

Sir James Crichton-Browne, M.D., LL.D., D.Sc., F.R.S.

ON January 31, 1938, Sir James Crichton-Browne died a few months after his 97th birthday. In him the Royal Society of Edinburgh lost its oldest Fellow, for he was elected in 1870. He held a similar distinction in the Royal Society, to which he was elected in 1883.

His father, Dr W. A. F. Browne, who was the first Medical Superintendent of the Crichton Royal Mental Hospital at Dumfries, was largely responsible for the high standard of care and treatment of the insane for which this institution has since been famous; later he became Commissioner in Lunacy in Scotland. It was therefore not surprising that after qualifying in medicine in Edinburgh University at the age of 22, his son decided to devote himself to the study of mental disorders. After serving in junior posts in various county mental hospitals he was appointed in 1866 Medical Superintendent of the West Riding Asylum at Wakefield, a post he held until 1875. It was here his most valuable researches and pioneering work were done. On obtaining the independence and the opportunities for study which his new post gave him, Crichton-Browne at once attempted to initiate an investigation of mental disease on a scale which had not been previously adopted in this country.

As facilities for the publication of papers on neurological and psychiatric subjects were then very limited, Crichton-Browne also instituted, in 1871, the West Riding Asylum Reports, in which there appeared under his own direction and that of his successors several valuable contributions to this branch of medicine from both members of his staff and from others who were interested in his venture, as Ferrier, Hughlings Jackson, Clifford Allbutt, William Turner the anatomist, and others. As a result of these activities the Wakefield Asylum became a recognised centre for the study of the brain and its disorders; and though its superintendent was unable, owing to his official duties, to devote much time to original investigation, his enthusiasm and critical mind stimulated and guided the work which was undertaken in the wards and laboratories of the Hospital.

In 1875 he was appointed Lord Chancellor's Visitor in Lunacy, and he was compelled to move to London. His new post gave him little opportunity for study or research, but his interests remained unabated. He was responsible, in conjunction with Hughlings Jackson and David Ferrier, for the foundation in 1878 of the neurological journal *Brain*,

and he was for a time co-editor of it. The most noteworthy of his own contributions to it was on "The Nature and Cortical Localisation of Muscle Sense," which revealed his power of accurate observation. He soon became a member of the Royal Institution, of which he was for many years Treasurer, and later a Vice-President; here he had opportunities of keeping in contact with various branches of scientific work; in fact, the affairs of the Institution were for long his chief interest outside his professional life.

His post as Visitor in Lunacy enabled him to emphasise his views on the importance of the early treatment of mental disorders, but he had to recognise the inadequate responses to his efforts from both official circles and from the medical profession; in this matter he was before his time. In 1884 he presented an important report on the influence of primary education on mental health and development and on the effect of overwork in the elementary schools, which at that time attracted considerable attention, and was printed for circulation by order of the House of Commons.

Crichton-Browne was an eloquent and a popular lecturer, and until recent years spoke frequently before various audiences on psychology and allied medical subjects, especially in their social relations. To later generations he was known chiefly as a gifted orator, and he was particularly famous as an after-dinner speaker. He published several volumes of reminiscences under the title *Leaves from a Doctor's Diary*, which attained considerable popularity. Till his end he retained his activity of mind and body, and to many of his friends he seemed to possess the secret of perpetual youth.

Crichton-Browne was knighted in 1886; he received the honorary degree of D.Sc. from the University of Leeds, and that of the LL.D. from Aberdeen and Edinburgh. He was in succession President of the Royal Medical-Psychological Association, of the Neurological Society, and of the Medical Society of London.

By his first wife, a daughter of Dr J. Halliday of Seacombe, he had a daughter who survived him and a son whose death preceded his own by only a few months. In 1912 he married a daughter of General Sir E. G. Bulmer, who survives him.

(Condensed from the *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, vol. ii, 1936-38, pp. 519-521, by permission.)