

Gordon, John (1870-1939)

John Gordon was born in Carlton, Melbourne, the son of Mr. John Gordon, a building contractor. His early education was at King's College in East Melbourne, with medical education at the University of Melbourne, graduating with honours MB in 1891 and BS in 1892. He won the exhibition in pathology and was placed second in his year. He was prominent as one of the twelve resident medical officers at the Melbourne Hospital after graduation and gained further experience by visiting England, where he succeeded in obtaining the diplomas of Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1894. He gained Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1895.

On return to Melbourne he qualified MD 1899, MS 1903 and was elected surgeon to out-patients at the Melbourne Hospital in 1903, and surgeon to in-patients 1911. In May 1907, he married Miss Ada Waters, who proved a loyal and devoted and cheerful wife through the long years of suffering.

Dr. R. H. Fetherston writes:

"In August 1914, when war was declared, Gordon was one of the younger surgeons on the staff of the Melbourne Hospital. He volunteered at once. Because of his surgical knowledge, his general health and active disposition he was attached as surgeon to the First Casualty Clearing Station, and sailed in 1914 in the Kyarra, landing with the unit directly after "the landing" on Gallipoli. He remained there until the evacuation. At times the casualty clearing station practically became a hospital, the only Australian unit of its kind on Gallipoli. Gordon did fine work, but the stress and strain, together with infected food, told its tale. Like many others, he received a vital blow, not from shot and shell, though always under fire, but from a rheumatoid infection, which crippled and finally killed him, one of the forms of rheumatic infection which affected his heart and muscles, later attacking his hands and joints. When I saw him on Anzac, towards the end of 1915, his heart was giving trouble, and he could only get about slowly. I saw he was unfit and wanted him to return with me, offering to find him a suitable position where he could be properly cared for; but "no", he begged me not to mention his condition. He wanted to see either the final advance or the evacuation then being talked of.

By the time he got away and got to London—even London was no place for him—he was worse, but would not give up. He was posted to a hospital for crippled men and men being fitted with artificial limbs. It was a difficult unit to handle; but he was one of the medical officers for whom the men would do as they were told.

Gordon took up work on return to Australia, both in practice and at the Melbourne Hospital, but was not fit for either. His deformed hands soon forced his resignation from full indoor surgeon to the hospital. The disease progressed until he was finally bedridden and unable to help himself. He never complained, making the best of everything, not wanting anything said about his work or his suffering. He wanted no one to fuss about him, refused to have nurses,

being satisfied that his wife could do everything for him that he wanted, and do it better than anyone else. He was probably right, for few permanently incapacitated men are so fortunate as to receive the devoted care and ceaseless attention that Gordon had bestowed upon him.

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For a number of years, he acted as surgeon to the Limbless Soldiers' Association and retained this position until shortly before he died. The limbless soldiers were pets of his; ill as he was, he would attend them and their wives and families and secured for them all kinds of special benefits.

Honest in his mind and in all his dealings, there was about John Gordon a complete absence of all humbug and pretence. It was characteristic of him that he died as he lived, thinking of the welfare of others, and he specially directed that there should be no funeral pomp and no mention of distinctions or honours in the death notice- just plain Dr. John Gordon.

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Sources: RCS: E005592 Plarr's Lives of the Fellows; *Med J Austral* 1939, 1, 486. The Age, 20/1/39, p.4.

Draft compiled by Allan Mawdsley.

