



*A. S. Stewart
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ALEXANDER DRON STEWART

(1883 - 1969)

Foundation Fellow

BIRTH

LT-COL ALEXANDER DRON STEWART CIE, MBChB (Hon.), LL.D (Hon), FRCP(Edin), FRCS (Edin), DTM and H., DPH, FRS (E), IMS (Retd), son of the Late William Stewart of Blairgowrie (Scotland), a leading teacher of Public Health and Founder Director of the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, the only all round Public Health Institute in South-East Asia, was born at Blairgowrie on the 22nd June, 1883 and passed away on August 15, 1969 in an Edinburgh Nursing Home at the age of 86.

He had a long and distinguished academic and scientific career both in India and British Isles (Scotland), extending over 42 years during which he devoted his boundless energy and knowledge to the advancement of public health teaching and practice in India, management of hospitals at Calcutta and in his own country and above all his distinguished service in the First World War and humanitarian service during the Second World War.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Col Stewart had his early school career in his native place and graduated as MBChB with First Class Honours from the Edinburgh University in 1906 and passed into the Indian Medical Service the same year. During the preliminary years of his Military Medical Service he took study leave and obtained his FRCS (Edin) and DTM and H in 1913 and caught up in the First World War (1914-1918) while posted as the Health Officer of Simla. In 1920 he obtained the DPH and thereafter his career in India was bound up with preventive medicine and public health teaching and practice.

MARRIED LIFE

He married Isobel Marguerita, daughter of Mr Alexander Mann of Edinburgh in 1916 and had two sons. His wife predeceased him and out of his two sons only one who is a medical man is surviving.



SERVICE AND CAREER

He had distinguished service career in both military and civil assignments. He joined the IMS cadre in 1906 and arrived in India in February, 1907. He obtained his first postgraduate diploma in 1913 while on leave and was posted on return as MOH Simla when the First World War started to which he was recalled. During this war he served in Gallipoli, Salonika and Mesopotamia and was mentioned in the despatch. While on leave in 1920 he obtained DPH as an additional public health qualification and was again posted as MOH, Simla and later as the Health Officer of the Imperial City of New Delhi. Between 1922 and 1927 he successively served as Health Officer, Director of Public Health, Lecturer and Professor of Hygiene at the School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Calcutta. In March, 1929 he was given the additional duty as the Principal of the Medical College and Superintendent of the Medical College group of Hospitals, Calcutta.

At this stage a new development was brewing in the history of public health in India. After the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene had been running for several years as the brain child of Sir Leonard Rogers, it was realized that there was a need for a first class Institute devoted entirely to the teaching of Hygiene and Public Health in India. The problem of finance was overcome in Calcutta, as in London, by a munificent grant from the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation of USA for the building and equipment of the Institute, the Government of India agreeing to meet the cost of staff and maintenance. The entire gamut of planning and execution fell upon Col Stewart as its Director-designate.

He completed the work with great skill and credit by 1933 when it was officially opened by the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson, with Col Stewart as its first appointed Director. The position this Institute holds to day in the national and international fields of hygiene and public health owes much to Col Stewart's wise planning and energistic administration in the early years of its functioning. Since the beginning this Institute has been the centre of national and international training in public health and of many valuable and outstanding researches, such as, on cholera, plague, blackwater fever, malaria, nutrition, epidemic dropsy, sanitation, health and morbidity surveys, epidemiological investigations and new innovations in public health practice like establishment of primary rural and urban health centres as methods of comprehensive health service in India.

During the initial stage Col Stewart as a symbol of encouraging research, offered space for three outside organisations namely, the field Investigating Wing of Malaria Unit of the Government of Bengal, Tuberculosis Research under Late Dr AC Ukil and two wings of cholera research, one of Chemical Antigenic Structure under late Dr RW Linton and the other Cholera Carrier and Epidemiological Unit under late Dr RB Linton both financed by the then Indian Research Fund Association, New Delhi to house them



research and investigation centres at the Institute. He had also the foresight to divide the Institute's functions into eight sections namely, Public Health Administration, Epidemiology and Vital Statistics, Nutrition and Biochemistry, Sanitary Engineering, Maternal and Child Welfare including Public Health Nursing, Malariology and Venereal Diseases (later designated as the Section of Microbiology), Industrial Hygiene and Occupational Health and the Public Health Library. The advantage was obvious. Not only each section could offer individual specialisation but also gained much in providing co-ordinated teaching facilities in the wider context of public health. Col Stewart was a dynamic personality, an efficient and lovable teacher and appreciative guide. He himself acted as the co-ordinator of the two Cholera Research Wings at the Institute and took special interest to follow up the day to day work.

In 1935, the Medical College of Calcutta had celebrated its centenary with great eclat under the able stewardship of Col Stewart as its Secretary General. The same year (Oct., 1935) he was appointed as the Superintendent of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and through the 10 difficult years that followed during the 2nd World War he proved to be a tower of strength. On his retirement on June 3, 1946 tribute was paid to "the high quality of his work as an administrator and to the selfless devotion which had marked the carrying out of duties, often under very trying and difficult situation" (*Manager's Minutes*, 3 May, 1948).

Col Stewart had a very high standing among his colleagues and was interested not only in the efficient running of the hospital but also took personal interest in the welfare of the patients. In the words of Mrs Gibson, Archivist of the University of Edinburgh, Col Stewart, who was in charge of the Infirmary during the Second World War, had to keep the hospital running smoothly throughout, inspite of all difficulties that the war had brought, particularly staff shortage. In 1938 he was released from the Infirmary for a short duration to take part in the urgent survey of the Scottish hospitals in anticipation of war, the matter being of great national importance and of extreme urgency (*Manager's Minutes*, 24 January, 1938). In 1939 he supervised the evacuation of 600 patients from the Infirmary and air-raid precautions within the hospital. In 1944 he organised the reception of about 1200 severe cases of casualties from the D-Day landings. Then again in 1948 there was an outbreak of Asiatic smallpox in the Royal Infirmary. Col Stewart played a leading part in the control measures and because of his experience in Tropical Medicine he was a source of great support to the MOH during this outbreak.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

In recognition of his work in public health teaching and practice he was given CIE and Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1934. The Medical and Veterinary section of the Indian Science Congress elected him as President for the year 1933 and to the Foundation



Fellowship of the Indian National Institute of Sciences (now called Indian National Science Academy) in 1935. He was elected as a member of the Syndicate of the Calcutta University and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. His work in his own Alma Mater impressed the University of Edinburgh which awarded him the Honorary Degree of LL.D. and was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and also the Royal Society FRS (E).

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In scientific thoughts Col Stewart was far advanced in his ideas than that of his time. He delivered his memorable Presidential Address in the Indian Science Congress in 1933 at Patna on "Some Reflections on Medical Science and Public Health". A few of his remarks is worth quoting here : "The thinking man at some periods of his life puts to himself or thrust on him questionings of the purpose of life, and on his own answer to himself depends his outlook on life, his career, the ordering of his actions, and his life and his relations to his fellow men and his bequest to posterity. There are many answers for wealth, power, happiness, peace, security, service, the avoidance of the disturbing and distressing situation, and the resultant of these on the intellectual and thinking persons of a nation that determines the character and its purpose."

"In common with many my own conviction is that in the quest and appreciation of truth and beauty in their largest sense and meaning lies the best answer to life's purpose, the one that gives the greatest satisfaction."

Most of his scientific contributions were on the improvement of laboratory techniques for the examination of samples of specimens of public health interest, epitomised in the publication of a standard book on "Public Health Laboratory Practice" in collaboration with the Late Col Crawford Boyd, the Indian students. The other aspect in which he specialised was health administration, particularly on that of planning and research.

AS A PERSON

As the Principal of the Medical College and Director of All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health and Professor of Public Health Administration he left an indelible mark on those who came under his care as staff or students or research workers for his sympathetic, amiable and easily approachable nature and ever-helpful outlook. He encouraged research work as well as the workers so much so that even after his retirement from the Indian scene he used to keep track of the progress of the work by direct correspondence with some of the individual workers (the writer himself being one of



them). According to him public health work means love for humanity as exemplified by true socialism, service and sacrifice.

Due to long years of gap all his scientific publications could not be traced and hence the list given is apparently incomplete.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges with thanks the help he received in preparing this biography from the Librarians of the British Council and the National Library, Calcutta, All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Calcutta, the Archivist, Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh and the office of the High Commissioner, London.

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