BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

John Sebastian Bach Stopford, Baron Stopford of Fallowfield, 1888-1961

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Sir John Sebastian Bach Stopford, First Baron Stopford of Fallowfield, of Hindley Green in the County of Lancashire, of the Life Peerage, was born at Hindley Green near Wigan on 25 June 1888 and died at his home in Arnside, Westmorland, on Monday, 6 March 1961. His father was Thomas Rinck Stopford, a colliery engineer, his mother Mary Tyrer Johnson of Bolton. He attended both Liverpool College and the Manchester Grammar School from whence in 1906 he entered the Medical School of Manchester University with which he was to be intimately connected and the future of which he was to do so much to mould.

The Medical School was in one of its most exciting and fruitful periods. The clinical staff were strong but were matched by the pre-clinicals. William Stirling taught physiology, whilst during Stopford's period as a student Grafton Elliot Smith was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy, too late, perhaps, to influence Stopford at the undergraduate level but to be a most potent influence in his post-graduate studies. Stopford's filial tribute 'The Manchester Period' tells much of the School and of the man.*

Frederic Wood Jones was Senior Demonstrator in Anatomy but much of the teaching fell into the able hands of Dr T. Wingate Todd. Geoffrey Jefferson, Harry (now Sir Harry) Platt and John Morley had entered the school a year or two before but Stopford had among his earliest students, O. M. Duthie, F. R. Ferguson, P. B. Mumford and R. L. Newell—all of whom were to achieve distinction in the sphere of clinical medicine in his own school and hospital.

Stopford graduated M.B., Ch.B. with honours in 1911 winning the Dumville Surgical Prize and the Bradley Memorial Surgical Scholarship at the Manchester Royal Infirmary. A resident post at Rochdale Infirmary followed and in 1912 he joined the Department of Anatomy as Junior Demonstrator under the late Sir Grafton Elliot Smith whom he was to succeed seven years later as Professor of Anatomy. In 1913 he was awarded the Tom Jones Memorial Scholarship in Surgery and in that year the first of his scientific papers appeared. In 1915 he was awarded the degree of M.D. receiving the Gold Medal for his thesis.

In 1916 Stopford married Miss Lily Allan and there is one son of the marriage. Lady Stopford is also a graduate of the Manchester Medical School and developed very considerable interests in ophthalmology until the

increasing pressure of public duties compelled her to withdraw from practice. The marriage gave Stopford a firm background of domestic care on which he drew lavishly in the serious illnesses of his later years. It was an ideal partnership though it would be difficult to find two people with so many, at least superficial, differences. He infinitely approachable and almost completely extrovert; she quiet, deeply reserved; he finding his life in a few interests, predominantly the University, then hospitals, medical education, gardening, association football, and more than satisfied with a few days in North Wales or on the Lancashire coast, she with more widely ranging interests and particularly foreign travel, which opportunity, alas, only rarely permitted her to indulge. But she has, fundamentally, a serenity which he lacked. Opposition of any kind, particularly in his later years, took much out of him and his capacity to carry on vigorously to the end owed more to her care than most people ever suspected.

Stopford’s first scientific papers were short communications on human topographical anatomy, one of which concerned the shape of the normal stomach. This preliminary study led him later to collaborate with E. D. M’Crea and B. A. M’Swiney (of the Department of Physiology, Manchester University) on a radiological investigation of the normal movements of the stomach in man, and experimental studies on the effect on the stomach of section and stimulation of the vagus nerve. But Stopford’s interests became rapidly concentrated on problems of applied neurology, and it was here that he made distinguished scientific contributions. His appointment early in the First World War as neurologist to the Second Western General Hospital and the Grangethorpe Hospital stimulated him to pursue his purely anatomical studies into the clinical field, and led to the publication of a series of papers on cutaneous and deep sensibility arising from his observations of peripheral nerve injuries. But his first important contribution was a monograph on the arteries of the pons and medulla of the brain, wherein he demonstrated the degree of their variability and the relation of their distribution to the clinical syndrome resulting from vascular lesions affecting them. It was for this extensive and detailed research that Stopford was awarded the M.D. of his University, with a gold medal, and it is fair to say that the monograph still remains a classic work of reference.

Stopford’s work on the peripheral nerves was partly concerned with the treatment of large defects due to wounds, and with the results of secondary suture of severed nerves, but he also published several observations on the effect of local pressure on nerves—particularly the pressure exerted by cervical ribs. But no doubt he will be best remembered for his studies on the recovery of sensation in the course of the nerve regeneration. To some extent Stopford agreed with the observations of Henry Head and W. H. R. Rivers that cutaneous sensibility could be divided into two categories—protopathic and epicritic (or what he called ‘the protective and discriminative divisions of sensation’), but he extended this conception to include also deep sensibility. He also developed the view that the two categories (which he thought could
be recognized as the successive stages in the recovery of sensation during the regeneration of a cut nerve) were not due to differential rates of growth of peripheral nerve fibres as Head had postulated, but could be more reasonably explained on the basis of successive adjustments in the central nervous system. His demonstration, partly based on dissections and partly on the study of clinical material, that at least some of the so-called cutaneous nerves commonly send fibres to neighbouring joints upset the traditional concept that the superficial and deep innervation of a particular region of the body is fundamentally distinct. Much of this systematic study of cutaneous and deep sensation was incorporated in a small book published in 1930, entitled *Sensation and sensory pathway*.

In collaboration with the Professor of Surgery at Manchester, E. D. Telford, Stopford later made clinico-anatomical studies of the autonomic nervous system, with particular reference to the surgical treatment of vaso-spastic conditions, and he also contributed some interesting reflections on the possible relationship between certain types of raised intracranial pressure and the anatomical disposition of some of the cerebral veins.

Stopford did not publish any scientific papers after 1936, and it is only to be expected, therefore, that some of the conceptions which he developed have now been superseded as the result of more detailed studies since then. But there remains no doubt that, during his scientific career, his work was widely recognized to be of considerable importance, and many anatomists felt that his translation to a life of administrative work (though exceedingly productive in its results) was a severe loss to the subject which he so ably represented in his time.

Scientifically his career must be regarded as frustrated. He showed, far too early, that administrative skill which drew him remorselessly into the wider world of university affairs, first in Manchester, then in the nation as a whole and finally—though the coming of the war truncated this—in the Commonwealth. He was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy in 1919. Within four years he added to his academic duties those of Dean of the Medical School. This post he relinquished in 1927 but the following year became Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the statutory period of two years. In the period of 1931-1933 he was again Dean of the Medical School.

For many years Stopford was the University's representative on the General Medical Council, in which office he succeeded Professor R. B. Wild, and was Chairman elect of that body when his first illness came, thus depriving him of succession to the Chairmanship.

In 1934, the then Vice-Chancellor, Sir Walter H. Moberly, accepted appointment as Chairman of the University Grants Committee. Stopford was appointed a member of the Committee to recommend his successor, but was quickly advised that he should absent himself from the meetings and for the first time in its history the University had the confidence to elect one of its own graduates to be its executive head. Some considerable pressure was needed to induce him to desert his scientific work and his teaching, but he
yielded, and took delight in repeating the story of how, walking home, on the day of the election, he met a member of the clinical staff coming out of the teaching hospital. ‘Is what I hear true Jock?’ ‘I suppose so.’ ‘Well, if that’s what you want I suppose it’s all right. But I’d rather run a zoo myself.’ Fellows of the Royal Society might well care to hazard the authorship of that remark!

No one hearing Stopford speak could doubt his power as an advocate, and the testimony of all his students was immediately confirmed by the experience. There was a simplicity, a directness and a consistency about it all which fitted in with all one knew of the man. He had a hatred of the polysyllabic and the Anglo-Saxon dominated the Latin in all he said. The University of Manchester has always, and quite rightly, been regarded as a research university, and has, indeed, not escaped criticism in this connexion. But Stopford was always very much a ‘students’ man, and the teaching function of a university was never far absent from his mind—or his policies.

If Stopford’s scientific life had been frustrated by the recognition of his administrative skill, there is little doubt that his life as Vice-Chancellor was gravely circumscribed by the war—and the years of restriction and privation which followed. To his successor, basking in plans of extension and the receipt of state grants of a magnitude that Stopford himself could never contemplate, that much seems obvious. Yet it is doubtful whether the notion ever crossed his mind. Certainly the years were years of great academic development, particularly in the quality of the senior academic appointments which he influenced. He was an unerring judge of men, and the skill he had shown in appointment committees from 1919 onwards reached new levels during his Vice-Chancellorship. The pretentious and the second rate never escaped him, yet there was an absence of formality at any committee of which he was chairman which put men at their ease immediately. Perhaps fatally so—for he had no little forensic skill in examining a candidate who dropped his guard. It was an experience not to be forgotten to see him take the chair at a Women’s Scholarship Awarding Committee. The girls, often immature, even for their age, answering his questions demurely and revealing more of the tastes of their teachers than of themselves; never listening to music less classical than Bach or Beethoven and reading Tolstoy or Dostoievsky in sterner mood with perhaps a Shakespearean comedy in more frivolous moments. Stopford never failed to pierce their armour... and his ‘But what music do you really listen to on the wireless for pleasure’ or ‘I simply do not believe that you read Tolstoy in bed at nights’ almost invariably evoked a flood of confidences which told him and his committee all that they wanted to know of the candidate.

Had his life fallen out differently there can be little doubt that he would have had great success as a clinician. He had a power of diagnosis and indeed of prognosis which was invaluable at committee and which was invariably respected by clinical colleagues. Many a doubtful appointment was crushed at birth by his faculty of observation. Even restricting oneself to
the years in which he was Vice-Chancellor, Stopford played a leading part in bringing to his University, Manson in Biblical criticism, Hartree, Blackett and Rosenfeld in physics, Todd, Hirst, Jones, Evans, Gee and Birch in chemistry, Wood Jones in anatomy, Willis Jackson and F. C. Williams in electro-technics, Rowley in Semitic languages, Goldstein, Newman and Lighthill in mathematics. Of his medical colleagues he took great pride in the creation of personal chairs for Sir Geoffrey Jefferson and Sir Harry Platt, Bt. and in the appointment, in 1945 of Sir Robert Platt, Bt. to the University’s first full-time chair of medicine.

He had served on the Inter-Departmental Committee on Medical Schools which was appointed in March 1942, and had been Vice-Chairman of the Committee under the chairmanship of Sir William Goodenough. To the report produced by the Committee he must have made liberal contributions for those who knew his views on medical education found many of them there reproduced. Hence he took particular interest and pride in the creation of full-time clinical teaching appointments in general and regarded the creation of the full-time clinical chairs of medicine and surgery at his *nunc dimittis*. They were in fact far from that, much vigour and activity lay before him but, to the end here mained acutely zealous of the principle of full-time teaching and was watchful of and uncompromising towards any attempt to reintroduce the part-time teacher. As an administrator he was sometimes criticized for inability to delegate, not infrequently, one suspects, by those whom he had not preferred when distributing administrative chores. It is difficult to reconcile the criticism with the facts. Despite a major illness in 1943 which had given great concern to his friends, and with considerable heart searching, the University, under the strongest ministerial pressure, agreed that Stopford should become the first Chairman of the Manchester Regional Hospital Board. Leaving much non-medical University work to Professor (now Sir William) Pugh, as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and leaving to that mild but determined man Henry Stanley Raper the task of working out the implications of the new regime as affecting the University and the Teaching Hospital (though in both cases retaining a mastery of affairs, remarkable for its detail) Stopford, with Dr F. N. Marshall as his henchman, set about the task of re-forming the hospital system within his region. The energy and concentration he put into the task was little short of phenomenal. The friends, retired as well as active, with whom he had worked in clinical medicine over the years found themselves impressed (‘shanghaied’, one of them describes it) into various kinds of voluntary and advisory jobs. The medical and ancillary services responded to a leadership which had something impassioned about it, and the lay members of the Board and of Management Committees, some of whom were still resentful at the change, nevertheless yielded to the patent sincerity and friendliness of their Chairman. It was a remarkable Indian Summer for in 1948 Stopford was already a man of sixty who was at war with his own medical advisers who were unanimous in advising less work and he being ruthless in accepting more. In 1953 Stopford’s
date of retirement as Vice-Chancellor approached but the University sought to persuade him to accept a further three years' appointment, laying down the one condition that he and his wife should, before entering on the final spell, take a holiday. They spent this holiday by travelling to New Zealand and Australia by way of the Panama Canal, returning by Ceylon and India. It was a mistake. Events showed that the wiser course would have been to let him have the holiday when the main task was over. The strain of taking up the reins again was almost crushing, but despite much sickness (often unsuspected by those working with him) he remained completely absorbed in his tasks, choosing the occasion however to retire from the Chairmanship of the Regional Board.

He received many honours. In 1920 he was appointed M.B.E., presumably in recognition of his work amongst the wounded of the 1914-1918 war; K.B.E. in 1955. He was knighted in 1941. In 1958 his name appeared amongst the first list of life peers. He held honorary degrees, in Science of the Universities of Cambridge, Dublin and Leeds, in Law of the Universities of Durham, Liverpool and Manchester. He was also awarded the Honorary Fellowships of the Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal College of Surgeons.

His retirement from the University evoked a series of demonstrations unusual even for one whose life had been so uniquely spent in the service of one institution as had been Stopford's. Chief among the distinctions falling to him and which, thereafter was to hold a very special place in his regard, was his appointment as an Honorary Freeman of the City of Manchester, and his election as an Honorary Associate of the Manchester College of Science and Technology in the translation of which from a local to a national institution he had played, along with the Earl of Woolton, a decisive role.

After his retirement, though his friends were increasingly concerned about the strain to which he was subjecting himself, he kept up many interests and fulfilled many duties. His work for the Nuffield Foundation continued unabated. He had been appointed Vice-Chairman from the start in 1943 until his death and his contribution to its development has been described as 'immense', he had considerable influence in the formation of its policy and his judgement helped his fellow trustees to a discriminating choice of the projects to be advanced. With two of the activities of the Foundation he was particularly identified. The first was the Foundation's Rheumatism Committee set up in 1948 to advise the Trustees on the use to be made of the funds at their disposal for research into rheumatism, of which Stopford was chairman from the beginning. The other enterprise, from which he extracted much joy, was his chairmanship of the selection committee for Nuffield Medical Fellowships, which was one of the first of the Foundation's fellowship schemes and which, under his guidance, became something of a prototype. Another activity which continued after retirement was his association with the Ministry of Health. For many years his advice had been sought by Chief Medical Officers and others on health service problems. After his retirement he
accepted the chairmanship of the National Selection Committee of the scheme for the recruitment of hospital administrators on a national basis and he continued in this work until April 1960. Testimony is unanimous that much of the success of the scheme derives from his skill in launching it and in guiding the selection of candidates.

Nor did retirement mean severance from his University. In the later years of his Vice-Chancellorship he had launched with the Earl of Woolton an appeal for the provision of Halls of Residence in the University. Together they raised £800000. He remained the chairman of the committee responsible for the first two projects, until Woolton Hall and Needham Hall were built and he remained, until the end, a member of the University Court. Like so many others, the days of retirement were filled with duties, and in addition to those already outlined he represented the University on the Westmorland Education Committee and until just before his death was a most active member of the Lancaster and Kendal Hospital Management Committee.

Stopford’s was a life lived at full intensity with a working load which may have bent but never broke him. His zest, the intensity of his interests remained to the end. In its simplicity and directness his life had a singularity which few attain and the joy in simple things, his love of football, the hours he spent at the University Athletic Ground, his interest in his garden were an abiding refreshment to him.

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