

THE LIFE AND WORK OF MOYNIHAN*

BY

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"Your calling should exact the utmost that man can give, full knowledge, exquisite judgment and skill in the highest . . . but such virtue is not reached or maintained except by a life's labour, a life's single-minded devotion. Its reward is not only the knowledge of mastery and the gratitude of the layman, which may or may not bring content. Its true reward is the dearly prized because unpurchasable acknowledgment of one's fellow craftsmen."

—KIPLING.

The War of 1914-18

The period of the war seems so recent that its events are within the memory of most of us, and I therefore propose to touch only on those contacts Moynihan had with it which notably concerned his influence on the world of surgery.

He gained his insight into front-line conditions by acting as consultant in France from December, 1914, to March, 1915, with his headquarters at Rouen. The chief result of this insight was to make him dissatisfied with the standard of operative treatment, and he lost no time in setting to work to improve this. It was fortunate that he found in Sir Alfred Keogh, the Director-General of the Army Medical Services, a kindred spirit, so that in the spring of 1915 he was made Chairman of the Medical Advisory Board, and in that capacity until the end of the war he was able to do much to improve the surgical organization. A most notable instance of this was his recognition of the outstanding personality and ability of Robert Jones, together with the fundamental importance of orthopaedic surgery to the fighting services and to the nation. Special hospitals were set aside both in France and in the United Kingdom for the treatment of injuries of the bones and joints under the supervision of Robert Jones. There was great opposition to this at the time by both Army officials and general surgeons, and it needed the powerful influence of a surgical leader like Moynihan, working through a sympathetic Director-General, to overcome it. Jones was ably supported in Scotland by Stiles of Edinburgh, and it is due to the work and influence of this triumvirate—Moynihan, Jones, and Stiles—that modern orthopaedic surgery began to take its rightful place in this country.

Another great part Moynihan played in the war was in securing the co-operation of our American colleagues. Both he and Jones had already gained numbers of friends and admirers in the States, and long before the formal alliance with America this helped to bring many medical men over to France and the United Kingdom to work in the Allied hospitals. But in 1917 he was called upon to play a more direct and important part in the enlistment of America on the side of the Allies. He was invited to go to America to speak about the justice of our cause and also about the surgery of the war. In this mission he was occupied a month. He gave many addresses to crowded audiences of two and three thousand doctors and their friends in Chicago, New York, Washington, and Philadelphia. He was received by President Wilson and he spoke at a special meeting of the Cabinet. His surgical addresses were concerned chiefly with general problems

of gunshot wounds and surgical technique, and especially with chest surgery, in the development of which he had himself played a prominent part. His patriotic speeches gave him full scope for that swaying of men's minds and emotions which is the joy of the born orator. Some of his more striking phrases may be quoted in illustration because they have so much significance in the world's catastrophe of to-day. In his Fellowship address before the American College of Surgeons he said:

"No one can doubt who reads history with an unbiased mind that Prussia has increased often, if not always, at the expense of other States, by acts of sudden and unprovoked aggression. War is the national industry of Prussia; it is a means of acquiring wealth. It is by her military successes that she has enlarged her borders, added to her own infertile lands, solidified her gains, and been able to prepare for a still further attack upon her next chosen victim. No State in history can compare with Prussia in its exploitation of the doctrine of plunder; the doctrine of taking because it has the power, and of keeping because it has the strength to do so. . . .

"But anyone who has given thought to the matter must agree that, whatever else this ghastly conflict is, it is in simple truth not a clash of merely material interests. This is a moral war. It is a holy war if ever there was one. It is deep down a war between conflicting and discordant and unworkable moral systems. It is a war, therefore, in which a real peace cannot come by compromise; for you cannot come to any terms but one with that which you feel to be a principle of evil, with that which you feel with your innermost soul to be the deadliest enemy of mankind, and the most menacing blight with which civilization has ever been threatened. What, then, are the issues at stake? The principle ground into the very fibre of the German peoples, accepted by them, gloried in by them, worshipped by them, inspiring them, is the principle of *tyranny*. What exactly is meant by that? It implies a complete surrender of individual rights and liberties and an unquestioning submission of them to a power exercised exclusively from without . . . tyranny, that is to say, is the power exercised by an irresponsible autocracy; it is the supremacy of the State carried to its ultimate expressions; and it is by implication an attribute of every individual in the State.

"Over against this what have we set up on our side as our standard? What is the principle by which we are sustained; whence do we derive our soul's refreshment? It is hard to find a precise word, but none fits so well as 'liberty.' And by liberty we mean here the inalienable and indestructible right of every human being to express himself, to be himself, to develop from within. . . . The laws which govern and control him are laws which he himself has helped to make and to which he and others like him willingly conform, not so much because the laws are good, but because they are laws which he and those who have gone before him have in freedom imposed upon themselves. This is democracy. To us, as surgeons practising a scientific profession, the conflict between these irreconcilable principles is of deep significance . . . tyranny is not a force to set ideas in motion. Under a system of tyranny intellectual salvation can only come from revolt. How else can we account for the eternal freshness of the Jewish mind and for the splendid achievements of that race which, tyrannized by every Power, has kept its own religion and lived its own intellectual life, not by submission but by resistance to those who held its men in bondage."

One who had heard Sir Berkeley speaking says: "Men whose opinions count for much in this country have told me that in these short weeks Sir Berkeley has done more to open the drowsy eyes of the public to what is required of us than anyone else so far. Sir Berkeley spoke in that golden voice of his for a full hour, and at the end they wanted more. He had simply held everyone tense with interest."

* The first Moynihan Lecture, delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons on April 11, 1940.

He felt every word he said, and of him it was true to say, "The heart must glow before the tongue can gild." (W. R. Algar.)

Yet one more instance of his power of effective impromptu speech. It was after he had been given a big dinner in Washington. He was asked all at once to propose the health of the President, and on the spur of the moment said, "I rise to propose the health of one who is prudent in counsel, wise in action, eloquent in speech; a man among kings, a king among men—the President of the United States of America."

The Years of Peace and Prosperity

The years that followed the war were happy and busy periods in his life. He reaped a rich and well-deserved harvest from what he had sown; he had proved himself a master of his art, a convincing and eloquent speaker, and above all a leader of men. Patients came from all over the world to consult him and to be treated by him, and he acquired a surgical practice which brought him fame and fortune and numberless grateful patients from every walk of life. This period, too, was one in which many honours were showered upon him, the most notable of which were the K.C.M.G. (1918), the Presidency of the Royal College of Surgeons (1925), and a Peerage in 1929, and all this time he continued to write articles for the English and American Press. His total number of papers was 217; there were besides fourteen books, fourteen articles which he wrote conjointly with other surgeons, and three books which he wrote conjointly with others. All of the papers were published in English and American journals with the exception of two in Spanish published in Buenos Aires, one in German, three in French, one in Hungarian, and one in Italian.

He continued to visit America, the most notable occasion being that on which, with Sir William Taylor and Mr. Albert Carless, he presented a copy of the great map of the English College of Surgeons to the American College of Surgeons. This was made on behalf of the consulting surgeons of the United Kingdom in the great war. In doing so he said:

"In the great war America and the Empire mingled their blood upon the same stricken field. The hope then grew strong in many hearts that a new understanding born of comradeship of battle, fiercely tested in the furnace of affliction and sealed in death, would redeem the ancient blunders, blot out the bitter memories of wrong, and lead at last to a supreme and permanent reconciliation; for we seemed then to realize that deep down in the hearts, enthroned in the conscience of the two peoples, there was the same full eager devotion to eternal principle, love of justice, joy in liberty, hatred of oppression; the same unselfish determination to strive for the redemption of mankind and to establish anew the freedom of the world. On the fields of Flanders and of France, as in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, humanity recovered its rights."

On the same occasion he delivered the first Murphy Oration, from which I can quote only a few sentences:

"The honour of the profession is the cumulative honour of all who in days gone by and in our own time have worked and honestly laboured in it. In every generation there are a chosen happy few who shed a special lustre on it by their character, their scientific attainments, or the great glory of their record of service to their fellow-men. In our generation Murphy was one who by his full devotion, his complete surrender to its ideals, and by his loyal, earnest, and unceasing work added distinction to our profession, which in return showered upon him the rewards with which no other can

compare—the approbation of his fellow workers and the friendship and trust of the best among his contemporaries in every country."

The Association of Surgeons

"A great man is one who affects the mind of his generation."—DISRAELI.

Directly the war was over Moynihan picked up the threads, which had been temporarily dropped, of the plan for founding an Association of Surgeons. The idea had probably germinated in his very first visit to America. It had been discussed in the early days of the *British Journal of Surgery*, and the first steps had been taken to unite the surgeons of London and the provincial cities in this common enterprise. Moynihan was able to persuade Sir Rickman Godlee, who was then the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, to call an inaugural meeting. This took the form of a dinner to twelve people, including Watson Cheyne, Pearce Gould, Makins, and other London surgeons, and Moynihan and myself from the provinces. After dinner Moynihan addressed the small company in the drawing-room, and although the elder men were politely sceptical it was decided to draw up the draft of a constitution, which Moynihan and I undertook to do. The matter was again taken up after the end of the war. The Association was founded and the first meeting held in London in 1920 under the presidency of Sir John Bland-Sutton.

The membership of the Association is sufficiently large to include practically all the active surgeons and a number of assistant surgeons of all the teaching hospitals in Great Britain and Ireland. The meetings have been held every year for the last nineteen years—in London every third year, and in a Scottish, Irish, or provincial city in the intermediate ones. These meetings have invariably been crowded and enthusiastic, and have brought men together in comradeship and for the advancement of surgery as nothing else could have done. The Association has also been able to endow the "Moynihan Travelling Scholarship" each year.

It was not until 1922 that the Association met at Leeds with Moynihan as its president. He presented a beautiful chain and badge of office, on each link of which appears the name of the president of the year. This is placed on the neck of the incoming president by his predecessor each year, with the words first indited by Moynihan himself: "I place upon your shoulders the badge of honour, the emblem of leadership, the reward of service, a tribute from your colleagues"—one of those happy phrases which were so characteristic of him.

His presidency of the Royal College of Surgeons, three years as Sir Berkeley (1926 to 1928) and three years as Lord Moynihan (1929 to 1931), was the natural and fitting culmination of his professional career. Only once before had the presidency been held by a provincial surgeon. This was by Mr. Joseph Hodgson of Birmingham, who held the chair for one year in 1864. He, however, had left Birmingham and settled in London before this. In another respect Moynihan by his long term of office created a new precedent. In former years the holder of the office for the longest period was Sir William MacCormac, who occupied it for five years.

The events in the College during Moynihan's presidency are of such recent date that they are within the knowledge of most of us. Two, however, are of outstanding importance: one of these was the decision to hold the Primary Fellowship Examination in Australasia, India, and Egypt; the other was the great stimulus given to

scientific research by the munificent gift of Sir Buckston Browne, which enabled the College to purchase, equip, and endow the Research Farm at Down in Kent.

Three other events should be recorded. One was the painting of the portrait of the Council of the College nearly fifty years after that famous picture which had been painted in 1884 and which is famous for containing the portraits of Lister, Savory, Paget, Spencer Wells, and Jonathan Hutchinson among other notables. Another was the dinner which Moynihan gave to his colleagues and their wives on the terrace of the Houses of Parliament after he had been raised to the Peerage. The third event was when, in 1927, he delivered the Hunterian Oration on the 199th anniversary of Hunter's birth. This was given before a distinguished audience, which included Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal. It was on the subject of Hunter's ideals and Lister's practice. This gave full scope to the orator to set forth his ideals as derived from these two great men.

His Role in Surgical Progress

It remains for me to attempt some appreciation of the part which Moynihan played in the development of the science and art of surgery.

He arrived at maturity at a moment in the history of surgery when all was ready for a great advance. Anaesthesia and sepsis had robbed surgery of its terrors and had made the deliberate investigation of every organ and tissue possible during life. Pioneers had not been lacking to explore that territory—the abdomen—which Moynihan was subsequently to develop. Every viscus in the belly had been separately removed in part or in whole; various short-circuiting operations had been devised and successfully performed. But the methods and habits of the old surgery which had dominated the practice of the nineteenth century still held sway in the early part of the twentieth. They were especially those of speed and spectacular brilliance of execution. The progress of surgery in which Moynihan took such a prominent part in our present generation consisted in refinement rather than invention. The startling surgery done against time was gradually replaced by careful dissection carried out with gentleness, treating every tissue as a part of a sentient organism deprived only temporarily of consciousness, and this new attitude to operative surgery was accompanied by other changes before, during, and after the operation itself. Before the operation was begun the patient's vital resources were estimated and his reserve of strength conserved or increased. In Moynihan's words, "The patient was made safe for surgery."

During the operation done so deliberately the changes observed in the tissues were noted and recorded. These observations, correlated to the history and symptoms of the illness, constituted "the pathology of the living." When the operation was over the recovery of health and well-being was assured by vigilant observation and unceasing care of the wound and of every physical need of the patient. Reverting for a moment to the actual conduct of the operation, it is to be noted that Moynihan, while he trained his hands to the utmost delicacy of touch and dexterity of movement, relied as little as possible upon instrumental aids. He never used a retractor if a human finger or hand would serve the purpose, and he had no use for elaborate mechanical self-retaining retractors.

Moynihan's practice in relation to short-circuiting operations, such as gastro-enterostomy or resection of the stomach or intestine, led the general advance which took

place in regard to these matters. For a time he utilized such things as a Murphy button and Mayo Robson's decalcified bone bobbin. But he very soon replaced the use of such mechanical aids by simple suturing. It is instructive to note how in this respect surgical advance has consisted in simplification rather than elaboration.

In the establishment of this new surgical technique, with its careful preparation of the patient, extreme gentleness and delicacy of touch in the performance of the operation, and detailed after-treatment, Moynihan was not of course the inventor, but only the exponent of a new outlook which many other workers shared. In the introduction of these new principles he had, however, an unrivalled influence. This was for several reasons. In the first place he had trained himself and his teams to the attainment of perfection of technique; in the second place he raised his ideal of surgical practice to such a high level that it was to him nothing short of a religion, which demanded of its devotees every sacrifice of mind and body and promised to them in return the satisfaction of an ideal worthily attained; thirdly, his magnetic and forceful personality enabled him to spread this evangel first in his own hospital and city, then in the larger circles made by the Surgical Club and the Association of Surgeons; and, lastly, his unrivalled gift of oratory enabled him to spread his gospel to the men of two continents.

Moynihan was certainly the favourite of fortune. Endowed with physical strength and mental greatness, his lot was cast in a northern city well accustomed to the nurture of surgical leaders; he arrived at a moment when the whole stage of the world's surgery was ready for advance and development. Brought up to hardship and poverty, he was enabled to acquire great fame and fortune. Having the gifts of a golden voice and an eloquent tongue, he had the opportunity of exercising these for the furtherance of his ideals of surgery and patriotism. Hating pain and weakness, he was spared all physical ill-health, with the exception of one illness which laid him aside for a very short time, and he was finally taken to rest by a stroke which deprived him of consciousness only one week after he had lost his life's companion. The city which had been the scene of his triumphs and which had rejoiced in his many honours was at last called upon to mourn the passing of a giant.

"The legacy of heroes, the memory of a great name and the inheritance of a great example."—DISRAELI.

According to the report for 1938 of the Director of Public Health, United Provinces, the chief epidemiological feature of the year was the high incidence of cholera, which was the cause of over 70,000 deaths, as compared with 6,000 in 1937. Vigorous anti-cholera measures were taken in all the infected areas. Scarcity of water and the silting up of wells in some areas increased the difficulty of the problem of control. Among measures taken were "permanganation" of wells, disinfection of infected houses, free distribution of essential oils mixture and cholera pills, and mass prophylactic inoculation. To prevent the importation of cholera from the Nepal territory special staff were detailed to the border for a period of six months, and cases were intercepted and treated on the spot. The larger towns did not enjoy the comparative immunity noticeable in previous years, only three escaping infection. In almost every town the disease was imported by pilgrims returning from the Kumbh Fair at Hardwar. An anti-cholera scheme is now in force in all districts of the province. Permanganate of potash, kaolin, essential oils mixture, and vaccine are issued on a large scale. Over 1,500,000 inoculations were performed during the year, more than half of which were carried out by the travelling dispensaries.