OBITUARY

DR. DONALD MUNRO

EVERY member of our International Medical Society of Paraplegia will be saddened to learn that Donald Munro, the first Honorary Member of the Society, died in March this year at the age of 83.

Donald Munro was born in Boston, Massachusetts on 10th August 1889, the son of John Cummings Munro, a general surgeon, and Mary Squibb Munro the daughter of the founder of the E. R. Squibb Pharmaceutical Co., Dr. Edward Robinson Squibb. He was educated at the Milton Academy before entering Harvard University and was graduated from Harvard in 1911 and from Harvard Medical School in 1914. Before joining the Army Medical Corps in 1917, he worked and studied at hospitals in Chicago and Philadelphia and became a pupil of Professor Frazier in Philadelphia, one of the outstanding neurosurgeons of that period with special interest in traumatic paraplegia.

Returning from World War I to Boston, after the Armistice in 1918, he was elected to the surgical resident staff at City Hospital in 1920. In 1925 he became surgeon in charge of neurological surgery at that hospital where he built up his famous Department of Neuro-Surgery. Over a period of some 30 years he was a Consultant to many New England Hospitals. He retired from Boston City Hospital in 1956.

He became President of the Aesculapian Club, the Boston Surgical and New England Surgical Societies and also a member of Neurosurgical and other State and National Societies, including Cushing Society of American Neuro-surgeons. He was made an Honorary Member of the French Neurosurgical Society and, as mentioned above, the first Honorary Member of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia.

Several other honours were bestowed on him, such as the Leonard Wood Medal for 'Distinguished Contribution to Medicine and Humanity' and in 1966 the Speedy Prize of the Paralysed Veterans of America for 'having done most for paraplegics'.

During World War II he gave his services to various Army and Navy Hospitals in New England.

He wrote about 150 publications, among them two books, one on *Cranio-cerebral Injuries* and the other *The Treatment of Injuries to the Nervous System* (1952) with a special chapter on his ideas of the management of spinal paraplegic patients.

Donald Munro became the outstanding pioneer on traumatic paraplegic in the United States and, as such, he had to change his whole neuro-surgical approach towards this complex subject of medicine and surgery. His most well-known contributions in the management of paraplegia were the introduction of tidal drainage for the prevention and treatment of urinary infection and the anterior rhizotomy for the treatment of intractable spasticity in paraplegics. In those years before and during the early stages of World War II these were break-throughs in the management of these patients. Through his work he became more and more conservative which made him very critical of untimely and indiscriminate

laminectomies and fusions. In his pioneer work he had often to swim against the stream of prejudices and old concepts, which made him sometimes unpopular among his colleagues because of his forthright criticism. However, he was a man of superb courage and his main concern throughout his career was always to help people. In this respect he became sometimes rather outspoken against certain trends in medicine. A classical example in this respect is his 50th Anniversary Harvard Report where he wrote 'I hope the teaching of medicine will soon crawl out of the mysterious and gloomy wood of "research" and return to the proper business of doctors—the care of the sick. It will do this because the public or patients—if you will—are already manifesting their displeasure with the profession with reference to their exploitation—the public's—in the name of teaching, the training of young doctors, and the colossal expenditure for investigation at the expense of better patient care.'

One of his favourite quotes was that from the book *Les Miserables*: 'A Priest's door should always be open, a Doctor's door should never be closed'.

Under his rather dour exterior, lay a very warm-hearted personality and those near to him—amongst which the writer of this obituary was proud to have been numbered for more than 20 years—will remember him as a loyal friend.

Donald's chief hobby was small boat sailing and after his retirement gardening, where he became greatly interested in raising flowers until failing health in the last few years made it impossible to continue. Of all the clubs and organisations of which he was a member, the one he most loved was the Tavern Club. As long as he was able to do so he would lunch there a couple of times a week and have a game of billiards afterwards with one of his friends.

His wife, Margaret (née Harbison) whom he married in 1928 was his loyal companion, and in his last years of failing health she gave him great comfort and happiness.

To Mrs. Munro and her daughter, Mrs. David E. Austin, we express our profound sympathy.

SIR LUDWIG GUTTMANN