

OBITUARY

JAMES BARRY BALL, M.D. (Lond.), F.R.C.P.

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JAMES BARRY BALL died at Abingdon, Berkshire, on the 2nd October 1926, aged 77. Born in Ireland, he received his medical education at University College, London.

Barry Ball commenced his professional career in general practice, but, in 1885, he was appointed Assistant Physician to the West London Hospital, and, later, was given charge of the Throat Department. When I left St Thomas's Hospital, in which I had served as clinical assistant to Semon, I became Resident Medical Officer at the West London Hospital, a position which entailed the supervision of the beds for throat cases. It was then that I became acquainted with Barry Ball.

I found that the methods which he adopted in the treatment of cases were very different from what I had seen at St Thomas's. Thus, the operation on tonsils and adenoids was considered a major one. The head of the child was not placed over the end of the table. The tonsils were removed first, by the guillotine, and not last, as we had been taught, the patient being held supine on the table, and only turned over upon the left side when the adenoids were removed. I expected from my previous teaching that fatalities would occur as the result of blood entering the larynx, but nothing of the kind ever happened.

Instead of treating certain pharyngeal affections with pigments and the cautery, Ball directed his attention to the nasal cavities only, teaching as we know now, that the causes of pharyngeal catarrh were of nasal origin. Some may recollect that this view created, at the time, a certain amount of controversy. But Ball was a pioneer in the specialty and held fast to his convictions, just as Woakes did about the same time.

When Stephen Paget resigned his charge of the ear beds in the hospital, they were transferred to the care of Barry Ball, who then resigned his post as physician and took over the duties of the Ear and Throat Department. He had excellent knowledge of aural diseases and carried out the necessary operations with neatness and precision, and with the best results. He frequently performed turbinectomy and used great care in the after-treatment of these cases. When this procedure was largely abandoned, he informed me that he had never seen atrophic rhinitis, dry pharyngitis or laryngitis result from the operation when properly performed. When the Killian submucous operation on the septum was introduced, Ball pointed out

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that for years he had always removed spurs and corrected septal deformities by first incising and elevating the muco-periosteum. He taught the necessity of this in order to prevent subsequent crusting.

He was a good lecturer, speaking quietly and with conviction to the large number of post-graduates who attended the hospital. He opposed the removal of tonsillar tissue in young children unless imperatively necessary, and in adults, before using the guillotine, he preferred to slit up the infected crypts with the tonsil scarifier which bears his name. Times have certainly changed! His manipulations on the larynx by the indirect method were masterly, and with his training as a physician he was a reliable diagnostician in cases of vocal cord paralysis, tubercle, and new growths. I have had the opportunity in recent years to read some of the reports which he made as Aural Referee to the Civil Service, and it is surprising how accurate was his prognosis in these difficult cases.

Ball was the last President of the old Laryngological Society of London, and when the Society was merged into the Royal Society of Medicine, he was re-elected as first President of the Section of Laryngology.

I am indebted to my former colleague, Mr Percy Dunn, F.R.C.S., for the following short appreciation. "For nearly forty years Barry Ball and I were close friends. He, like all of us, had his struggle in earlier years. The incidents, however, connected with it afterwards proved so mirthful when recalled, that we realised that 'waiting for practice' was not without some recompense. But this period of probation was not a long one for Ball. To attempt to analyse his character is not an easy matter. It was certainly complex, but, nevertheless, marked by some outstanding features which never failed to appeal to those with whom he came in contact.

"He was essentially a man of peace. In consequence, he was a valuable man on Committees where controversial matters were under discussion. He seldom spoke unless directly appealed to. It was then he revealed the judgment of a well-balanced mind. If he had chosen law instead of medicine as his profession, he might have gained distinction as a judge. One never heard a word of criticism against him. To all his colleagues he was invariably known as 'Old Ball,' in his case a term of endearment ensuring a welcome to him on all occasions.

"He had a genuine gift of hospitality. Many were the dinners he gave to his friends. These were festive occasions, as enjoyable to himself as to his guests. His natural Irish geniality flowed round the table, diffusing an atmosphere of good fellowship. A man of blameless life, he was true to the core in his dealings with everyone."

H. J. BANKS-DAVIS.