that lasted till his death. His intention at first was subsequently to practise as a physician, and this may have induced him to undertake the course of private lectures on physiology that he gave to the students in his rooms at the infirmary. Fate had, however, ordained that he should practise that other branch of medicine, for which, it must be admitted, his abilities better qualified him. By the death of one surgeon and the retirement of another, two vacancies occurred on the surgical staff, and to these posts Mr. F. R. Cross and Mr. Greig Smith were elected in 1879, 80 that by a stroke of fortune he was placed at once on the staff as a full Surgeon. Starting private practice, at first but only for a short time, as 1852 a general practitioner, Mr. Greig Smith rapidly rose to distinction as a careful and brilliant diagnostician and a skilful and bold operator; and though he was best known to the profession and public for these qualities, his knowledge of pathology was wide and extensive. Early in his career he published papers on the Pathology and Treatment of Chronic Osteoarthritis, and the Mode of Growth of Spicular Osteophytes in the Royal Infirmary Reports, while more followed on other subjects in different journals.

Mr. Greig Smith took no part in public life; but there was nothing he would leave undone for the sake of his profession. It was largely, but not solely, due to his initiative that one of the most successful provincial medical periodicals, the Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal, was started. In conjunction with Mr. L. M. Griffiths, he from 1883 to 1890 edited the journal, and carried it through the perilous years of its early existence, with that energy and perseverance that characterised him when he

took any matter in hand. The early numbers of the journal afford abundant evidence of the labour he expended on the literary venture he had undertaken to make a success; and though in later years the work of publication has been undertaken by others, he ever kept up his interest in it. Another matter with which he was more or less closely associated was the formation of the library of the Medico-Chirurgical Society in 1891; and on its fusion with that of the medical school he was elected the first chairman of the Library Committee. A regular attendant at the meetings, he gave the benefit of his wide and comprehensive knowledge of books and medical literature, in the selection and purchase of publications of all sorts that in his opinion would be of value to the students of the medical school and to his fellow-practitioners. In 1893 he was elected President of the Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Society, and delivered an address on Modern Medical Journalism which encountered a good deal of criticism at the time.

In 1888 he began to lecture on surgery in conjunction with Mr. N. C. Dobson at the medical school, and on the retirement of his colleague in 1893 he undertook the whole course. As in his writings, so in his lectures, his style was clear, forcible, and lucid, and the perfect mastery that he had of his subject rendered his lectures of great value to the students.

As an author Greig Smith is so well known that little need be said about literary productions. His best known work, *Abdominal Surgery*, has gone through five editions since its first publication in 1888, and the continued demand for it in this country and America necessitated a sixth edition, which is at present in the printer's hands. It has been translated into French, German, and Italian. There is no doubt that this work, on which he spent an infinite amount of care, added largely to his reputation, and the favour with which it was received was very gratifying to him. The book is a reflection of the man himself. The clear and forcible methods of expression, the genuineness and conspicuous honesty of the opinions held by him are thoroughly characteristic of Greig Smith, as his fellow-practitioners of Bristol and the neighbourhood knew him. Scattered through medical literature can be found numerous articles from his pen, all of them on subjects connected with pathology and surgery; and though of late years these publications have been more particularly on matters bearing on the special branch of surgery with which his name must ever be associated, they show that he was not a mere specialist on abdominal surgery, but a capable and experienced all-round surgeon.

When the British Medical Association visited Bristol in 1894, Greig Smith delivered the Address in Surgery, taking for his subject the Art of the Surgeon, and we have no hesitation in saying that as an oration it has seldom been equalled, and possibly never surpassed, for depth of thought, originality of ideas, and finish of expression. A member of several of the medical societies, Greig Smith was some years ago made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and was for some and was for some time an examiner in surgery at his old University.

But Greig Smith was not only a well-read and skilful surgeon. He was a man of wide intellectual culture, well read, not only in the history of his profession, but in the current literature of the day. He was, further, an able modeller in clay, a finished carpenter, and a by no means indifferent draughtsman. His consulting room was adorned with many beautiful medallions in clay, worked with his own hands. The museum of University College, Bristol, contains many well executed models and preparations mounted by a process he had perfected, and the writer of this notice can call to mind many stories he has heard from Greig Smith of successful sailing races in a boat constructed while yet a student at Aberdeen. He was a keen sportsman and a good shot, and frequently entertained small shooting parties of his friends at his

country house near Bristol. Of late years he had been an enthusiastic golfer, and while a resident at the infirmary was known as a forcible, if a not very scientific, boxer. Though possessed of great muscular strength and a robust frame, an attack of acute rheumatism some years ago, and of pneumonia in 1894, must have left a scar on what was once a strong constitution, so that a second attack of the latter disease found him a too ready victim.

On Monday, May 24th, he was in consultation in Wiltshire, and dined at a friend's house in Clifton in the evening. He then complained of feeling unwell, but ascribed it to rheumatism, from which he constantly suffered. The next morning symptoms of pneumonia showed themselves, but no great anxiety was felt for his condition till Thursday, when he began to fail, and in spite of the unremitting care of his friends Drs. Shaw and Swain, he passed away on Friday morning at 8.15.

The funeral took place on Tuesday, June 1st, at Redland Green, and his body was followed to the grave by a large number of his professional brethren and friends who wished to show their respect to his memory. There were also present representatives of the institutions with which he was associated, many of the nurses from the Royal Infirmary and Nursing Home, and a large number of students from the medical school.

Mr. Greig Smith married about fifteen years ago, and leaves a widow and daughter to mourn his loss.