LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR ALFRED KEOGH, G.C.B.,
G.C.V.O., C.H.

[This obituary has been written by Major-General Sir Michael Russell, K.C.M.G., C.B.]

SIR ALFRED KEOGH was born in Dublin on July 3, 1857. His father was a member of the Irish Bar and Resident Magistrate of Roscommon. He was educated at Queen’s College, Galway, and at the age of 21 took his medical degrees at the Royal University of Ireland. Coming then to London he obtained a resident appointment at the Brompton Hospital for Consumption, and was for a time a Clinical Assistant at the Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital. In 1880 he entered the Army Medical Service and at Netley distinguished himself by taking the Herbert Prize and the Martin Memorial Gold Medal. After a period of service abroad he returned home and was appointed Medical Officer to the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich.

In 1900 he was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and the same year was specially selected for increased pay of the rank for his services in South Africa. On December 2, 1904, he was promoted Colonel and on the following day Surgeon-General; and on January 1, 1905, Surgeon-General ranking as Lieutenant-General on being appointed Director-General, Army Medical Services. He remained Director-General from January, 1905, to March, 1910, when he went on retired pay. In October, 1914, he was reappointed Director-General shortly after the outbreak of the Great War and remained so until 1918.

Sir Alfred Keogh will be long remembered as a great administrator.
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He had all the requisites for the task. Quick perception of essentials, tenacity, enthusiasm and rapid action characterized all his work. His judgment was rarely at fault; it has been described as intuitive. Intuition there was; but it was founded on knowledge, wide reading and close observation.

In his younger days he devoted himself to acquiring a sound professional ground work, taking clinical appointments in general and special hospitals, and losing no opportunity of adding to his store. This professional keenness he kept up through his working life. I well remember how deeply interested he was when once on leave at Berne we paid a visit to Kocher, then on the crest of the wave of his European reputation. It was difficult to see which was the more absorbed, Kocher in demonstrating the work in his clinic or Keogh in eliciting all the information he could.

On joining the Army, without loosening his grasp on his purely professional work, Keogh immersed himself in the study of military medical problems. He familiarized himself with the various Commissions which had reported on the subject—especially the Herbert, Camperdown, and Elgin reports. In these, he would say, are laid bare most of the spots where the shoe pinched.

One of his great ambitions was to break down the barrier which existed between the civil and military branches of the profession. This was difficult so long as the military training centre was isolated at Netley; but when he reached higher administrative rank the opportunity came and he seized it with both hands. By great good fortune the Secretary of State for War at the time (Mr. Broderick, now Lord Middleton) was sympathetic and the Royal Army Medical College was built and opened in London. Thus the way to the co-operation of the civil and military branches of the profession, which has since proved of such great advantage, was opened. In this connexion the help that the then Advisory Board was able to give, and gave, should not be overlooked.

In this College the post-graduate instruction for Captains for promotion to Major was expanded to nine months and the students were given the advantage of participating in the instruction given in the London schools and hospitals—and of training for specialties which they might wish to adopt.

When the Territorial Force was established by Mr. Haldane (later Lord Haldane) it became necessary to organize its Medical Service. This was more of a creative effort than an organization, as the medical units required for the Force did not exist, and the few medical units in being bore no relation to it.

By visiting the chief medical centres in the Kingdom and expounding the meaning of, and the necessity for, these units, Keogh enlisted the co-operation of the leaders of the profession. The units were established, and courses of instruction were instituted; so that in 1914, when the War broke out, the great hospitals came into being without trouble and the
sick and wounded were assured of the ministration of the cream of the medical profession throughout the land.

Another reform was the reorganization of the military hospitals at home. At the time he took over the office of Director-General every little depot station had its little hospital with a skeleton staff, in which cases of sickness occurring in the station, serious or slight, were supposed to be treated. These tiny hospitals were closed down, and all cases requiring hospital treatment were transported to the nearest well-equipped hospital, where they could obtain the nursing and attention they required.

A subject on which Keogh held strong and clear views was sanitation. His views did not at first meet with general acceptance, but they prevailed; in the end. He held that the real sanitary officer of a unit was the Commanding Officer not the Medical Officer. The preservation of the health of his men should be one of the main preoccupations of the Commanding Officer; the Medical Officer was there as an expert, to advise and to be consulted, but the ordinary rules of hygiene should be known to and enforced by all officers. For that reason it was necessary that they should all be instructed in these matters. Hence arose the School of Army Sanitation and the teaching the elements of Hygiene embodied in the Manual of Army Sanitation to all officers.

Shortly after laying down his office as Director-General he was appointed Rector of the Imperial College of Science and Technology. This was a congenial post as his interests in Science had always been deep and close, and he welcomed the opportunity of extending its practical application. What he valued highly was the personal association into which he was brought with leading scientists, and with the students being educated at the College for scientific careers. With his keen sympathy for youth he was always on the look out for measures which might enhance or ease the course of training.

When the War broke out it was felt that his services were required in the military sphere. The British Red Cross Society, mindful of the way he had always encouraged and helped them during his tenure at the War Office, appointed him their Chief Commissioner in France and there he remained until October, 1914, when he was recalled and reappointed Director-General, Army Medical Services, at the War Office.

There he was able to see the reorganization of the Military Medical Service, which he had carried through in his previous tenure, come to fruition. The great machine started and worked without a hitch. There was complete and loyal co-operation between the civil and military sides. All had been made to understand and laboured sympathetically to a common end. And so, with his hand on the lever, the machine continued to work until the close.

A great triumph, which was universally acknowledged. At the conclusion of the War all vied to do him honour.

At home he was made G.C.B. (the first Army Medical Officer to be given
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that honour), G.C.V.O. and Companion of Honour; France made him Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour; Belgium Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown; Servia Grand Officer of the Crown, White Eagle; the Universities of Oxford, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Leeds gave him honorary degrees; the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of England, Edinburgh and Dublin gave their Honorary Fellowships; and thus amidst a chorus of appreciation he returned to his work at the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

As a man he was entirely likeable. Quiet, kindly and sympathetic in manner, no trouble was too great for him to help a friend or anyone who applied to him for advice or assistance.

He possessed in a high degree the faculty of clear exposition and admired it greatly in others. He has told how, at times when working in London, he would steal off to the Law Courts to listen to some leading barrister presenting his case. A very distinguished retired official who did some work for him during the War once said of him: "In a long official career I have served many masters; but two stand out pre-eminently. Each had the power of stating lucidly not only what he wanted done but also of indicating categorically how he wanted it done. There was never any ambiguity. One was Lord Curzon of Kedleston and the other Sir Alfred Keogh."

A hard worker himself Keogh expected hard work of those under him but he never failed to acknowledge such work with a kindly smile or a few words of appreciation, and took care that the credit went to the doer. Amongst those who worked under him Keogh inspired feelings of intense loyalty and often of affection.

His work is done but his memory will long remain green amongst those who knew him.

Appreciation.

Director-General, Army Medical Services.

Although Sir Alfred Keogh was personally unknown to the majority of serving officers of the Corps, the striking tributes paid to his memory in the Press have been, I feel sure, a source of much gratification to all its past and present members.

Until the last couple of years of his life my acquaintanceship with him was limited to a single meeting in the South African War when I took a convoy of sick and wounded to the General Hospital which he commanded at Pretoria and when as a subaltern I was much impressed by the courtesy and hospitality which he showed me. I had since heard so much about him from officers who knew him well that I had come to regard him as one of the most outstanding officers of our Service.

When, some two years ago, I heard that he had returned to London
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(he had been living abroad) I called on him, a very simple act of courtesy from a Director-General to the greatest of his predecessors. He was frankly pleased, and such was the modesty of the man that he seemed surprised to learn that his services were still remembered and appreciated. He invited me to visit him frequently and this invitation I took full advantage of, sometimes in order to seek his advice which he gladly gave. I shall always entertain the happiest recollections of these visits. Seated on a chair with a rug over his knees, he would recount his experiences during the two periods in which he was Director-General—probably two of the most important periods in the history of the British Army as they were assuredly the most important in the history of the R.A.M.C.

The transfer of the College from Netley to Millbank; the organization of the Territorial Army Medical Service; the establishment of the School of Hygiene; the development of the clinical and scientific side of the Corps; liaison with the civil profession; his interview with Lord Kitchener before returning to the War Office for the second time—these were some of the topics which he related to me and which I found of absorbing interest. I invariably came away from these visits with the feeling that I had been in the presence of a great man.

He retained the keenest interest in the Corps to the end; in fact, when speaking of it, he was inclined to forget he was an invalid (he was prone to anginal attacks) and allowed himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm. Before returning to take up the duties of Director-General during the War he asked for, and was accorded, exceptional powers, without which he could not have carried out that stupendous task.

It is well known that his position at the War Office was somewhat unique. With Mr. Haldane (afterwards Lord Haldane) he was on terms of close intimacy. Their outlook and ideas had much in common and he always expressed the warmest regard and affection for that great statesman. With Lord Kitchener too he worked in the greatest harmony.

The sympathy of the whole Corps will go out to Lady Keogh and her family at the irreparable loss they have suffered and the nation in general, and we of his Service in particular may feel grateful that at the time of our greatest trial the post of Director-General was held by the officer who was so pre-eminently qualified to fill it.