

OBITUARY.

RICHARD ROBERT LEEPER.

ALMOST two hundred years ago, on August 16, 1742, a writ, *De lunatico inquirendo* was issued directing certain persons that they should "diligently inquire whether the said Jonathan Swift be a person of unsound mind and memory and not capable of taking care of his person or fortune and if he be how long he hath been so." The writ was returned next day, and it stated that the Dean was of unsound mind, "and that he hath been so since the twentyeth day of May last past." The Dean had signed his will on May 3, 1740, and he died on October 16, 1745. On September 26, 1757, the first patients were admitted to the hospital, built in accordance with his will, which, in the original building, is still carrying out the Dean's charitable intentions. Perhaps no one in the history of St. Patrick's Hospital did so much for its improvement, or has taken such care of its inmates, as the late Medical Superintendent, Richard Robert Leeper, who held that office for forty-three years.

Leeper came from a stock long settled in Ireland, members of which had won distinction in medicine, in law, in letters and in the church. His father, Richard John Leeper, held important posts in the Poor Law Medical Service in Donegal, in Queen's County, and in County Wicklow. In Tinahely in that county, on December 6, 1864, Richard Robert Leeper was born, and there on December 28, when he was just three weeks old, his father died. It is probable that after her husband's death Mrs. Leeper came to live in Dublin, and in 1875, at the age of eleven years, Richard was entered as a dayboy at the Rathmines School. Charles William Benson, LL.D., the headmaster of the school, was at the time a notable figure in Dublin, and Rathmines School was responsible for the early education of many boys who afterwards distinguished themselves. Benson was a keen field naturalist, especially interested in birds, and it was from his influence and example that Leeper learned that love of nature study which was so characteristic of the rest of his life.

When he had finished the usual school course Leeper started the study of medicine in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and shortly after he became a student at the Meath Hospital. In 1884 he was admitted a Licentiate of the College; in 1886 a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and in 1890 a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. After he had qualified he was for a time Resident Surgeon at the Monkstown Hospital, and he took a trip as surgeon on the S.S. "Waroonga," in the service of the British and Indian Steam Navigation Company, but he was back in Dublin in 1885, when he was appointed one of the Demonstrators of Anatomy in the College of Surgeons, and later Resident Physician at the Hampstead and Highfield Private Asylum. His early interest in the study of mental disease is shown by his having taken the Certificate of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1888. In that year also he published in the *British Medical Journal* "Notes on Charcôt's Disease," and about the same time a pamphlet, on *Irish Private Asylums*. He did not, however, at once commence as a specialist, and after he left Hampstead he was elected Medical Officer of the Rathdrum Union Infirmary and Fever Hospital. There in the beautiful scenery of County Wicklow he built up a good practice, and he enjoyed to the full the pleasures of a country life. Of the gun and the rod he was always a devoted follower, and he prided himself on the skill of his sporting dogs. Of his dogs he was very fond, but it was characteristic of him that he never allowed them to usurp the place of his human friends. In his district his professional visits were mostly made on horseback, and excellent shooting and fishing were at his door. He was popular with all classes, and it seemed that there he would "ripen at his ease" as a country dispensary doctor.

This, however, was not to be. In 1898 the Governors of St. Patrick's Hospital had bought St. Edmundsbury, an estate near Lucan, with the view of using it as an annexe to the Hospital in James's Street, and to it Dr. John Molony was transferred as Medical Superintendent. In January, 1899, Molony's place at St.

Patrick's was filled by the appointment of Leeper. Three years later Molony resigned, and Leeper became Medical Superintendent of both divisions of the hospital, with full charge of the farm and lands.

It is not now easy to realize the change which has taken place in mental hospitals since Leeper was appointed at St. Patrick's forty-three years ago. There new buildings have been added, the whole house has been reconditioned, and now St. Patrick's is a first-class mental hospital, which need not fear any competition. In the nineteenth century there had been little change made in it. In all these improvements Leeper, assisted by his wife, was the leading spirit. He advised the Governors, and they with great wisdom followed his advice, or perhaps it would be more correct to say they approved the decisions which he made. While thus working for the structural betterment of the hospital, and directing with skill and success its large farm, he brought to the treatment of his patients all the latest knowledge in psychiatry. All his life he was a student, and his excellent memory enabled him to retain and to make use of his knowledge which he acquired. After the death of Connolly Norman in 1908, Leeper became the best known and most sought after specialist amongst the alienists in practice in Ireland. In 1931 his colleagues bore their testimony to his worth, and elected him President of the Medico-Psychological Association. His dignity and urbanity in the chair are still fresh in the memory of many of us.

Great as were Leeper's activities, and worthily as he used them in the discharge of the many duties of his important office, it is as a beloved friend that he will be best remembered by those who knew him. He seemed by nature to be particularly designed for friendship. He loved his fellow men, and he loved to be with them; to extend to them his unbounded hospitality, and to entertain them with tales, drawn largely from his own experience, by nature lore, of which he had an inexhaustible supply, or by relating the sayings and doings of the great Dean, whose life history he seemed to know as that of a personal friend. There was no more enjoyable way of spending a summer afternoon than by wandering through the farm or through the woods by the river at St. Edmundsbury, with Dick Leeper as a companion. He would point out the pools where the salmon lay, and where one might see the kingfisher leave his nest.

After a long illness and much suffering Richard Robert Leeper died on Lady Day, 1942. His devoted wife had died in 1934, and he is survived by their only child, now Mrs. Herbert S. McClelland.

"A very perfect friend.
And as he trod that day to God, so walked he from his birth,
In simpleness, in gentleness, in honour, and clean mirth."

T. PERCY C. KIRKPATRICK.

The news of the death of Richard Leeper will come as a sad blow to many, and especially to old and valued friends in the Association. Few members were more widely known; extremely few regarded with such genuine affection.

Leeper, who came of medical stock, was born in December, 1864, and had thus entered upon his seventy-eighth year. His father, who was in medical practice in Co. Wicklow, died at a comparatively early age, and for reasons of education much of his boyhood was spent in the home of his uncle, Rev. Canon Leeper, Rector of St. Audoen's, Dublin. He was educated at Dr. Benson's School, Rathmines, Dublin, where he had as a fellow pupil the late Dr. Rambaut. At the early age of sixteen Leeper entered upon his medical studies at the Royal College of Surgeons, obtaining the Licentiate of the College four years later, and in 1886, the Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians. In 1890 he proceeded to a Fellowship of the Irish Royal College of Surgeons.

His undergraduate career gave early promise of what was to follow. For two years he acted as Demonstrator in Anatomy under the celebrated Prof. Cunningham, and during his residence in the Meath Hospital he won the Surgical Prize of the Hospital, an award which had also been won by his father, and which, therefore, he treasured greatly. After qualification he took at least one voyage to India as Ship's Surgeon in the service of the British and Indian Steam Navigation Co., and to the end of his life he could paint vivid word pictures of scenes he had witnessed in Calcutta, Aden and elsewhere.

In 1888 Leeper obtained his first introduction to psychiatry on being appointed to the position of Resident Physician to the Hampstead and Highfield Private Mental Hospitals, which have been run with such conspicuous success by several generations of the Eustace family. This position he held for some three years, when he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and to embark on private practice in Co. Wicklow. Eight years later, however, psychiatry again called him, and in 1899 he entered upon what was to prove his life's work as Resident Medical Superintendent of St. Patrick's Hospital.

In his new post Leeper shouldered a task which would have daunted anyone not possessing his vitality and courage. The income of the hospital had sunk to a low level. Extensive and urgent repairs and redecoration were necessary, for which there were no funds. There was no trained staff and for a time he had to carry on without an assistant. Very soon, however, his energy and enthusiasm began to take effect. One after another of the more urgent problems of renovation were tackled. Nursing lectures for the Medico-Psychological Diploma were immediately instituted, and the increased reputation of the hospital soon provided funds to pay not only one but subsequently three assistants, and to enable him to make those additions and improvements which were to raise the hospital to the first rank of similar institutions, and to justify the title he often liked to give it as "The Bethlem of Ireland."

Many of the additions which Leeper made to the hospital showed vision and courage of a high order. About the year 1907 he built a spacious Villa for gentlemen patients in the lovely old demesne of the Branch Hospital at Lucan. The investment, made when funds could not have been too liberal, amply repaid the outlay. In 1916 he added male and female wings to the main hospital, and from then onwards, for the next twenty years, he carried out continuous improvements. Further male and female wings of a new architectural design, a dental and electro-therapeutic block, cinema theatre, extensions to the visiting rooms and pharmacy, remodelling of the offices and kitchens, re-roofing of farm buildings, installation of power plants, etc., were only the main items in a continuous programme.

In considering this achievement it should be kept in mind that apart from a very small endowment, St. Patrick's, which is a Registered Mental Hospital, founded by Royal Charter in 1745, depends entirely for its revenue from fees received from paying patients. Not only, however, were all these works financed from revenue, but, in addition, substantial sums were added to the invested stocks of the hospital.

What I have already said will have given some indication of the energy and drive which characterized Leeper as an administrator. He was only apparently quiescent when a new work was already in hand. As soon as it was completed his critical faculties suggested where additional improvement could be effected. Nothing, however, was done impulsively or hurriedly. As in all his work, he loved discussion and debate, and only when quite satisfied that the projected plan was absolutely right, and that the finances of the hospital could safely bear the strain, did he set the plan in motion. Never, I am quite sure, did he undertake anything from the motive of impressing anybody, Governors or visitors. His one criterion was—would it add to the value and efficiency of the hospital? If not, then nothing would induce him to undertake it. He had, in fact, a very vigorous contempt for any ill-thought-out scheme, no matter how distinguished the author.

In his relations with his staff few men, I should think, obtained greater loyalty or more wholehearted co-operation. He could never be described as a strict disciplinarian, and he believed in utilizing the individuality of every member of the staff to the greatest degree. He had a theory that if you cannot trust a man you should get rid of him, and that confidence, together with the appreciation and encouragement he gave so liberally, rarely let him down. A lazy or a fussy individual he could not tolerate, and he had a long memory for anyone who committed a serious error of judgment. The most junior member of the staff, however, who had anything interesting to report on the informal rounds he made so frequently could be sure of an attentive ear, and in this way he constantly surprised his medical officers by the extent and variety of his information—a surprise which afforded him no little satisfaction. One had, in fact, to keep thoroughly tuned up regarding the clinical histories of the patients to cope with this knowledge, but he was always equally pleased when you could counter his information with something more detailed that you yourself had discovered.

As a psychiatrist Leeper was eminently sound and practical. In dealing with relatives few men could get to the heart of a case more rapidly or by such seemingly disarming questions. He had a keen eye for the potentially impulsive patient, and an equally keen one for the patient whose property might be endangered by unscrupulous relatives. His intuition in the latter type of case was sometimes astonishing, and his experience, I should think, unique. With regard to treatment he held no narrow or extreme views, and the essentials he aimed at were a careful history and physical examination, rest, restoration of the bodily health by every means, recreation and amusement and later occupational therapy. When in doubt he availed himself liberally of the advice of consulting physicians, surgeons and gynaecologists.

Perhaps, however, Leeper's greatest claim to fame as a psychiatrist lay in his use of suggestion. His buoyant personality and fund of anecdote and story were in themselves suggestion of a powerful order. In his wide reading and manifold interests he had grounds in common with almost every patient, but he constantly added touches which were of a purely personal nature. A Sunday morning round, for example, might end up in his own house, where for several hours he would show a selected group of patients the various treasures of Swift he had collected, or his sets of duelling pistols, or curios of old Dublin. Throughout the spring and summer months it was a common sight to see his car "filled to capacity" with convalescent patients on a visit to the Branch Hospital at Lucan. Here he would display the gardens, or give the history of the old manor house, or perhaps fix up a rod and let them see his skill on the river. The party might arrive back at any hour up to near midnight, and those who had been on similar excursions never refused the invitation.

Early administrative problems gave Leeper little scope for writing, but he published a number of very practical papers on various clinical aspects of mental disease. As was the fashion in the beginning of the present century he took a keen interest in the pathological histology of the brain, and he had a useful collection of excellently stained slides. At one time he took a keen interest in treatment by intensive doses of thyroid extract and published a number of interesting cases. Modern developments by the use of cardiazol and electric shock give an added interest to those earlier methods. In discussion and debate, however, he was outstanding, and his amazing memory could unfold case after case in vivid detail. His descriptions, in fact, often revealed a realism and an acute sense of logic in his make-up that seemed more Gallic than Celtic in origin.

The Royal Medico-Psychological Association held for Leeper a deep and abiding interest. In 1911 he took over the Secretaryship of the Irish Division from the President-Elect, Dr. Dawson, and thereafter he was elected annually for the next eighteen years, only relinquishing the post on being appointed the first Chairman of the Division in 1929. On the latter occasion the Irish Division presented him with an engraved salver, on which was recorded their appreciation of his work. Few gifts, I think, gave him greater pleasure, and few were so richly deserved. It must be remembered that the period of his Secretaryship covered not only the Great War but also the sad years of internal strife which followed it in Ireland, and it was truly remarked by Dr. Nolan that only a man with Leeper's buoyancy, courage and devotion could have held the Division together throughout those critical years. His elevation to the Presidency of the Association in 1931 was indeed a tribute which his colleagues in Ireland warmly appreciated. To himself I know it brought the keenest gratification, coupled only with some misgivings that he might not do full justice to his great honour. When the Dublin Annual Meeting, for which he and Mrs. Leeper planned so meticulously, had come to its very successful conclusion, his misgivings had vanished and his happiness was very nearly complete.

Outside his profession Leeper had an amazing number of interests. From boyhood he had taken the keenest interest in natural history—of which he had a very good library. As a game shot he had few equals, and apart from his own shoots in Wicklow and Anglesea, he had shot probably every species of game all over the British Isles. Next to shooting in his recreations came salmon fishing, and his description of a fight with a twenty pounder was something to remember. He had, however, a remarkable interest in the fauna of nearly every country, and an almost expert knowledge of the animals in the Zoological Gardens—of which Society he was a permanent Vice-President. Other interests included fencing,

armoury and period furniture. In the literature of the 18th century especially he was widely read, and his knowledge of Swift, the founder of St. Patrick's Hospital, truly remarkable. His Swiftiana collection is probably unique.

No account of Dr. Leeper could be complete without reference to Mrs. Leeper. Her death, somewhat unexpected, in 1934, was a blow which he felt with great keenness and from which he probably never quite fully recovered. She was a woman of very considerable culture, on whose judgment he had relied, perhaps more than he knew, for more than forty years. Her great organizing ability and wide experience filled in the background so fully that he had complete freedom from all minor anxieties to pursue any interest, medical or otherwise, to any extent he wished. In the medico-psychological world and in the entertainment of his guests she was a kind and charming hostess.

Of the man himself it is scarcely necessary to say much. That buoyant wit and exuberant vitality is fresh in the memory of all who knew him. As an after-dinner speaker he was in the first flight, but he was unquestionably at his best as host or guest at a private dinner party. Here his amazing memory and rich fund of anecdote were only to be experienced to be appreciated. Leeper dearly loved good hospitality and especially to have his medical colleagues around his table. It was characteristic of him that on very special occasions he did not fail to include his assistant medical officers.

Physically he had a marvellous constitution, and when over seventy years of age could wear down much younger men in a day's shooting. A few years ago an acute mastoiditis gravely undermined his physical powers and, although he resumed work, it was with increasing difficulty until finally cardiac failure brought his labours to a close.

To myself personally, who had the privilege of acting as his Senior Assistant Medical Officer and Deputy Medical Superintendent for over eleven years, his death, even after a separation of over five years, came as a painful blow. That rich personality, that gay courage, and above all that warm appreciation by word and deed of any work that pleased him, are memories I shall always treasure.

R. THOMPSON.