

OBITUARY

ARCHIBALD ADAM SCOT SKIRVING, C.M.G., M.B.,
M.R.C.S.Eng., F.R.C.S.Ed., and F.R.S.Ed.

MR SCOT SKIRVING died at his house in Rothesay Place on 14th June, and was buried at Haddington on 18th June 1930. The intimation of his death was received with universal regret by his many friends in Edinburgh and elsewhere, and not least by his former colleagues and students. When he felt it necessary, on medical advice, to resign his appointment as Senior Surgeon to the Royal Infirmary two years ago, it was the hope of everyone that he would enjoy for a long time the leisure of a quiet life of retirement, which he so well deserved. Such, unfortunately, was not to be the case, and it was known for some time that his health was giving cause for anxiety. After some weeks recently in a nursing home his strength again rallied for a short time, and he was able to be out on a few occasions and to make plans for a change to the country. Arrangements were made for a visit to a country-house in Ayrshire, with a stretch of river through the grounds. He was not, however, to enjoy this happy prospect—the period of improvement was only too short and soon he was losing rather than gaining strength. The end at last came peacefully, but for a week or more, while the issue was yet in the balance, he fought a good fight, keen to live but facing the odds, and not unaware of the chances against him, with the courage which those who knew him would have expected.

Mr Scot Skirving was the fifth son of Mr Robert Scot Skirving, and was born in Edinburgh in 1868. His forebears had long been associated with East Lothian, and one of his treasured possessions was the portrait of his great-grandfather, Adam Skirving, who had witnessed the battle of Prestonpans in 1745.

He was educated at Edinburgh Academy till the age of fifteen, and subsequently was for four years at Cheltenham College. He was a keen Rugby player, and for many years played for the Edinburgh Academical team, and on more than one occasion was selected for representative matches. While a student of medicine at Edinburgh University he had many interests outside his work, and for several years took an important share in the work of the Students' Representative Council, of which he became Senior President. After graduating at Edinburgh University in 1893, he acted as House Surgeon to Professor Chiene, and later visited various surgical centres on the Continent, while sometime was also spent in London—in 1895, when he took the M.R.C.S. diploma. He took his F.R.C.S.Ed. in 1897, and after a period during



Photo by]

A. A. SCOT SKIRVING.

[A. H. Baird, Edinburgh

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which he was a demonstrator of anatomy and a surgical clinical tutor in the Royal Infirmary, he was appointed to the staff of Leith Hospital, to which he gave many years of devoted service and from which he only retired, as Senior Surgeon, in 1916, when he was promoted to the full charge of wards in the Royal Infirmary.

During the South African War Skirving eagerly seized the opportunity which was afforded him of seeing war service, and proceeded to South Africa, in March 1900, with the Imperial Yeomanry Field Hospital, to which he was attached as Surgeon, with the rank of Captain. For his services in South Africa he was mentioned in Lord Roberts' dispatches and received the Queen's Medal with three clasps and the C.M.G.

His close association with the Royal Infirmary dates from 1910, when he was appointed Assistant Surgeon. In 1916 he was promoted to the full charge of wards, and at the time of his retirement in 1928 he was the Senior Honorary Surgeon on the staff of the Hospital. It was characteristic of Scot Skirving that he should consider his hospital work as coming first in importance as regards his time and energies. He took a personal interest in his patients and spared no effort to do whatever was in his power to help them. The confidence which he inspired in them, and their regard for him, were largely the result of the great interest he took in their welfare and the sympathy which they could not but know he felt for them. Whatever the circumstances his patients always felt better and encouraged after his friendly visit, and with his hearty voice all in the ward could share in the cheery remarks which he had for each.

Throughout his career Mr Skirving was devoted to his teaching duties. For many years he acted as Lecturer in Surgery in the School of Medicine of the Royal Colleges, and after retiral from the Royal Infirmary he continued for a short time as Lecturer on Surgery in the Dental Hospital, with which he had been associated for twenty-seven years. He was closely associated with the teaching of dental students, and many who received their systematic instruction from him at the Dental Hospital also attended his clinical class in the Royal Infirmary. He thoroughly enjoyed teaching, and regarded it as one of the least arduous parts of his daily work. His clinical lectures and ward visits were always instructive. He had the natural capacity of emphasising important points by apt quotations and by illustrations from his experience, and not infrequently, when the circumstances were appropriate, he delighted the students with his characteristic wit and humour. Outside the class-room his interest in the students was continued, and his name will always be associated with the University Boat Club, to which he presented a cup for competition. He was a welcome guest at students' functions, to which he looked forward, and

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he could always be relied on to contribute an amusing and witty speech on these occasions.

In 1914 Scot Skirving was mobilised with the Territorial Staff of the 2nd Scottish General Hospital and served with it during the earlier years of the war at Bangour and later at Craighleith. In 1917 he was promoted to the rank of Major, and proceeded to France to join the 58th (Scottish) General Hospital at St Omar. During the latter part of his period of over a year in France he was the Senior Officer-in-Charge of all the surgical wards in the Hospital. Probably none of his surgical work gave him more pleasure than that which he performed during his period of active service in France. He welcomed the opportunity of serving his own country and also of doing something for the country which appealed to him next to his own. He was highly regarded by the French civilians and known to them as "the gallant Major." It is easy to understand the statement of one of his fellow-officers that as President of the Mess he was the life and soul of the whole unit. His coolness in time of stress and his thought for others were never better shown than when the Hospital was bombed—while he was operating—and several of the nursing staff were killed.

Skirving had many interests apart from his work. He was fond of flowers and of gardening, and a country life appealed to him. He was keen on fishing and shot regularly every winter, and was regarded as a more than useful shot. Many of his holidays were spent abroad. France made a special appeal to him, and his interest was maintained by the share he took in the affairs of the Edinburgh branch of the Franco-Scottish Society, of which he had been Chairman. He had also been for some time President of the French Protestant Church in Edinburgh, and took an active interest in its affairs. It was always a special pleasure to him to entertain French visitors, and to show them the historic places in and around Edinburgh.

Scot Skirving will be remembered as one who had the highest ideals of conduct in every branch of work and in his daily life, and who showed at all times courage and fortitude in whatever task lay to his hand. He will be remembered with affection by all who worked with him and who had the privilege of knowing him.

To Mrs Scot Skirving and the other members of his family we can only extend our deepest sympathy in the loss of one whose memory we shall always cherish.

J. M. G.