THE DEATH OF SIR ALEXANDER OGSTON

Sir Alexander Ogston, KCVO, MD, CM, LLD, Extra Surgeon to the King in Scotland and Emeritus Professor of Surgery in the University of Aberdeen, died at his home on February 1st last, at the age of eighty-four years.

His death, which is much regretted, removes a notable figure from the ranks of the profession, one who did much for the science of medicine and for the advance of his own particular branch. Inasmuch as for nearly twenty years Sir Alexander had been retired from the active duties of the Chair of Surgery at Aberdeen he has been little more than a name to the present generation of medical students, but those who studied their bacteriology in the early nineties of the last century, then a subject just in its infancy, will remember Ogston as the discoverer of staphylococcus aureus (1882) as a cause of abscess-formation. and will associate his name with other pioneers of the time - Pasteur, Lister, Billroth (to whom we owe the name streptococcus, or "chain coccus"), Fehleisen (who connected the streptococcus pyogenes with erysipelas), (1887), Rosenbach, and Weichselbaum.

Alexander Ogston was born in April 1844, the eldest son of Francis Ogston, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Aberdeen. He took his MB, CM at Aberdeen, with honours, in 1865, and one year later received his doctorate. He studied abroad, at Prague, Vienna, Berlin, and Paris.

Starting in Aberdeen as a general practitioner he soon developed a special reputation for his skill in surgery, until his work eventually became purely consulting. On the retirement of Professor William Pirrie in 1882 Ogston became Regius Professor of Surgery at Aberdeen, a post which he held with great distinction for twenty-seven years.

Educated before the days of antisepsis, Ogston had the scientific and progressive turn of mind which led him to accept the lead of the new study of bacteriology, so that he was an early convert to the Listerian doctrine. His own studies on the question of suppuration led to his discovery of one of its microbic causes and it is to him that we owe the specific name, staphylococcus aureus, because of its resemblance, as it seemed to him, to a bunch of grapes.

Early in his career he devoted himself to bone-surgery, and devised the operation for genu valgum (commonly called "knock-knees"), known as Ogston's operation. But, his greater interest seemed to lie in the subject of military surgery, and he gained much experience in this branch in the Egyptian war of 1884 and 1885, in South Africa in 1899, and in the Great War in 1914 and successive years.

During his life-time Ogston received many and varied honours. He was President of the British Medical Association at the Carlisle meeting in 1896. He was Surgeon-in-Ordinary in succession to Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, and King George V. He was an LLD of the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen. He was a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft Chirurgie, and a corresponding member of La Societe Royale des Sciences Medicales et Naturelles de Bruxelles. In 1912 he was made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

Sir Alexander Ogston was noted for his painstaking care in the examination of his patients, his manual dexterity, and his attention to detail. As a teacher he was thorough, clear, and graphic, and his course on systematic surgery was far in advance of the current textbooks of the day. A great man has passed.