Obituary

A. R. PARSONS, M.D., F.R.C.P.I.

Alfred Robert Parsons, who died at his home in Dublin on January 24, was born in 1864, and after a brilliant career at Trinity College, Dublin, graduated M.B., B.Ch. in 1888. He won the medical scholarship and medical travelling prize, and continued his studies in Vienna and Berlin. In 1894 he was appointed visiting physician to the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, a position he held till his death, and rapidly became one of the leading physicians in Dublin and an outstanding clinical teacher. In 1894 also he was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, of which he was senior Fellow for many years.

Throughout the years his mind remained as keen and as active as ever, and his bodily vigour showed little sign of impairment. He never retired, but continued his full hospital work to the end, taking his usual clinical class the week before he died. For 58 years he was a fascinating clinical teacher, one who could hold the attention of students and stimulate their interest. He taught them to observe accurately, to examine a patient carefully and critically, to evaluate what was found, and to be self-reliant, but not cocksure, in judgment. A diagnosis was held in almost tantalizing suspense until all the facts on which it was based had been thoroughly worked out. Parsons saw many changes in medicine, but his reliance on symptoms and, above all, on physical signs as the sure foundation for diagnosis did not change. Although pathology, bacteriology, serology, radiology, biochemistry, and all the other present-day aids to diagnosis were used by him fully, he was not carried away by any uncritical enthusiasm for what was new. In treatment he showed no hesitation in abandoning the elegant potions and pills of the 'nineties in favour of the synthetic chemicals and antibiotics of to-day, and was always eager to use a new remedy, though he tried out each one carefully and experimentally before passing judgment upon it.

During the first world war Parsons served in the R.A.M.C. He was on the staff of 83 General Hospital in France with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Parsons took a keen interest in scientific medical meetings. He was an original member of the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland, and was a past president of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland, and a member of the “Bi” Club. It was a great pleasure to hear him read a paper or to see him demonstrate a rare clinical case. The thorough investigations, the scientific clarity, and the dramatic presentation were all admirable.

Dublin has lost its oldest and most beloved clinical teacher. He was a steadfast and loyal colleague, a skilful and warm-hearted physician, a courteous and modest man. His sense of duty, his tenacity of purpose, and his rigid moral values remained unchanged throughout his life. Thousands of his former students in all parts of the world will always remember “Alfie” Parsons with gratitude, affection, and veneration.—V. M. S.

Sir DOUGLAS SHIELDS, M.D., F.R.C.A.C.S.

Sir Douglas Shields, who began his career as a surgeon in Australia and later built up a big practice in London, died at Merstham, Surrey, on February 22, aged 73.