

OBITUARY

JOHN WILLIAM SCHARFF.

B.A., M.B., B.A.O., B.Ch., D.P.H., M.D.,
D.T.M.&H. (London).

Dr J. W. Scharff, former Chief Health Officer, Singapore, died in London on 21st March, 1964, after an illness of 3 months. With his death Malaya has lost one of her greatest malariologists as well as one of her most outstanding health officers, who, more than any other anti-malarial worker, after Sir Malcolm Watson, was responsible for the country's freedom from malaria.

Born in Dublin in May, 1895, he was the son of Dr. R. F. Scharff, B.Sc., Ph.D., F.Z.S., Curator of Dublin Museum, and Alice Hutton. After his early schooling in County Wicklow, he graduated in biology in 1912 and, a year later, entered Trinity College, Dublin. His medical studies were, however, interrupted by the 1914-18 War when he served as Surgeon Probationer from 1915-17 in the Royal Naval Reserve and took part in the famous Battle of Jutland. Graduating B.A., M.B., B.A.O., B.Ch., in 1918, he became Assistant Pathology lecturer in T.C.D., and in July of the following year he qualified D.P.H., M.D., D.T.M.&H. (London); a month later, he came to Malaya to work in a rubber estate in Malacca as assistant to Dr. Malcolm Rattery.

In 1920, he entered the Colonial Medical Service as Asst. Health Officer to Dr. Gilbert Brooke under whom he served for 5 years until 1925, when he returned home to marry Kathleen Esther Burn, the daughter of Sir Joseph and Lady Burn. From then on until the fall of Singapore in February, 1942, Dr. Scharff devoted himself to the eradication of malaria and the improvement of health in the states to which he was posted, viz. Malacca, Trengganu, Penang and Singapore where, in addition to his substantive post as C.H.O. of the whole island, he lectured in Public Health in the K.E. VII College of Medicine. During the thirties he organised anti-malarial courses under the auspices of the League of Nations, which became so internationally famous that



Health Officers and Malariologists from all parts of the world came to attend. To keep abreast of the latest developments in malarial prevention and public health, he travelled extensively to various parts of the United States, Europe and the Far East, and he also wrote on many aspects of his field of study and made many original contributions to medical and health journals.

During 1942 — 1945, Dr. Scharff served in the R.A.M.C. with the rank of colonel, returning to Malaya in 1945 as Malaria Adviser to the Army. In 1946 he retired from the Colonial Medical Service and returned to the United Kingdom where he worked on Soil Fertility until 1959 when he made his second return to Malaya to serve as Medical Officer of Health in Cameron Highland which post he relinquished in early 1962.

Completely dedicated to his work, Dr. Scharff was, par excellence, the ideal Health Officer who did not spare himself in order to achieve his main object — the betterment of people's health; and this he achieved aided by his boundless energy, unflagging enthusiasm and complete understanding of his work. He was interested in all aspects of health work but his forte was the prevention of malaria, the problem which called forth from his fertile mind many original ideas and inventions.

Everyone conversant with the history of public health in Malaya will readily agree that the present good health of this country is due, in no small measure, to the untiring efforts of Dr. Scharff and the wonderful tradition of public health which, by precept and example, he has handed down to his successors, subordinates and students.

In the course of his work, he came across all strata of the populace and everyone, who had the good fortune to know him, benefitted by his encouragement, kindness and generosity. No one genuinely in need of help, who approached him, was ever turned away; and

if there was one trait which endeared him to all who worked under him, it was his happy knack of remembering the names of all his subordinates, whether health officers, inspectors, overseers, or the lowliest of labourers in whose welfare he took the keenest interest.

Dr. Scharff was eminent in that long list of Colonial servants whose lives and work have so enriched Malaysia, and to his widow and seven children, we extend our deepest sympathy.

O.E.K.
