

JAMES CHAMBERS.

THE quiet passing of Dr. James Chambers, at his home of recent years near the scene of his chief life work, The Priory, Roehampton, brought no surprise to most of his many friends, who mingled with their sorrow for his loss, and their sympathy with his widow and family, a feeling of thankfulness that his useful and valuable life had so peaceful a close, after a long period of failing health.

James Chambers came of the sturdy and capable Ulster stock, and was the second son of the late John Chambers of Ballymaguire in co. Tyrone. Born on August 16, 1858, he received his early education at Moneymore Intermediate School, and later at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, from which he entered the Queen's College, Belfast (at that time one of the constituent colleges of the old Queen's University of Ireland), being placed first amongst the entrance Scholars. In his "Arts" course there, he held a succession of scholarships, and also the Dunville Studentship, then considered the academic "Blue Riband" of the College, and won the gold medal of his year in experimental science. As regards University as distinguished from College distinctions, his record was equally brilliant, including the first Medical Exhibition of the new Royal University.

After graduating in Arts and Medicine in 1882 in the Royal University of Ireland, he was appointed Demonstrator and Lecturer in Anatomy in the Belfast Medical School. He proved an excellent and helpful teacher, ready to assist everyone, and able to hold the attention and gain the respect of his pupils and to maintain discipline by dint of efficiency and kindly understanding. Some of his confrères thought that he would take up general medicine with a view to becoming a consultant, but psychiatry seemed to appeal to him, and to gain some first-hand knowledge of that subject he became assistant to the late Dr. John Eustace in 1885 at the latter's private mental hospitals near Dublin. After over a year there, finding that his interest in the study of mental disorders persisted, he obtained the appointment of Assistant Medical Officer, first at Montrose Royal Asylum, and then at the Cumberland and Westmorland Asylum, Carlisle; and finally, in 1891, he became Medical Superintendent of The Priory, Roehampton, with which he remained connected for the rest of his life, though for the last few years he had ceased to reside in the institution and only retained a consultative connection with it.

In adopting what at first sight would seem a more restricted field of work, however, Chambers did not cease to avail himself of other opportunities of gaining experience; for instance, his friend Dr. Edwin Goodall writes that they first met in the course of the "rounds" at Bethlem, and that later Chambers visited the West Riding Asylum, Wakefield, feeling "the urge to get an insight into some of the scientific aspects of psychiatry", and "drawn

by the pathological work of Bevan Lewis". Like everyone who came in intimate contact with Chambers, Dr. Goodall succumbed to the charm of the man, and writes that "he had most lovable qualities, with unusual knowledge

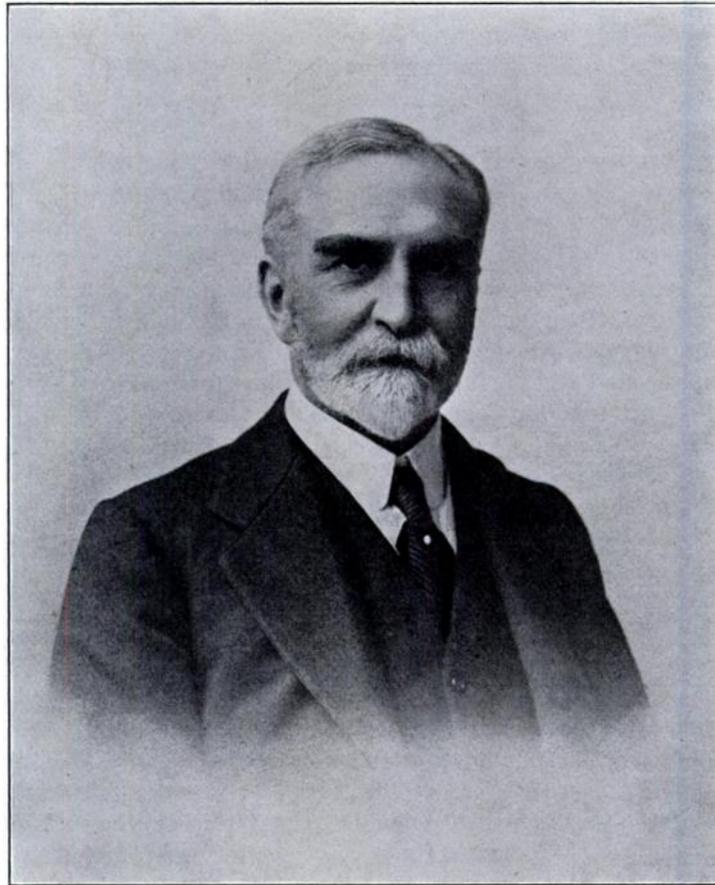


Photo : Stuart, Richmond.]

JAMES CHAMBERS, M.A., M.D.

of human nature and wonderful tact. A modest, self-effacing man ; shrewd and observant ; withal, a sound man to take counsel with. He was trusted by all ; regarded with affection by all. He had the charm and humour which one looks for and expects in the land of his birth. He could not have chosen a profession, nor a branch of that profession, better suited to his attractive, sympathetic nature."

His work at The Priory, however, always took first place in his affections and his thoughts, and as an even older friend, Dr. J. J. Redfern, writes, "he was indeed the father and wise counsellor of his large family of patients". "What perhaps struck one most about Chambers," he continues, "was his genial nature which, without any surrender of his principles, so combined the iron hand with the velvet glove that the former was never obtrusive." "He had an unusually open and unbiased mind, and was never known to say an unkind word of anyone." "As a consultant when dealing with patients he never looked on them only as patients, but as friends in need of help."

"Though thoroughly accepting modern progress in psychology, and conversant with the newer work in research, he adhered to the view of treating disease from the material point of view, laying special stress on the treatment of the patient as a whole, body and mind together and inseparable."

"Socially," Dr. Redfern adds, "he was just delightful, full of charm and loyalty to his friends," and elsewhere he calls him "a shrewd Ulsterman with a rich vein of humour."

As a medium of combined acquisition of knowledge and social enjoyment, Chambers, as might have been expected, took full advantage of the facilities provided by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, which he joined as far back as 1882, and in the work of which he took an increasing part as time went on, becoming Assistant Editor of the *Journal of Mental Science* in 1900, and Co-Editor in 1905, which latter position he held until 1914. He became President in 1913, and at the annual meeting in London at which he took up office, his Presidential Address on "The Prevention of the Insanities" included a carefully thought-out discussion of the old controversy between Vitalism and Mechanism, written with what the late Dr. Mercier, who proposed the vote of thanks, described as a "very charming literary flavour". In this he took the standpoint of Hobhouse that "the complete answer to the Why? that eternally confronts us is only obtained when we admit a teleological impulse working through mechanical conditions", and proceeded to develop at length a chain of argument which he very briefly summed up at the conclusion as indicating "that man's life should be filled with hopeful purpose; that belief in the transmission of certain acquired characters throws open a vista of possibilities and requires the admission of imperative responsibility; and that in attempting the better prevention of the insanities no sanguine hopes must be indulged in of finding some simple formula for social regeneration, some legislative panacea for the mental ills of mankind, or some master-key that may unlock the many portals that guard the mysteries of life, death and disease. The task set is to pursue, without haste or rest, complete investigation of the many factors involved; to consider how, avoiding mischievous interference, harmonious correlation of the multitudinous forces at play and interplay around us can best be promoted. A giant task! But even in dull performance of elementary duties we participate in the co-ordination of the

agencies carrying forward the race, whose better security from failure lies in pressing on with directed effort towards the accomplishment of our purpose."

"If," he said, "in pursuit of some attractive scheme we are tempted to forget the present sufferer from mental disability and his needs, it must be remembered that for him also the best hope lies in urging the need for personal effort as far as possible; and failing result, in devoted care of the hopeless case."

That such were the principles underlying Chambers's own treatment of his patients (whether at The Priory, which, already known as a reliable institution, had by this time attained to the first rank of private mental hospitals, or in his large and growing consulting practice) had long been widely known, and the repute in which he was held in the London medical world was indicated by his appointment as Lecturer on Mental Disease at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, a position which he held for a number of years.

The Royal Medico-Psychological Association testified their opinion of his business capacity by electing him Hon. Treasurer during the years 1917 to 1931.

During the War he acted as Consultant in Mental Disease to the London Military Hospitals, and was also physician to the Special Hospital for Officers at Latchmere House, Ham Common.

As regards his personal endowments, it may be added to what has been already said, that (in the words of his kinsman, Sir Robert S. Woods) he brought to his professional work "the highest qualities of intellect and character, kindness, courtesy, deep sympathy and understanding, a remarkable insight into the mental processes of others and withal an endless patience with the mental sufferer, whilst his scrupulous uprightness inspired confidence in his patients and their friends, and drew respect and affection from a large staff of workers". (One of the Priory staff since Chambers's passing expressed their feeling by saying that at the Priory they had all been a happy family.) Sir Robert adds that Chambers "found perhaps his keenest pleasure in holding out a helping hand to younger medical men", and as a friend of over forty years' standing the writer believes this to be true.

Although Chambers was not given to talk much on religious matters, his whole life and conduct testified to a deep religious faith as the basis of his character, and as Sir Robert Woods wrote, "it never failed him, in the strain and anxiety of his professional work or in the years of physical weakness which followed his retirement". A friend who saw him shortly before his death wrote of him that "the peace of God was in his looks", and adds, "This indeed was the secret of his whole life". Canon J. W. Browne, his friend, and former Chaplain to the Priory, testifies that "his religion was real" and "lay hidden deeply in God", though "he was not emotional or demonstrative,—partly, I think, because he dreaded superficiality and make-believe"; and this in the present writer's opinion is true. Canon Browne speaks of the impression

made by Dr. Chambers's "rectitude"—i.e., "his loyalty to what he believed to be right and true" in all his dealings with others, and says that his care of his patients was full of tenderness. He sums up his appreciation of him as "a truly great and good man".

As regards his family life, in 1893 he married Evelyn, daughter of Mr. Sharon Turner, who survives him after being for forty-five years his constant companion and indispensable helper in all his work at the Priory, so far as allowed by the cares of a family, of whom two sons and three daughters survive. The younger son follows his father's profession, though not his speciality.

For some years past Dr. Chambers's health had been failing, so that it became necessary for him to retire from practice and the management of the institution; but he continued to interest himself in the latter, and to attend the business meetings occasionally until comparatively recently. Despite growing infirmity, however, he maintained his interest in his friends and in current events, and also his courage and cheerfulness. On May 31 he was downstairs as usual, but during the following week pneumonia developed, and he passed away quietly in his sleep on Tuesday, June 7, in his eightieth year—a fitting ending to a well-spent life.

W. R. DAWSON.