SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, LL.D., M.D.

BORN MAY 22, 1859

A Biographical Note by

MAURICE CAMPBELL, O.B.E., M.D., F.R.C.P.

Arthur Conan Doyle was born at Edinburgh on May 22, 1859. His grandfather moved from Dublin to London and became a well-known caricaturist: his three elder sons all became equally well known in literary and artistic circles, Richard illustrating *The Newcomes* and designing the cover of *Punch*. The fourth, Charles, Arthur's father, became a civil servant, though he spent his spare time painting. He married Mary Foley, also of Irish parentage: she traced her descent from the Plantagenets and instilled Arthur with a love of chivalry and of history. She must have been a capable woman, for Charles's salary was £240 a year, and on this she managed to bring up a large family.

Arthur was sent to school to Stonyhurst, but was not happy or successful. His strict upbringing was perhaps one reason why he lost his Roman Catholic faith. In October, 1876, he started as a medical student at Edinburgh University. He still spent much of his time reading his favourite authors—at first tales of adventure and later the romances of Scott and the historical essays of Macaulay. He was good at most games and was always ready for a fight. He had little money and was keen to help his mother, as his sisters were already doing. During some long vacations he worked as an unqualified assistant, which took him to Birmingham and to London, and in 1880 as "surgeon" to a whaling expedition, for which he earned £50 and the lasting respect of the mate for his prowess as a boxer. More important for his future, he had already earned three guineas for a story in *Chambers's Journal*.

At Edinburgh

One of his teachers at Edinburgh was Dr. Joseph Bell, whose powers of observation and deduction—so essential in all medical diagnosis—made a great impression and gave him some ideas for Sherlock Holmes. In spite of all his interests he must have worked hard, for he graduated M.B., with credit if not with distinction, in August, 1881. For the next six months he was on the west coast of Africa as a ship surgeon.

On his return he was invited to join Dr. Budd, who had been a fellow-student and was now in practice at Plymouth. Budd appears to have been a maniacal enthusiast, full of energy and wild ideas, and the practice must have been one of the most curious and unethical that has been known. Conan Doyle always had the highest moral standards in his medical and in his private life and found it impossible to work with his friend, so that there were many rows, and once at least a fight, and he left after six months. Some of Budd's qualities were reproduced in different characters in his tales.

In Practice on His Own

He decided to start practice on his own at Southsea, and chose an area where he thought there might be a shortage of doctors. But patients were a long time coming, and during the eight years he was there (July, 1882, to December, 1890) he earned no more than £300 a year from the practice. In 1885 he married Louise Hawkins, whose brother had been one of his patients. He had many friends and activities and was captain of the cricket club and secretary of the literary and scientific society, to which he read several papers.

I find it hard to understand why Doyle was not a great success in practice. He was fond of his fellow men and

understood them, though perhaps he idealized women and understood them less; and he had a good knowledge of medicine, as I have tried to show in my "Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson: A Medical Digression," published in the *Guy's Hospital Gazette* in 1934. It is doubtful if the works of any other novelist describe extrasystoles, oedema due to fibrillation, angina pectoris, aneurysm, rheumatic valve disease, and left ventricular failure with orthopnoea with such careful adherence to medical probabilities. I can only think that in a town such as Southsea, and perhaps elsewhere, it was impossible to build up a good practice without purchasing one.

Early Writings

During these eight years he was writing hard, though too frequently his stories were returned to him. *The Study in Scarlet* appeared in *Beeton's Xmas Annual* in 1887 and the *Sign of Four* soon after. *The Firm of Girdlestone* and *Micah Clark* and many other tales were finally published during this time: in spite of their popularity later they did not lead to immediate success or fame, and during the period he never earned more than about £50 a year from his writings. For those who feel that he wrote the Sherlock Holmes adventures in close collaboration with Dr. Watson, it is interesting to speculate how they met. While he was at Southsea Dr. James Watson, M.D. Edin., was secretary of the local medical society; there are indications that he may have been an elder brother of Dr. John Watson and may have invited him down to one of the society's medical dinners.

Setting up as an Eye Specialist

Conan Doyle decided to leave Southsea to set up as an eye specialist, and was given a farewell dinner on December 12, 1890. By January 5 of the next year he was at Vienna to study ophthalmology. By March 24 he was back in London, and two weeks later settled at 2, Devonshire Place, where, as he said, "he waited in the consulting room and no one waited in the waiting room"; and within two months he had decided to give up the practice of medicine and devote himself to writing.

Literary Success

I cannot think that a man of such great common sense as Doyle really took this incursion into ophthalmology very seriously. I think he must have almost decided earlier, and the literary success that came to him during these months enabled him to put his dearest wish into action. *The White Company* was appearing in *Cornhill* and most of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* were written at Devonshire Place and soon appeared in the *Strand Magazine*. These led to wide recognition of Conan Doyle and of Sherlock Holmes, and Doyle got to know many more writers and henceforth moved in literary rather than in medical circles.

In June, 1891, the family moved to South Norwood, where they lived till 1897, when they built a house at Hindhead. But in 1893 Mrs. Doyle developed tuberculosis of the lungs and they moved to Switzerland for the winter, where in 1895 Doyle introduced skiing. He had carried out his first lecture tour in America the previous year. He was writing all the time, and the *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1892-93), *Stark Munro Letters*, *Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1895), and *Rodney Stone* (1896) belong to this period.

South African War

In 1899 Doyle went to the South African war in charge of a hospital unit. He wrote what was probably the best and fairest history of the South African war and a shorter

pamphlet that was translated into many languages, and did much to counteract the anti-British feeling that was widely spread over the continent at that time. Partly for this, perhaps, in 1902 he was knighted and appointed Deputy Lieutenant for the County of Surrey. He was still writing exciting and popular stories, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-2), *The Adventures of Gerard* (1902-3), *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1903-4), and *Sir Nigel* belong to this period.

His wife lived till 1906, though at first she had been given a very bad prognosis. In the same year he read the statement of Edalji, the Parsee solicitor who had been condemned to penal servitude for horse-maiming three years before. He was at once convinced of his innocence and studied the evidence until he was able to force the appointment of a committee of inquiry that set Edalji free. His other well-known case that led to the relief of Slater after 18 years in prison was an example of his sympathy for those who had suffered injustice rather than of his powers of observation and deduction that had been shown in the Edalji case. He was always anxious to fight for the weak, and his attacks on the injustices in the Belgian Congo were not without effect.

Second Marriage

He was married again in 1907, to Miss Jean Leckie, whose family he had known for several years, and they went to live at Crowborough in Sussex. The marriage was exceptionally happy, and two sons and a daughter were added to the son and daughter of his previous marriage: Conan Doyle had reached a position where he was more able to relax with his children. He became interested in the theatre and lost much money in staging a version of *Rodney Stone*, but recovered it with a dramatization of *The Speckled Band*.

During the 1914-18 war he wrote *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (6 vols.) and was disappointed that it was not more popular. He could still write enthralling stories, as shown by *His Last Bow* and *The Valley of Fear*, which appeared in the *Strand Magazine* between 1911 and 1915. The last of the Sherlock Holmes stories did not appear till 1926, but in general opinion these are not as good.

Last Years

After the war, when he was nearly 60, spiritualism, which had attracted him for many years, became his main interest and occupation. He gave up nearly everything for it and lectured in America and many other countries. Even after he had suffered from a cardiac infarct he would not let this interfere with his work. I admire above all the courageous patient, and I like the story of his reply to the consultant who said he could not carry out his lecture tour: "I did not come here to ask you to arrange my life for me but to tell me how I can avoid another attack during my tour."

He died in July, 1930, aged 71, a simple friendly man who admired courage and honour and integrity, and exemplified these virtues in his life. There are enthusiasts for his tales of boxing, like *Rodney Stone*, for his historical novels, and for the tales of Brigadier Gerard, but not so many as there are for the tales of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. He will, I think, live as one of the great story-tellers, and I like to think that his medical experiences were some help to him in this.

[I should like to acknowledge my debt in writing this article to Hesketh Pearson's *Conan Doyle: His Life and Art*.]

Mr. Kenneth Walker's *The Story of Medicine*, first published by Hutchinson Ltd. in 1954, is now available in a cheap edition (Arrow Books Ltd., 178, Great Portland Street, London, W.1. Pp. 326; illustrated. 5s.). The book provides a short history of medicine written in a style suitable for the layman, and covering the period from prehistoric and Greek times to the present.

IMMUNIZATION IN CHILDHOOD

A symposium on "Immunization in Childhood" was held in the Wellcome Building, London, from May 4 to 6. Sponsored by the Wellcome Foundation, the symposium was organized by an independent steering committee,* under the chairmanship of Brigadier Sir JOHN BOYD, F.R.S., which assembled about 70 participants representative of the many branches of medicine interested in the practical aspects of immunization. It was a declared object of the conference to try to resolve conflicting viewpoints and to recommend acceptable immunization schedules for general use in Britain. While most of the members were British, a few experts from W.H.O., Commonwealth countries, the U.S.A., and France also took part.

The full proceedings of the symposium will be published later in the year by Messrs. E. and S. Livingstone Ltd. Here we report the first two sessions—on "The Risks of Immunization" and "Poliomyelitis and Pertussis"; and, with the approval of the steering committee, the full and authorized text of the "Recommendations" agreed upon by the conference. The "Recommendations" include two alternative practical immunization schedules. For reasons of space we are unable to include an account of the third and fourth sessions—on diphtheria and tetanus immunization, combined prophylactics, "personal records," and the pros and cons of immunization schedules—but these topics are dealt with in the conference's final "Recommendations."

Sir John Boyd's Address

The symposium was opened by Sir JOHN BOYD. A number of diseases resulting from bacterial or viral infection could now be prevented by means of vaccines or toxoids, and the problem of administering these to the best advantage, and with the least inconvenience to the recipients, had become complex and difficult, he said. The time had come to assess all the evidence and work out a scheme—or schemes—which would serve as a guide, or perhaps even a model, for those who had to administer these immunizing agents. The symposium had been organized for that purpose.

They had at the symposium representatives of all sections of the profession interested in the subject—medical officers of health, school medical officers, general practitioners, paediatricians, epidemiologists, statisticians, representatives from infectious diseases hospitals, from the Services, from the laboratories, from interested departments overseas, and, casting a paternal eye on the proceedings, from the Ministry of Health. He welcomed them all. Among the many distinguished visitors he would like especially to mention Dr. Salk, whose name was now a household word.

HAZARDS OF IMMUNIZATION

"Provocation Poliomyelitis"

Dr. JOHN KNOWELDEN (Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, London School of Hygiene) gave a paper on "Provocation Poliomyelitis," which he said was first recognized in 1949. A Medical Research Council committee had sponsored a large investigation of the problem in Britain, and on the basis of information collected in the years 1951-4 had confirmed the observations of earlier workers that there was sometimes an association between the site of injection and the limb paralysed in children who developed poliomyelitis within 4 weeks of inoculation with diphtheria prophylactics or pertussis

*The Steering Committee was as follows: Sir John Boyd, F.R.S. (chairman), Dr. W. C. Cockburn, Dr. D. G. Evans, Dr. B. E. Schlesinger, Dr. I. Taylor, and Dr. H. J. Parish (secretary).