My most vivid memory of my father is of a small, frail figure sitting in his armchair by the fire, with his white head bent over proofs—for ever working on his beloved Journal. He became Editor of the R.A.M.C. Journal in 1908 and was actually preparing an editorial on the day of his death, 26th January, 1941; it must surely be something of a record for one man to have edited a Service Journal continuously for thirty-two years. For him it was a labour of love, because this was the tenuous link which kept him in touch with the Corps he loved, right up to the end of his life.

If home life has any influence on children, then my sister and I were indeed fortunate, because we were brought up in a thoroughly happy atmosphere, for my father and mother were a most devoted couple. Her death, caused largely by a strained heart which she acquired through helping to carry heavy patients in the local hospital during the First World War, was a grievous blow to him. Fortunately my sister remained at home and looked after him devotedly throughout the remainder of his life.

Even as a youngster I acquired a great respect for my father’s judgment, and I now realize that he had one of the clearest brains of any man I have ever met. His advice invariably turned out, in the long run, to have been correct, and I only wish that I had had the sense to take it more often.
The memories he has left with us are always of courage and patience and a high standard of integrity. His philosophy of life was a simple one. Once convinced of the right course to be pursued, nothing would cause him to swerve from it, whatever the effect on him personally. In the course of his research and scientific work he was often forced to take unpopular measures, but, since his ultimate goal was the welfare of the troops, no consideration of any sort was allowed to interfere. Popularity meant nothing to him. He met the limitations of old age and ill health with the same courage and patience, and as one active hobby after another was taken away from him he made no complaint but looked for something to take its place.

When World War II caught up with him, now an old man, he faithfully studied A.R.P. regulations and carried them out with meticulous care for the safeguard of his family. He constructed a scientifically perfect air raid shelter in the garden, but, needless to say, once construction was finished, never went near it and refused to leave his bed in those first air raids, reading quietly, undisturbed. So we remember him, courageous and patient to the end.

He was educated at Owens College, Manchester, whence he matriculated at the age of fifteen and took his B.Sc. After graduating in medicine, he took his M.B. in London in 1883. For a time he was a resident at the Brompton Hospital for chest diseases, and then went to the Guildford Hospital. It was here that he started riding, which was to be one of his chief hobbies for the rest of his life. In his later years he would often talk of the long pleasant hacks over the downs and Newlands Corner, and this was the picture of England which he always carried in his mind during his periods of service abroad. At this time he was all set for the life of a civilian practitioner, but a chance conversation with a patient turned his attention to the Army, and he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, a step which he never once regretted.

As I am no scientist it is difficult for me to comment on my father’s long and distinguished career in the Army, for though he started as a surgeon, passing out of Netley as a Surgeon Captain on 5th February, 1887, he gradually turned more and more to research and the scientific side, and in 1897 was appointed Assistant Professor of Hygiene to the Army Medical School at Netley. Then came one of the most important periods in his life, when he was posted to Gibraltar. We lived in a quarter called Paradise Cottage, hunted regularly with the Calpe Hounds, and he applied all his energies and research to the health conditions on the Rock. My only memory of his experiments is of the monkeys obediently turning their posteriors to the bars of their cages in order to have their temperatures taken. Then came Malta and the battle against Malta fever. This is history now, but we carry in our minds the picture of my father sweating night and day in the sticky heat of Malta, and the final crowning success of the discovery of the germ in the goats’ milk. As a result, the scourge of this dread disease has been almost entirely eliminated from our Mediterranean garrisons ever since.

Space will not permit me to mention my father’s publications, nor am I competent to do so, but they were many and varied. While Assistant Professor
of Hygiene, he published his “Introduction to the Bacteriological Examination of Water,” for long the standard work on the subject. He edited with Colonel Firth “Parkes’ Theory and Practice of Hygiene” and the second edition of Notter and Firth.

In 1914 he became a King’s Honorary Surgeon, and in 1915 was awarded the Chadwick Gold Medal and prize of £50.

It was, however, during the 1914-18 war that the supreme test was to come. For as a member of the Army Medical Advisory Board, member of the Army Sanitary Committee and Chairman of the Anti-Gas Committee, his activities covered a wide field, but to the layman his work can be summed up in two words, “Water” and “Gas.” There is no doubt that thousands of lives must have been saved by his mobile water sterilizers, the mobile hygiene laboratories, by the water-carts in which he was responsible for many alterations, and, above all, by the “Test case for Water Supplies,” which, incredible though it may seem, is still in use today, and is known as the “Horrocks Box.” I shall never forget my embarrassment when, as a young officer attending a course at the School of Hygiene, I heard the N.C.O. saying to a large squad: “This ’ere is known as the ’Orrox’s box, invented by Lord ’Orrox, the father of that young gentleman over there.” It was some time before I succeeded in persuading my fellow students that Colonel Sir William Horrocks, K.C.M.G., C.B., was not a member of the Upper House.

My father was the most modest and retiring of men, and it was extraordinarily difficult to get him to talk about his work, but his greatest contribution to the war was undoubtedly made as Chairman of the Anti-Gas Committee. The story of the constant fight to provide adequate protection for our troops against the new types of gas which kept on appearing is an epic in itself. What pictures that word “Gas” conjures up in my mind! Instead of the stands of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club echoing to the roar of the North London football fans, they reverberated to the clicking of endless sewing machines, for it was here that thousands of girls constructed the British gas masks. Though the stands were roofed in and enclosed to provide a measure of protection against the weather, these young women would have worked in a snow-storm if necessary in order to provide the anti-gas protection for their boys overseas. My father ended the war with a profound admiration for the spirit of the women of Britain.

From time to time new formulæ would appear on his desk. Whence these came he had no idea, but they indicated that a new form of gas was likely to be used against us. The antidote had to be found, and on one occasion the formula was accompanied by a request that sufficient gas helmets to protect the front-line troops and artillery should be available in France by a certain date. All went well until it was discovered that the material was not sufficiently robust to stand up to the chemicals which had to be used to keep out this new gas. As time was getting desperately short, it was impossible to go through the usual War Office channels in order to obtain materials of the required strength. So my father took his own counsel and lorries were dispatched round all the towns in England to buy every available yard of a particular cloth. Even so, the helmets were forty-eight hours,
late in arriving, and it was during this period that his hair went quite white. He hardly slept at all, and every few hours went down to Hungerford Bridge to feel the direction of the wind. Luckily, during this vital period it never changed, and the Germans were unable to launch their gas until after the helmets had arrived. Unknown to the front line troops, this battle on the scientific front continued throughout the war, and it was my father's proud boast that as far as gas was concerned the defence was always one jump ahead of the attack.

There was one other activity which caused my father much worry during these war years, namely, the soldiers' rations. In view of the submarine warfare, efforts were always being made to reduce the ration, and so save shipping. He fought hard and, on the whole, successfully to ensure that the food allocated to the Army did not fall below what he considered to be the minimum calorific value.

Those war years were terribly exhausting, and I think he may be said to have earned his decorations, K.C.M.G., C.B., and two mentions in despatches. His final appointment before retirement could hardly have been more suitable, for in 1919 he became the first Director of Hygiene at the War Office.

When the time came for him to retire, he was glad to withdraw into the peaceful backwater provided by the Journal, his garden, and his books, for the war had sapped his strength. Nevertheless, in spite of much ill health, he had a happy and contented old age, looked after by his daughter Jean. I cannot do better than end with this short extract from his obituary notice, which was written by Brigadier Cowell in the British Medical Journal:

"Sir William was a great man, with a wide outlook, and an untiring devotion to detail. He retained his interest in the Journal of the R.A.M.C. until the end, being entirely responsible for the editing of all the articles since the beginning of the 1914-18 war. He was a little, frail, sweet-tempered gentleman, old in years, but young in mind, living in the country, but in touch with the office of his beloved Journal at the War Office.

"Sir William has achieved the happiest of endings, dying in harness."