OBITUARIES

Prof. John Ryle

THE death of John Alfred Ryle on February 27 at the age of sixty-one was not unexpected. Nevertheless, now that it has occurred, it is a shock, for he had been occupying an exceptionally important position in academic medicine and it will be difficult indeed to find a successor of like stature.

When in 1942 the chair and Institute of Social Medicine were created at Oxford, nothing was so important as the choice of the man to occupy that chair and to direct the development of that Institute. He had to assume responsibility for giving definition to the subject, for establishing its relationships with other departments of academic medicine and for creating or reshaping within the Institute the instruments of teaching and research within the general field of social medicine when this had been surveyed.

John Ryle was chosen and there could have been no better, no more fortunate choice. The attractiveness, to oncoming youth and to the utilizer of knowledge, of a particular field of human activity is, to a large extent, determined by the attractiveness of those who work therein. In his person, John Ryle was an attractive creature, displaying a beauty of body and of mind that was embellished by a nobility and strength of character and a glad devotion to medicine, both as the application of science and as an expression of a love of humanity. Professionally, he stood on a pinnacle, for he was regius professor of physic in the University of Cambridge and was loaded with honours. Yet from this pinnacle he stepped down because the post which was offered to him promised him exceptional opportunities for doing what his own experience and expanding philosophy were driving him to do—to take a personal and active part in, and to expedite the changes in interest and emphasis within, medicine that were reshaping medical thought and action.

Without hesitation he left all that his place in Cambridge represented, and in late middle age entered on what was tantamount to a new career. He, who had thus far concerned himself with the illness of individuals, now began to play his part in the adaptation of medicine for the preservation and augmentation of the health of the population as a whole.

As his ideas took shape they were presented in published papers which will claim a permanent place in the history of social medicine. He visited India, South Africa and the United States of America, there to display his developing notions, to offer his views for critical consideration and to influence policy in relation to the teaching of medicine in these countries. His annual reports and his "Changing Disciplines" give an account of these events.

In Oxford he soon collected around him a strong group of younger people who, fired by his enthusiasm, quickly made the Institute widely known by their published works, now a fitting monument to their dead leader.

Because the chair and Institute were created in Oxford, and because John Ryle went to Oxford and worked there, chairs of social medicine now exist in several other British universities, and academic departments of public health everywhere are changing their names.

John Ryle's life was fuller and more complete than those of most men for the reason that he was more gifted and more dedicated than most. To the end

he welcomed change and to the end he pursued it. He once wrote: "Dying is not so terrible as we have been led to believe. It is often the witnesses who suffer the greater mental pain. Their suffering is usually a matter of untutored sympathy—of imagining what the victim must be feeling and imagining what they themselves may be called upon to endure. In their leave-taking from their friends the dying may or may not feel a fleeting wistfulness, but they will know no terror."

His many friends will find comfort in the thought that these observations were surely confirmed in John Ryle's own experience. F. A. E. CREW

Dr. A. E. M. G. Gillam

THE death occurred on January 16 of Dr. A. E. M. G. Gillam, a senior lecturer in the Department of Chemistry in the University of Manchester, at his home in Timperley, Cheshire. Gillam was born in Wavertree, Liverpool, in 1900. On leaving school he joined the technical staff of the Department of Inorganic Chemistry in the University of Liverpool under Prof. E. C. C. Baly, where he soon showed his talents as a lecture demonstrator, becoming the principal demonstrator on the death of the late Mr. Froyssell. He studied in the evenings at the Central Technical School (now the Technical College) to obtain his associateship of the Institute of Chemistry in 1926, and served the College afterwards as a part-time assistant lecturer.

Continuing as the lecture demonstrator, he began research under Dr. R. A. Morton at the University and studied the absorption spectra of halogens and interhalogen compounds, methods for determining ultra-violet light intensity and the deterioration of fused quartz and of quartz mercury-vapour lamps. For an outstanding thesis on this work he obtained the M.Sc. degree in 1929.

At this period the value of absorption spectra in the study of conjugated unsaturated compounds became clear, and Gillam applied the method to the carotenoids and vitamin A in conjunction with Prof. (now Sir Ian) Heilbron and his collaborators. This led to the discovery in 1937 of vitamin A₂ in the liver oils of freshwater fish. The ultra-violet absorption spectrophotometric methods were applied to ergosterol and vitamin D precursors as well as to carotenoids. Later he investigated systematically the absorption of conjugated unsaturated carbonyl compounds to obtain the reference data for structural interpretations of these types. The method was further applied to polyphenyls, terpenes and many problems referred to him by colleagues in many walks of life, whom he was most willing to help.

He followed Heilbron to Manchester as research assistant in chemical spectroscopy in October 1933 and became a special lecturer in 1935. In 1937 Liverpool awarded him the D.Sc. degree. In 1938 he took charge of the first-year medical chemistry course at Manchester and showed his great gift as a teacher and demonstrator for eight years.

Gillam will be most remembered for his unfailing courtesy and help to others, whether colleague, student or service staff. Perhaps his own early educational handicap gave him a particularly sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of elementary students. In 1946 he became a senior lecturer, but soon afterwards his health deteriorated and he died after a long illness borne with characteristic courage.