

THE
JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE

[*Published by Authority of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association.*]

No. 352 [NEW SERIES
Nos. 316-17.] SEPTEMBER, 1938. VOL. LXXXIV

SIR JAMES CRICHTON-BROWNE.

It is with deep regret that we have to record the death of Sir James Crichton-Browne, the oldest, and one of the most respected members of the Association.

He was born in Edinburgh in 1840; his father, Dr. W. A. F. Browne, a psychiatrist of distinction, was the first Medical Superintendent of the Crichton Royal Institution, Dumfries, and later became a Commissioner of Lunacy in Scotland; his Mother was a woman of a scholarly type of mind who was deeply interested in the highest form of literature.

Sir James was educated at the Academy, Dumfries, and graduated M.D.(Hon.) at Edinburgh University in 1862. It would appear that his interest in matters psychiatric declared itself at an early date, seeing that while still a medical student he read a paper entitled "Psychical Diseases in Early Life" before the Royal Medical Society. He acted as Assistant Medical Officer in various county mental hospitals (Derby, Devon, Warwick), and in 1865, only three years after graduation, was appointed Medical Superintendent of Newcastle City Asylum. Later he became Medical Director of the West Riding Asylum at Wakefield, and it was here that he initiated a great field of research work, pathological and clinical. His strong personality impressed itself on everyone and expressed itself in everything at Wakefield. He established here the first pathological laboratory in England attached to a mental hospital, and inspired a great deal of good work. In fact at that time Wakefield was the most important neurological centre in England, for it was here that Ferrier, following Fritsch and Hitzig, did much of his earlier work in connection with cerebral localization.

In 1871 Sir James conceived the idea of a special journal dealing with psychiatry, and from Wakefield published an annual journal entitled *The West Riding Asylum Reports* in order to "give stimulus to the arrangement and

elaboration of material . . . hitherto buried in the casebooks". A glance through these volumes is sufficient for one to realize their great value, and the names of some of the contributors—Ferrier, Hughlings Jackson, Clifford Allbutt, Sutherland, Milner Fothergill, William Turner, Carpenter and Bevan Lewis—are more than sufficient to convince anyone of the high position that Wakefield held under his guidance, in the neuro-psychiatric world of that day, a position which, it may be added, has been well maintained under his successors.

Sir James joined what was then called the "*Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals of the Insane*" in 1863, the year in which Dr. Skae of Morningside was President. He soon distinguished himself in its councils, and in 1878 he was made President of what had by then become the "*Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland*".

In 1875 he was appointed Lord Chancellor's Visitor, to the great satisfaction of all interested in psychiatry, and a few years later he collaborated with Bucknill, Ferrier and Hughlings Jackson in establishing the new journal called *Brain*, to the first number of which he contributed an article "*On the Weight of the Brain and its Component Parts in the Insane*".

His mental activity was amazing and marked by its variety; he was a Vice-President of the Royal Institution, President of the Neurological Society and the Medical Society of London, a Fellow of the Royal Society (1883), and he received degrees, *honoris causa*, from various Universities. As to his skill in light literature and keenness of humour one only has to read some of his later works, such as *Victorian Jottings*, *Stray Leaves from a Physician's Portfolio*, *What the Doctor Thought*, etc., which are a never-failing joy. No one who was present at the Royal Medico-Psychological dinner given in his honour on his ninety-second birthday could fail to be impressed by his outstanding personality, his amazing vigour and his mental alertness, and his speech in response to the toast of his health was perhaps the finest and one of the most beautifully balanced after-dinner speeches that any man ever made—all in exactly the right manner and tone, and delivered without a single note.

A great admirer of Carlyle, one of his favourite quotations was this, which well describes his own attitude to life:

"For does not health mean harmony, the synonym of all that is true, justly ordered, good: is it not, in some sense, the net-total, as shewn by experiment, of whatever worth is in us? The healthy man is the most meritorious product of Nature, so far as he goes. A healthy body is good; but a soul in right health—it is a thing beyond all others to be prayed for; the blessedest thing this earth receives of heaven."

J. R. WHITWELL.