Sir James Paget : in memoriam / Howard Marsh.

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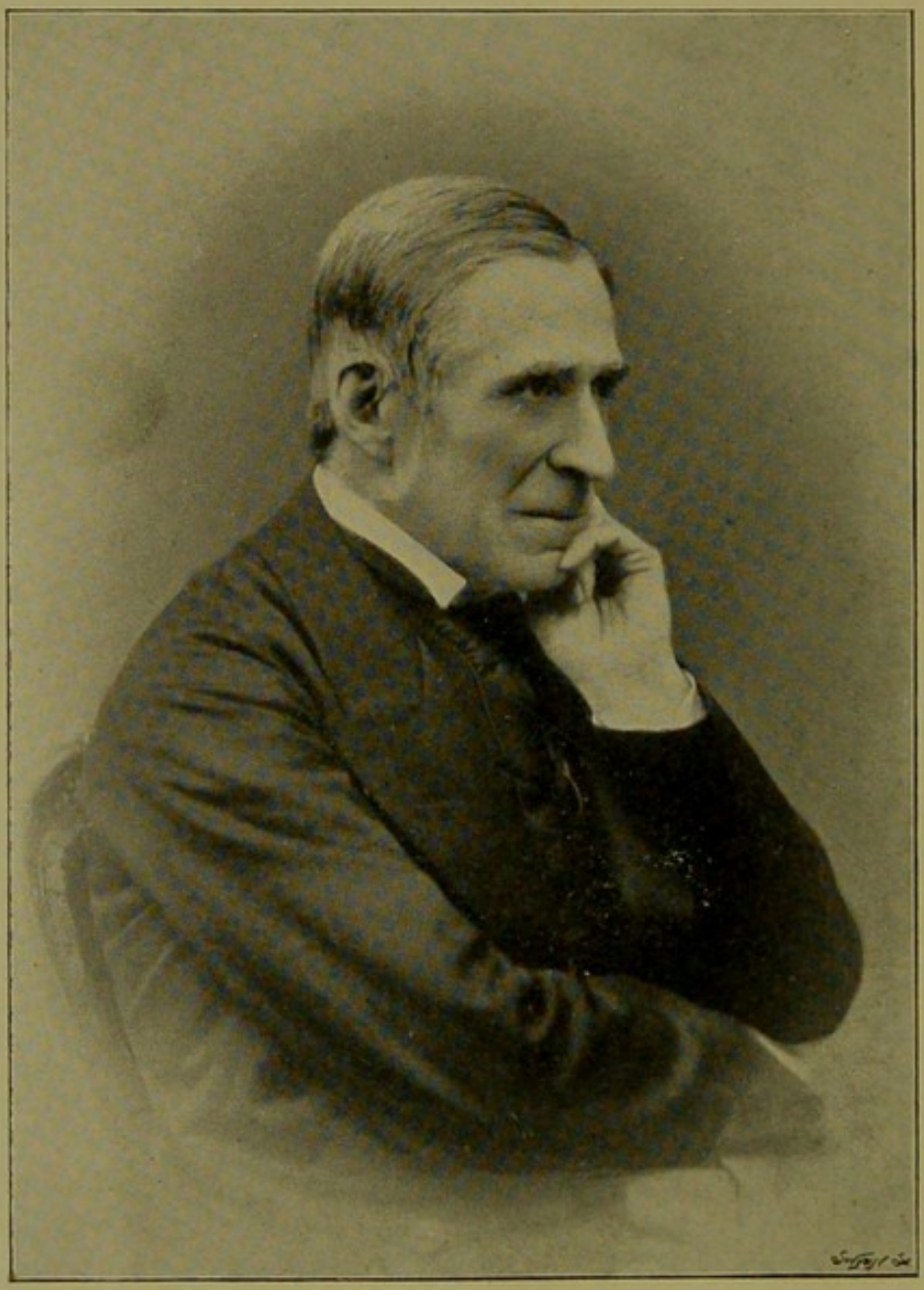
In Memoriam.

HOWARD MARSH.



Sincerely yours

James Paget.

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In Memoriam.

SIR JAMES PAGET.

By Howard Marsh.

MANY who will read these lines never saw Sir James Paget; they can have known him only by his reputation as the great teacher and master, whom all revered and held in affectionate regard. But to those who were students at the Hospital, or engaged in practice, between 1850 and 1885 it would have seemed difficult to imagine either the work in the School or the routine of professional life without Mr., or, as he became in 1871, Sir James Paget. During all these years Sir James was without a rival; his position was as assured as it was unique. In his early days he had entered the fields of physiology and pathology, and had been associated with such men as Müller, Rokitansky, Lebert, Billroth, and the illustrious Virchow. In this group, every one of whom enjoyed a European reputation, it was well known that Paget occupied a foremost place. This in itself was fame. But there was much more; he was not only a master in two of the subjects which lie at the very foundation of surgery, but he was both a lecturer and writer of quite singular skill and grace; while in himself he was gifted with every quality which could make his fellow-men respect and sincerely admire him.

As one who was intimately associated with him, for two separate periods, as his assistant in his private practice, and as the editor of one of his works, I have been asked

by the editor of the JOURNAL to write an appreciation of Sir James Paget. The position I have just mentioned, like that of private secretary, no doubt gives the junior full opportunities of forming an estimate of his senior from every point of view, and I have promised the editor to do my best. Yet I make the attempt with unfeigned diffidence. Time and mental leisure are both wanting, and I can only ask those who have known Sir James Paget, and who cannot fail to notice my omissions and defects, to remember that I am only too conscious of them, and that others, under more favourable circumstances, will supersede my hurried and crude sketch by a fuller and more adequate picture of the great figure who has just departed from amongst us.

From my earliest associations with him I learnt that Sir James Paget was a man not only of a strong, but of an unflagging and even vehement determination. Like one of the forces of nature, his will never slept and never faltered, and nothing ever turned it to the right hand or to the left. What he had undertaken to do, whatever he thought was right, or what he considered he had a right to do, that he would do at whatever cost, especially if the cost fell upon himself. He ruled himself with a rod of iron. Of his personal comfort and convenience, or even safety, he took no account; even when he was most severely overworked and exhausted by fatigue, he would deny, both to his friends and to himself, that he was even tired. Once, but once only, I made the mistake of saying, after he had been ill, that I was glad to see him looking well again. He turned upon me almost fiercely, and desired me never to make a remark of that kind to him. He seemed to think, however, that he had been harsh, and in a minute added, with a friendly smile, "Don't you remember what Lawrence's * reply was to some one who told him he was delighted to see him looking so well? 'I don't know, sir, why I should not look just as well as you do.'" Sir James

* The late Sir William Lawrence.

never allowed himself to wear slippers in the evening, and he never sat in an easy chair. I do not think he had one. He never went to bed till every letter was answered, and all his affairs were so completely in order that had he died suddenly it would have appeared that he had anticipated the event.* I have many times sat with him writing letters from 11 p.m. till half-past 1 or 2 o'clock. As I used shorthand, he would dictate two or three letters, and while I copied these he would write others, and thus we got through twenty or thirty, and I went home feeling I had had quite enough of it, but with orders to meet him at 8, or even at half-past 7 the next morning, to go into the country, or to Brixton, or Islington, to help him at an operation—nursing homes in Welbeck Street or Upper Wimpole Street had not then been dreamt of. One sometimes hears it said by men who do not know what a hard day's work is that they have no time for this or that. I very much doubt if there was a single occasion on which Sir James Paget declined to do what he was asked on the ground that he had not time. He never allowed time to cross his path. What he regarded as his duty, that he did, either in the course of the day or in the small hours of the night. During his busiest years of practice he was President of the College of Surgeons, and of the Medical and Chirurgical, and the Clinical Societies, served on more than one Royal Commission, and helped very largely to prepare a new catalogue for the Pathological Museum of the College of Surgeons. In all these offices he discharged his duties thoroughly well. He not only contrived to be, with remarkably few exceptions, in his place to the minute, but to keep himself so fully posted up that no one was better informed or more ready with mature advice. His indomitable will was shown even in his illnesses. When I was his assistant he had two attacks of what Sir Thomas

* The Duke of Wellington told Lord Stanhope that he always did the business of the day in the day (Sir Herbert Maxwell's *Life of the Duke of Wellington*, vol. i, p. 67).

Watson and Sir George Burrows agreed was gouty pneumonia; he was desperately ill, and on both occasions it seemed to me he lived because he *would not* die, and on both occasions he was down again, in what seemed a dangerously short time, in his study, without leave, seeing patients, declaring that he was quite well again, and writing with painful care, so that it should not be seen that his hand was shaking.

It might be supposed that so strong-willed a man would have many enemies. In the early part of his career there was, it is true, no love lost between himself and one or two of his competitors. But he went his way, and took no open notice. As he said, it takes two to make a quarrel, and he was determined not to be one of them. The only part he ever took in disputes and angry discussions was to advise his friends how best to act—and this he did with unerring judgment—and do his best with both parties to induce them to compose their differences and be friends. He was frequently asked to act as an arbitrator, and almost invariably both sides accepted his advice. He thoroughly disliked quarrels, for, he would remark, they were generally foolish, they brought out a man's worst qualities, and they interfered with work. But there was another reason. Sir James Paget was a man of refined and correct taste, very sensitive, and, as his intimate friends knew, he had a very warm heart, so that strife was a worry to him, and all his impulses were towards tolerance and peace. Indeed, though he treated himself with so little consideration, or even mercy, he was so concerned when others were in trouble that he was sometimes kind when he should have been severe; and from over-kindness, which, however, to some seemed almost a want of moral courage, he procured an acquittal when sterner justice would have awarded a sharp punishment. Probably it never occurred to anyone to quarrel with Sir James himself; his personal modesty, his scrupulous fairness, his high-toned courtesy, and his chivalrous self-denial kept even rough hands off him, and

1. Harewood Place.
Hanover Square.
W.

Nov. 17. 1891. *

My dear Stanley

I am very sorry that I could not come this afternoon. My other meeting, beginning at 4 did not end till 6.30 — I hope all went well.

Sincerely yours

James Paget.

* This characteristic letter referred to a meeting at which arrangements were made for the banquet which was given to Surgeon Parke on the return of H. M. Stanley's expedition from Darkest Africa.

made every one respect him. To his juniors he was always loyal and considerate. I remember that a patient on whom I had operated for a fissure, having a return of the trouble, consulted a surgeon of twice my age, and in large practice, who took the case into his own hands and operated. When I mentioned this to Sir James Paget he remarked, "Did —— do that? I am very sorry to hear it of him."

His intellectual endowments were such that, look where we might, there was only one here and there who excelled him in natural capacity. He had a strong and clear understanding, imagination or, in other words, the creative faculty, keen observation, and remarkable astuteness and mental accuracy. Such gifts would undoubtedly, by selective cultivation, have placed him in the first rank in Parliament, diplomacy, the law, the Church, pure science, or, as I venture to believe, in many walks of literature. But he had two other gifts to which his renown was largely due. As a writer on medical subjects he was, with the doubtful exception of Sir Thomas Watson, without a rival, and he was one of the very best speakers of his time, not only in the profession, but beyond its ranks. In his 'Surgical Pathology' his descriptions of disease are, as word-pictures, so singularly perfect in clearness, completeness, and artistic form that they afford his readers the same kind of delight and charm that they might derive from the study of some gem in water-colours by Birket Foster or Old Crome. From cover to cover of this volume there is not one common-place, obscure, or uninteresting sentence to be found. Like Swift, Sir James cultivated the simplicity of pure Saxon, and used monosyllables as far as possible. Latin admixtures he avoided, and I feel nearly certain that the word "lesion," for example, is nowhere to be found in any of his writings: at least, I remember that when I had used it he made me cross it out.

On the occasion of one of her birthdays, he presented to

his elder daughter an excellent likeness of her mother, and beneath it he wrote—

"Be as like as this."

What more appropriate inscription could have been chosen, or how could it have been more happily expressed?

As a lecturer and speaker Sir James Paget must under any circumstances have excelled, for he had a natural facility in the use of language and a beautiful voice, which, in singing, was a tenor of rare quality. But few were perhaps aware with what care and diligence he prepared his public speeches and addresses, first selecting and arranging his material, then elaborating and perfecting the form in which he would present it, and then committing every word to memory so securely that, for instance, he could deliver without a note the Hunterian Oration, with H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and H.R.H. the Duke of York a few paces in front of him, and Mr. Gladstone, as the theatre was crowded, literally within four feet of his nose, without hesitation over a single word; but with such propriety of emphasis, such correct modulation of the voice, and in every particular such an appearance of spontaneity, that it was difficult to believe *ars celare artem* could be so perfectly achieved.

Sir James once told me that in three weeks he could make certain of learning by heart an address which would occupy an hour in its delivery: and I know that, just before he was to give the address at the opening of the International Medical Congress in 1881, he spent a morning in Richmond Park in order to be sure that his preparation was complete. Many, when they learnt how Sir James Paget invariably produced such an ideal result, were inclined to think less highly of his powers. But was not this a mistake? I believe the method he adopted was the only one by which, on such occasions, he could have approached so nearly to perfection. No doubt when a speaker has his subject at his fingers' ends, and when he has some argument to press home or conclusion to enforce, he may, in an extempore

appeal, by his earnestness which he makes contagious, his animated voice and appropriate gestures, act upon his hearers like the strains of martial music. But in a scientific lecture or address in which not only every sentence, but every word, must be part of a carefully elaborated context, that which has first been written, and is then exactly reproduced, must be the best that can be done. Had Sir James been in Parliament, or at the Bar, where speaking must often be entirely extempore, he would, there seems no reason to doubt, by cultivating a different method, have attained an equal measure of success.

His Hospital lectures, though not written out, were yet in almost every instance carefully prepared, and he had his specimens so arranged that they served to remind him of the order in which his subject was to be treated. Sometimes, however, I knew he had been so pressed with incessant work that preparation had been impossible, and on these occasions, when, by a rush, he just managed to be in time, under the stimulus of necessity, he would give an admirable lecture, couched in such clear and telling language that every member of his class was delighted.

Sir James Paget's work in general pathology, his reputation in the field of science, and his position as the first surgeon of his time, may have somewhat overshadowed and thrown into the background his numerous clinical papers. But almost all of these were completely original, and were additions of great value and importance to surgery. Let all first year's students remember that Sir James conferred a lasting honour upon their order by his discovery, when he was a student of less than three months' standing, of the *Trichina spiralis.*

His papers on osteitis deformans, senile scrofula (tuberculosis), the sequelæ of typhoid fever, glossy fingers (one of the earliest notices of the results of injuries of peripheral nerves), chronic pyæmia, and others—each taught what before was quite unknown, or had never been clearly recognised or adequately described.

Nothing could have more clearly shown that Sir James Paget was one of the most gifted, and, to good judges, one of the most attractive men of his time than the fact that there was scarcely anyone of real distinction with whom he was not on more or less intimate terms of friendship. Her Majesty the Queen, to whom he was Sergeant-Surgeon, was graciously pleased to confer many favours upon him, and their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, to whom he was Surgeon-in-Ordinary, treated him with the greatest cordiality. Only a few months ago they made him very happy by paying him a visit at his house in Park Square West; while Tennyson, Browning, Cardinal Newman, Darwin, Huxley, George Eliot, Gladstone, Charles Kingsley, Millais, Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Langenbeck, Pasteur, and many of the chief people on the Continent and in America were his friends and intimates.

To me Sir James Paget was in many ways the most interesting man I have ever known. Many men who attain distinction, however worthy, are quite commonplace. They owe their success to their birth, their wealth, their capacity for the ordinary forms of business, their dogged perseverance along some narrow line, their low-level shrewdness, or even to mere good fortune. Sir James was different from all these. He belonged to a higher order, and possessed, in their best forms, qualities of which many men are mainly or wholly destitute. Most men when they met him felt they were in the presence of one who was—though he himself seemed quite unconscious of it—much their superior, and who had depths which they could not plumb. Although there were many things of which he knew nothing, yet there were others of which he knew nearly everything; while the impression arose that there were few in which, had the occasion offered, he might not have been a master. His time was too fully occupied to allow him to become technically proficient in art, music, or other forms of culture. Yet it was evident that he had full capacity for success in all. As it was, he had a consider-

able knowledge of music, and his water-colour drawings, though few in number, were, I have been told on good authority, excellent. To a wide acquaintance with literature or to classical scholarship he had no claim—his strength lay elsewhere—and to many things by which men are usually interested he was a total stranger. Of many sports and pastimes he knew nothing, while of others the little he knew made him thoroughly dislike them. Whist, which he played with considerable skill, was, I think, his only game. But he had a born naturalist's love for the country and all he found there. He was a good botanist and geologist. In his country holidays he was a great walker, and, in the experience of all his friends, a charming companion.

We all owe Sir James Paget a deep and lasting debt of gratitude for the part he played in representing the profession in the eyes of the public. On every occasion and in every way he brought us great honour; and he did more than anyone else to advance our reputation and secure us just recognition. For many years, wherever scientific culture, good taste, and unsullied integrity existed, he was regarded as a chief exponent of them all. Every member of the profession felt that no greater service could have been rendered to us. We all heartily thanked him, and we hoped that a knowledge of our gratitude afforded him one of the quiet pleasures of his life.

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