

TAIT'S WORK IN THE FIELD OF HYSTERECTOMY

The diseases of women held a special place in the interests of Lawson Tait and dominated his work in Birmingham. When he acquired the practice of Dr. Thomas Partridge in the Lozells Road towards the end of 1870, it might have been supposed that he would settle down in general practice and Harvey Flack records that it was in that year that he took the Edinburgh Fellowship. It soon became apparent, however, that the Lozells practice was but a step on the road which he meant to follow.

Early in 1871 Tait took rooms in Waterloo Street where he began to practice as a consulting surgeon and finally abandoned general practice. Here he set about the establishment of a hospital for the treatment of diseases of women, similar to those already established in other provincial centres. The pro's and con's of this ambition could furnish quite a story in itself, but briefly, it resolved itself into a conflict between Tait, helped by Arthur Chamberlain and supported by Mr. Gamgee and Professor Berry on the one side but bitterly opposed by *The Lancet* through an editorial on the other. When the advocates of the new women's hospital pointed out that what they sought to do in Birmingham had already been done elsewhere they met with the response that "The argument is not worth much for the same reason that, as Lord Macaulay once pointed out, the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira furnishes no excuse for that of Titus Oates." That, to us, seems to be an entire *non sequitur*, but, in any case, it availed nothing. Tait, with the powerful support of the Chamberlain family, won his point and the hospital was duly established at No. 8, The Crescent.

It was then, in fighting a rearguard action, that

Tait's opponents were able to engineer the proviso that candidates for the office of surgeon must be in possession of the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Although time was short, he hastened to London and by June 8th had got through all preliminaries and was admitted a Fellow, which enabled him to return in triumph to Birmingham and his appointment to the Birmingham and Midland Hospital for Women in July.

So within ten months of his arrival in Birmingham success crowned his efforts. He had gone into and abandoned general practice; had moved on to consultant practice; had seen the establishment of the Women's Hospital on which he had set his heart, and had cleared the last hurdle by gaining his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England which gave him the right to be appointed as one of the first surgeons of that Hospital.

The picture which we have of Tait is, so far, that of a man willing to stake all in a bid to achieve that which he thought possible of achievement and necessary for the well-being of his patients and, with a special emphasis on women patients.

There was, however, another facet to this man's character which was often overlooked or ignored by those who have written about him over the years, namely, his willingness to afford to others the credit which was their due for the part which they had played in enabling him to introduce new surgical techniques. Take, for instance, his attitude to Marion Sims; in his book "The Pathology and Treatment of Diseases of the Ovaries" published in 1873 and based upon his Hastings' Essay for 1873, his dedication was to "Dear Dr. Marion Sims" and carried the message: "I dedicate this volume to you as a token of the value I place upon your friendship, and as an acknowledgment that much of the new work described in it is the outcome of your ingenuity." and, again, in the chapter of that same volume dealing with "Recent extensions of abdominal and pelvic surgery" the following, which is quoted at some length:—