

Sir Joseph Fayrer, Bart., K.C.S.I., F.R.S.

Contributors

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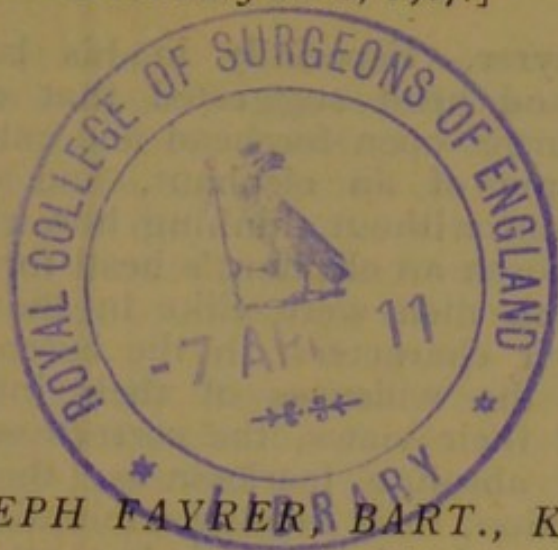


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SIR JOSEPH FAYRER, BART., K.C.S.I., F.R.S.

ON Tuesday, May 21, Sir Joseph Fayrer died. He was born on December 6, 1824, and he died full of years and full of honours, for he was honorary physician (military) and physician extraordinary to the King, honorary physician to her late Majesty Queen Victoria, M.D. and LL.D. of various universities, and fellow of many learned societies. Yet all his honours were richly deserved, and he bore them with the most unassuming modesty. Many men are acquainted with parts of his work, but very few know the whole. When Huxley died, a wail of grief went up from the scientific world, but many people are unaware that but for Fayrer the course of Huxley's life might have been completely different, and a great part of his scientific work might never have been done. They were fellow students together, Huxley being senior by a year, though Fayrer was actually older by a few months. When Huxley had finished his medical studies he was, as he himself says in the autobiographical sketch prefixed to his essays, wondering what he should do to meet the imperative necessity of earning his own bread, when Fayrer suggested that he should enter the naval medical service. He did so, and after a few months at Haslar he went on his famous voyage on the *Rattlesnake*, and thus began his scientific career. The attraction which drew Fayrer and Huxley together and led to their close friendship was the great likeness between them in many respects. It has been said that in every human face a resemblance may be traced to some animal, and this was markedly so both in

Huxley and Fayrer. Especially in his later years Huxley's face and head suggested that of a lion, while Fayrer's large, open forehead and calm expression reminded me of an elephant, and one could hardly look at him without thinking how rightly the Hindoos have chosen an elephant's head for their god of wisdom. Both men were alike in the stern uprightness of their characters, in the extent of their knowledge and the wideness of their interests, in the clearness of their views, the correctness of their decisions, their absolute fearlessness, their prompt and energetic action, their firm determination to carry out what they thought right, in their tenacity of purpose, in a certain impatience of opposition, and in their great success in overcoming it. Associated with these qualities which compelled admiration were an extraordinary kindness and tenderness of heart which gained the affection of all who knew them.

It is not so easy to draw a comparison between their intellectual powers, because their spheres of activity were so very different. Huxley's life was passed in the pursuit and teaching of science and philosophy; Fayrer's scientific work was done in the short intervals of time that he could snatch from the pressure of other occupations. While Huxley was on board the *Rattlesnake*, Fayrer was engaged in amputating limbs and treating gunshot wounds in the insurrection at Palermo, and narrowly escaped death at the siege of Rome by the French. Between such occupations, however, he managed to learn sufficient Italian to pass the examinations and obtain the degree of M.D. in the University of Rome, perhaps the only doctor not a Roman Catholic who ever did so.

Before his friend Huxley had come back from his voyage, Fayrer went out to India, and again saw active service in the Burmese war. During this war he distinguished himself so highly that the Governor-General appointed him residency surgeon at Lucknow, the best appointment at his disposal, as a reward for his services.

In order to carry on his work he had to learn Hindostani and Persian, and in addition to all his medical work he had to conduct a great deal of the correspondence between the British Government and

the King of Oude. When the Indian Mutiny broke out, Fayrer's house in Lucknow was one of the most exposed to the enemy's attack, and he himself took an active part in the defence of the town as well as attending to all the medical and surgical work which disease from insanitary conditions, unsuitable food and the wounds by shot and shell caused amongst the besieged.

Broken in health, Fayrer returned to England after the Mutiny, but instead of remaining idle he went to Edinburgh, worked at the university, passed his examinations, and received the degree of M.D. He then returned to India, where he became professor of surgery in Calcutta.

In 1870 he went with the Duke of Edinburgh on his travels in India, and in 1875 accompanied the King, who was then Prince of Wales, to India. He was a keen sportsman, and was fond of zoology, and in 1867, when president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, he proposed to found a Zoological Gardens in Calcutta, a proposition which, after some years, was carried into effect. He also proposed an ethnological investigation of the races of India, but this was never fully carried out.

Much of his time was taken up by pathological investigation and sanitary work, but the research in which he took the greatest interest was his zoological work on the snakes of India and his physiological investigation into the action of their venom. It was during this investigation that he first tried the effect of various antidotes, one of which, permanganate of potash, is now beginning to be used in such a way as to preserve life in cases of snake bite which would otherwise have been fatal. The difficulties under which his scientific work was carried out are shown by the fact that he had often to leave an experiment of this kind in order to attend to his hospital work, and that while there amputating a limb or performing some other operation his mind would be disturbed by anxiety regarding the condition of his private patients, who were anxiously waiting for him. But for Fayrer's extensive knowledge and firm decision in difficult circumstances, the Prince of Wales, with whom he was travelling, might possibly

have been induced by the earnest entreaties of various personages to visit infected places, with the probable result that cholera might have spread over large districts of India, and that our King might never have returned from his visit to that part of his Empire. Not only do scientific men owe a great debt to Fayrer for his own contributions to science and for the bias he gave to Huxley's life, but also for the care which he took of our King's life and the benefits which its preservation has conferred upon the Empire.

At Fayrer's funeral one of the wreaths bore the gracious inscription,

"For Auld Lang Syne from Edward VII."

LAUDER BRUNTON.



