

### Obituary.

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SIR ARTHUR VERNON MACAN, M.B., F.R.C.P.I.

By the death of Sir Arthur Macan, which took place at Dublin on the 26th of September, a most distinguished member has disappeared from the ranks of the medical profession : in particular those branches of the Medical Art of which this JOURNAL treats have suffered, being suddenly deprived of a zealous worker and powerful master, whose ability is appreciated not only throughout the British Empire but in all parts of the civilized world.

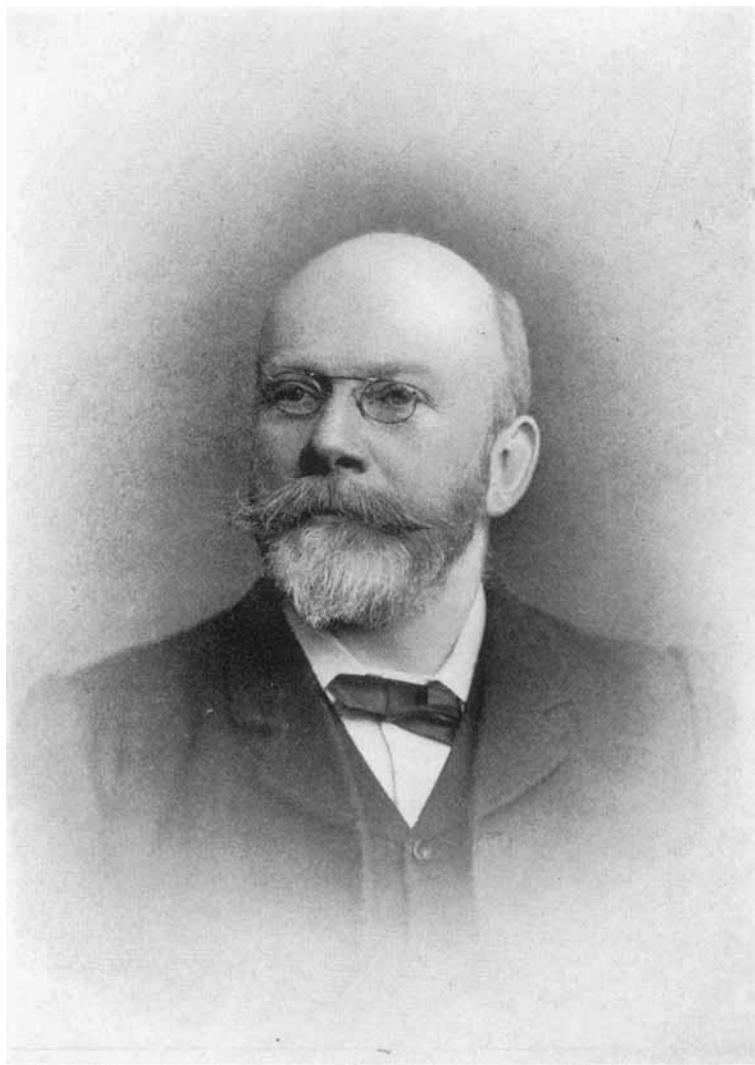
Arthur Vernon Macan was born on the 30th of January 1843, at 9 Mountjoy Square, one of Dublin's handsome green parks, a residential quarter not lacking in historic interest and at that time still much in vogue; but nowadays not so fashionable and less central owing to the growth of the city in the southerly direction.

He was the eldest son of the Hon. John Macan, a distinguished lawyer, ex-scholar of T.C.D., and Q.C. of the Connaught circuit, who for many years held the position of First Commissioner in Bankruptcy in the High Court of Justice in Ireland. Judge Macan came from a Sligo family, and his brother Francis was distinguished as an Army Surgeon.

Arthur Macan's mother was Miss Maria Perrin, daughter of a Liverpool merchant, whose people lived in the Co. Wicklow, though they were of English and Huguenot extraction.

Judge Macan died in 1859 and left a widow, two daughters and four sons, of whom Arthur was the eldest. Of the others Jameson John went to Cambridge, also adopted the medical profession, and is now well known in London as a medical journalist. Reginald Walter had a distinguished career at Oxford, and for some time has been Master of University College. Francis, the youngest son, went into business. After her husband's death Mrs. Macan remained in the same house until after the marriage of her second daughter in 1868, all her sons having then left home.

On the death of his father, Arthur was taken from St. Columba's College, and shortly afterwards entered Trinity College, Dublin. He passed without particular distinction through his career of undergraduate, being too discursive to be much of a mere prize winner. He devoted himself chiefly to the mathematical side of the course. He also spent some time in studying music and in reading English literature and philosophy including the works of John S. Mill and Herbert Spencer.



ARTHUR VERNON MACAN

He graduated in Arts in 1863 as Senior Respondent, *i.e.*, first of the honour division at the Degree examination, a distinction to gain which an accurate knowledge of all the subjects in the Sophister curriculum is required, and not merely of a few selected to suit the candidate competing for a medal. It is therefore considered more difficult to obtain.

He did not join the medical school until he had finished his Arts course. Then, having found a specific goal for his energy, he started his medical studies with characteristic zeal and ability. He attended the clinical work in the wards of the Government House of Industry Hospitals—Richmond Surgical, Whitworth Medical and Hardwick Fever,—in each of which he served a six months' term as Resident Pupil: a post much coveted by senior students, as its functions resembled those of House Surgeon or Physician in the English Hospitals.

At a later period he spent 6 months as Internal pupil in the Rotunda Lying-in Hospital.

He obtained his M.B. and M.Ch. degrees in 1868. Shortly afterwards he attended a special class in London, with the view of entering the Army Medical Service. But he soon abandoned this idea, and in January 1869, went to Berlin, where two of his class fellows were studying ophthalmology and pathology. He devoted himself to learning the language and to skating, and first in the spring turned his attention to professional work. He attended several lectures and clinics, and in the summer session a course of practical operative surgery conducted by Langenbeck, who met his class punctually at 6 o'clock a.m., in spite of his some seventy years of age.

Intending to spend the following winter in Vienna he utilised the summer months by a series of walking tours, with a Dublin friend, in which they tramped from Berlin to Milan and thence to Vienna, both depending solely on their knapsacks. In the three months they traversed Saxon Switzerland, the Hartz Mountains, Thüringer Forest, Sieben Gebirge, the Rhine, Black Forest and Switzerland, passing from Milan through the Tyrol to Linz and by the Danube to Vienna.

In Vienna (1869–70) he attended several of the post-graduate courses for which that school is famous, devoting himself chiefly to Pathology, Dermatology and Gynæcology. He was struck with the Austrian methods of treatment, which differed so essentially from the time-honoured system that then obtained in these islands—Hebra's out-patients, male and female, marching round quite naked before a large class seemed strange to modest Irish eyes. The well-organized gynæcological department was a revelation when compared with the backward state of that branch at home. Macan soon grasped the situation, and becoming familiar with the new order of things, worked away with his usual pertinacity.

In March 1870, he left Vienna and travelled through Italy, Sicily, Greece, to Constantinople, returning to Vienna in June, but only for a short time, for then the continent was all ablaze with the Franco-German war. He made his way to Frankfort, and with some difficulty obtained work as a medical volunteer. After many hardships while conveying wounded from the front to the hospitals at the bases, he found himself at Versailles, the Royal Palace there being used as a German Military Hospital. His war service was rather disappointing. He acquired some useful experience, no doubt, but it was combined with so many hard knocks, terrible privations, and inability to do what he considered really useful and best—being a mere volunteer,—that he decided to return to Vienna in November 1870. He worked exclusively in the Gynæcological department for the next nine months under Prof. Braun. About that time he became great friends with Braun's senior assistant, Rokitansky, with whom he worked assiduously.

After another long walking tour in the vacation of 1871, he again returned to Vienna and continued his obstetric work during the winter session, acting as junior assistant.

When he left Vienna for good (March 1872) he spent a few months in Paris reviewing the obstetric and gynæcological clinics, which he did not consider were equal to those of Vienna. He also visited the obstetric institutions in London, and was disappointed that so little progress had been made in adapting the newest and best modern methods.

On his return to Dublin he was welcomed by his friends, many of whom had enjoyed similar advantages of continental study. He became an active member of the Dublin Biological Club, which had been formed after the manner of the German *Wissenschaftliche Kneipe*, at which the scientific topics of the day, etc., were discussed over beer and tobacco. Some of the seniors looked rather askance at this new departure, and Macan was dubbed by a caustic wit "The Leader of the German Band."

He diligently attended the Rotunda Lying-in Hospital, and shortly became Assistant Physician.

His progress in Dublin was marked with brilliant success throughout. His first appointment to a teaching post was that of Lecturer on Obstetrics in the Carmichael School of Medicine, where he gave a systematic course of lectures during the summer session.

A new post on the clinical staff—that of gynæcologist—was created at the City of Dublin Hospital, and Macan was selected to fill it on his ceasing to be Assistant Physician at the Rotunda. Here he worked with zeal and marked success for several years before he gained the highest prize in the obstetric field in Ireland, namely the Mastership of the Rotunda Lying-in Hospital, an appointment which

was held for 7 years and gave him ample scope for the exercise of his abilities and the application of his experience.

In 1889, shortly after he had left the Rotunda and taken up his residence at 53 Merrion Square, he was appointed to the post of King's Professor of Midwifery in Trinity College, and at the same time, *ipso facto*, he became Obstetric Physician to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital.

Dr. Macan received many well-merited distinctions, which may be briefly enumerated. In 1877 he obtained the M.A.O., T.C.D., and the Fellowship of the College of Physicians in Ireland. In 1887 he acted as President of the Obstetric section of the British Medical Association. In 1890 he had the honour of being selected Honorary President of the Obstetric section of the International Congress in Berlin. He also held the posts of President of the British Gynæcological Society and of the Obstetric section of the Royal Academy of Medicine, Ireland. In 1896 he was Honorary President of the Congress of Gynæcology and Obstetrics in Geneva, and he held the same post in Amsterdam in 1899.

He had acted as Censor and Examiner, and in 1902 he was elected to the Presidency of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. In the following year, during the second year of his term of office as President, he accepted a knighthood.

From 1903 to 1907 he held the post of examiner in the Medical School of Oxford, and at the time of his death was consulting gynæcologist to the Rotunda Lying-in Hospital.

Macan was not a prolific writer. He wrote no text-book, although few would have been more competent to do so on account of the enormous scope and accuracy of his knowledge of the literature of his subject. He shone rather as a clinical teacher and demonstrator of facts than a scribbler of theories. His new views and methods he disclosed to learned societies personally as practical demonstrations. However, between the years 1872 and 1908 he made some 70 communications, reports and exhibitions to the Obstetric and other Dublin Societies, which were published in the *Dublin Medical Journal* of those years.

At the annual meeting of the British Medical Association at Cork, in 1879, he read a paper on "Hæmorrhage from the organs of generation during pregnancy and parturition," which opened the discussion, and was considered a comprehensive resumé of the subject. And at their annual meeting at Oxford, in 1904, he read a logical and well-arranged paper to open the discussion on "The treatment of accidental hæmorrhage."

The previous number of this JOURNAL contains a paper on "The operative treatment of puerperal fever," which he read before the Obstetric section of the Royal Academy of Medicine, Ireland.

It is as a clinical teacher, lecturer and demonstrator, that Sir

Arthur Macan was renowned. His personal force was communicated directly to his hearers, who bore it away to shed seeds in distant lands. He was remarkable as a reformer and introducer of new methods and modes of treatment, and in this way he helped to advance his subjects more than by original writings.

It is difficult for a modern obstetrician to realize the conditions in vogue 35 years ago. News from afar of the dorsal position being used in obstetrics had been heard by some, but not without expressions of amazement and averseness. Its adoption was regarded then as quite out of the question in this country.

Such an unheard-of contrivance as an obstetric chair was spoken of rather with horror than admiration, and it took a considerable time to overcome this prejudice even when its advantages had been practically demonstrated. Abdominal palpation as a means of diagnosis and a substitute for vaginal examination during labour was not accepted as practicable even by those to whom it was known. Such an unheard-of contrivance as an obstetric chair was spoken of as a new and successful method. The views on the subject of uterine displacements accepted in these islands, before Macan introduced Schultze's rational ideas, were crude and vague.

For some time before Macan had become the Master of the Rotunda, many of these antiquated conditions had been removed. Some new methods and various new treatments were adopted while he was yet Assistant Physician. In spite of their conservative bent, the Masters under whom he served either let him have a free, or lent him a helping, hand in all matters that they considered to be useful and good. In Macan's earliest days the antiseptic method was only beginning to have a firm footing in midwifery. He now came forward as its most zealous advocate, and no doubt considerable progress was made in this direction when he was Assistant and Dr. Atthill Master. While Master, Macan worked hard to insist upon the systematic use and perfection of aseptic methods of every kind then known. So successful did these precautions become under his guidance that blood poisoning was almost forgotten, no case having occurred during the eighteen months prior to his vacating office.

To gauge adequately the great general impetus given by Macan to the improvement of obstetric methods and gynæcological practice, one must take into account the comprehensive character of the Rotunda Hospital and the widespread influence this institution exercises both at home and abroad. This was the field upon which his hardest battles were fought and his most distinguished victories gained. A more cosmopolitan class of students could not be found than that drawn together by the plentiful material for study provided by its wards and out-patient department. It is not to be wondered at that the extraordinary number of 4,000 deliveries per annum, and a corresponding field of gynæcological practice, induced

many students and practitioners from the sister isle, as well as distant parts of the Empire, America and many foreign countries, to visit this great Dublin school. To such a class for some ten years—three as Assistant and seven as Master—Macan imparted his ripe knowledge with all his emphatic force and personal persuasiveness. To the last he continued with unexhausted vigour to teach in the Medical School and Hospital of the Dublin University. His early reading of Herbert Spencer and other philosophical writers, tended to increase his innate readiness to re-adjust the commonly accepted fitness of things that, in his opinion, were not logically fit. He analysed the worth of established systems and sought for weak points of old-standing situations. Thus he was a reformer to the backbone; when he saw that a change was advisable he insisted that it be made at once. He was an active radical when there was any evil to be eradicated.

As an administrator he was both capable and thorough. During his tenure of office as Master of the Rotunda he managed all its multifarious departments with the same remarkable efficiency and success that characterized his clinical work. With indomitable patience and tact he remodelled the old nursing arrangements and introduced a system that required but little to make it perfect.

His manner was bright and buoyant to all. To his patients, equally to the high and to the low, he was cheery and inspiring. To his friends he was warm and sincere. He was genial and straight to his colleagues and kind and encouraging to his pupils. For some people, however, he was too straightforward and downright, and accordingly he has been accused of having an uncompromising manner. This may to some extent be explained by the very plain way he had of speaking the naked truth: for the truth without some little dressing may at times be found to be unpalatable. He certainly did not attempt to affect that intense *suaviter in modo* which some think should gild the elegant physician. But he was an honest man, a wise counsellor and impartial adviser.

It is possible that now and then his apparent brusqueness was the outcome of an effort to subdue a feeling of shyness, a trait he despised. At any rate, none can be found that did not admire and respect him, and that do not now sincerely mourn his loss.

Next to his undying energy, Macan's most striking characteristic was his great thoroughness in all his undertakings. When acquiring knowledge he went to the bottom of every item and was not satisfied until he had completely grasped every point of the matter in hand. He believed that almost every accomplishment could be acquired if practised with determination and perseverance, and so he worked at everything he took up; whether music, skating, German, operating or teaching.

He had naturally a logical mind. He loved argument, which he

carried out on systematic logical lines but with a dogmatism and assurance with which it was hard for an antagonist to cope. His wish to carry logic into the details of daily life occasionally landed him in awkward corners out of which he loved to wriggle with subtle reasoning. One of his pet theories was that no human being should control or correct another. He quite differed with Solomon about the treatment of children. One might guide them by precept and example, but never correct or punish them, and as far as common sense would admit he carried this out in practice.

He was fond of out-door exercise to the last, and even when he was too ill to attempt it he went fishing not very long before the end. In his student days he was very fond of skating and worked very hard in Berlin under a professional for three months. At the Vienna club rink his skating was quite a revelation. Often he was obliged to abandon practising a figure from the number of too attentive onlookers. When cycling came into vogue he became an enthusiastic advocate for the iron horse, and almost daily took considerable exercise on his wheel—possibly of late years too much.

He was always of remarkably strong physique, and had but few illnesses in his life. The only one of real danger was typhoid, which he contracted in the autumn of 1879. This kept him *hors de combat* for nearly six months, but his recovery was then complete and he again took to active physical exercise which he continued until a couple of months before his death.

On his 34th birthday—30th January, 1877—Dr. Macan married Mary Agnes Wanklyn, daughter of John Bradshaw Wanklyn of Cheam, Surrey; in which parish his sister had been settled since 1868 as wife of the Rector. She proved a charming and able helpmate, but their happy married life lasted but little over nine years, as she died on the 26th July 1886, at the very time he had attained the highest point of his success. In addition to one daughter who did not survive early childhood there were three sons and three daughters of the marriage. The eldest son died some few years ago, and the others remain to mourn the irreparable loss of a devoted and indulgent father and friend.

The blank left in Dublin by the death of Sir Arthur Macan will be hard to fill. It must remain conspicuous, not only among the number of Dublin gynaecologists but also in more general circles, for his was a well-known and striking figure in the Irish metropolis.

His loss will be keenly felt throughout Ireland both by the medical profession and by his numerous patients, by whom he was esteemed with veneration. A general feeling of cordial sympathy will be extended to his near relatives, especially his children, whose loss it is quite impossible to mitigate by any pity or compassion.