

OBITUARY

AIR VICE-MARSHALL SIR DAVID MUNRO

K.C.B., C.I.E., LL.D., M.B., F.R.C.S.Ed.

We regret to announce the death of Sir David Munro on November 8, 1952, in his seventy-fifth year.

David Munro came officially into industrial medicine at the age of 52 when he succeeded D. R. Wilson in 1930 as Secretary of the Medical Research Council's Industrial Health Research Board. He admitted in his autobiography, "It Passed too Quickly", that his knowledge of industrial health was very limited, but his experience as Director of the Royal Air Force Medical Service, his personal charm, and administrative ability were much needed qualities in a man who was to be the link between a scattered group of research workers and a board of doctors, scientists, employers, and trade unionists with such diverse interests in the health of workers.

After graduating at Edinburgh University in 1901 he joined the Indian Medical Service. In the 1914-18 war he served in France, Mesopotamia, and Palestine and was appointed C.I.E. for distinguished service at Basra. After the war he transferred to the Royal Air Force and in 1921 became Director of Medical Services until he retired in 1930. It was in this post that he probably made his greatest contribution to medicine. He built up a medical branch which has served the Royal Air Force with distinction. Not least of his achievements, of which he later spoke with justifiable pride, was his ability to pick good men, the creation of a first class nursing service, and of a medical team which was able to deal with the special problems of flying. He had indeed applied sound principles of industrial medical practice to a fighting service.

He was Secretary to the Industrial Health Research Board at a time of economic depression when much of its best work was done silently and unnoticed. But these investigations have since received fuller recognition and it must have given him much pleasure when in the last months of his life several of the old I.H.R.B. pink reports were re-published after being out of print for many years. Later, when Britain began to prepare for war, Munro was more concerned with the application of the results of research than with the initiation of new research. He took to heart that section of the Board's Terms of Reference by which they were empowered:—

"To take steps to secure the co-operation of industries in making widely known such results of research work as are capable of useful application to practical needs."

The results of the first 20 years work of the Board



were well reviewed in its eighteenth Annual Report; special attention was drawn to such of the results which had already found a place in industrial practice or were ripe for practical application. Early in 1940 the Board published "Industrial Health in War", which was a summary in simple terms of the research findings capable of

immediate application and furtherance of the national effort. This policy inspired by a practical man was a wise one to follow in the early days of war. In 1940 Munro took on additional responsibilities as Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Supply and helped to organize and integrate an industrial medical service for the Royal Ordnance Factories. His scorn for paper work and a strong preference for making personal contacts won him many friends and admirers among the temporary civil servants. By 1943 he had retired from both these posts, but remained a member of the I.H.R.B. and a medical adviser to the Ministry.

For seven years he was a member of the General Advisory Board of this journal. As one of the first honorary members of the Association of Industrial Medical Officers he did much by his personality, warmth and culture to join together in friendship a small group of men and women pioneering in industrial medical practice. At one of the earliest meetings of this Association he reminded us that problems of industrial health were as old as antiquity by quoting from Ecclesiasticus:

"The smith also sitting by the anvil and considering the iron work—the vapour of the fire wasteth his flesh, and he fighteth with the heat of the furnace".

Munro was willing to take on any burden of administration and it never seemed to worry him, but he always found time to live a full and happy life. Of the several honours he received none gave him greater pleasure than his election as Rector of St. Andrews University in 1938. To return to his old university which he had entered more than 40 years previously was the hey-day of his life.

RICHARD SCHILLING.



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Br J Ind Med 1953 10: 59
doi: 10.1136/oem.10.1.59

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