

Memories of JHS

Professor A.E.W. Miles

1 Earliest recollection

My earliest recollection of him is his reading a paper at the Royal Society of Medicine on nutritional experiments on growth of the jaws in pigs either during the war or the period of austerity just after it. A lithe young man with ample curly hair, striding about to point to features on his slides, with a soft attractive Irish accent. At the end a wittily expressed remark hinting that a side-product of the experiments was some useful meals of bacon, which went down very well. I have no other recollection of him before his whole demeanour was changed by the attacks of rheumatoid arthritis, which I guess began in the early 1950s. He became slightly bent and slow moving, gnarled hands and a crumpled face but always with bright cheerful, usually twinkling eyes. As well as James, I came to know well and see a lot of two of his contemporaries: Harry Blackwood and Barry Symons, both of whom came from a small town north of Belfast and knew each other as schoolboys. Harry was the son of the local doctor who I once met with him in Dublin; although both were Protestant Unionists, Harry was softer and not so typical. Barry was the more typical dour sort but became equally respected and liked. James was entirely different; he was warm and outgoing, and his Irishness – worn on his sleeve you can say – was of a different sort. I suspect that the accent of his speech was different and was recognisable as showing his origins – Cork. At the drop of a hat, in a good-humoured way he would refer to 400 years under the yoke of the English. He actually deeply felt as I learned later, there was a grave injustice that had to be put right but I never heard him express this with passion. He was more interested in peace and removal of conflict. I cannot say how I came to know James so well; it is likely that it came about through meetings of the British Division of the IADR but these did not start until 1953 and he did not read a paper at this or 1954. However, those meetings quickly brought researchers together all over the U.K..

2 “Putting the cat among the pigeons”

Certainly by 1957-8 I knew him well and he came to stay with us in the flat in Whitechapel we had moved to. We had to make sure he could cope with a flight of stairs and he had to explain that he had to have a hot-bath in the morning before he could get his limbs to move. The first time he came my brother in law had popped into see us, a rather dull conventional small-business man. I introduced James as from Ireland and sat them down while I got some drinks. My brother in law, to make some conversation, asked James what part of Ireland he came from. James with the exaggerated accent I suspect he sometimes assumed,

replied “The part that is still occupied!” My brother in law was completely non-plussed until I found a remark that solved the problem and the episode dissolved into laughter as James really intended. There was also an element of “putting the cat among the pigeons” a favourite phrase of his as anyone who knew him will agree. He used it as a deliberate tactic.

3 Publications

James must have recovered enough by 1955 to do an enormous amount of work with McKeag, Reader in Orthodontics at Queen’s, Belfast to produce the 250 page or so addition to the Dental Board of the U.K. commissioned Brash book on the Aetiology of Malocclusion. The revised version of which James sent me a signed copy dated 1956. This must have put him on the map in a big way. I have not been able to check for papers James read at IADR meetings after 1954 except for the November meeting at Newcastle. I attended in 1958 when he read a paper on Mesial Migration of Teeth in Macaques and influence on jaw and face growth, but I do not remember that. These years were ones of very rapid exciting movements forward for all of us.

4 Visits to London

James was paying regular visits to London at this time, perhaps examining. I had done a stint of examining dental anatomy for the R.C.S. L.D.S but James never did that I am sure. Ron Fearnhead was part of my department at the time and was like me, enormously impressed by James. Certainly he once got him to talk to our dental students. I think it is likely that I got him appointed to examine in Dental Anatomy for the B.D.S. of London University with me or after I had done a spell. That would have brought him to London twice a year. Our only son died in November of 1958 and I think it was early in 1959 that James came to stay with us, bravely with typical gentle understanding facing to speak of our loss. He used, perhaps later, say to me “I ought to be a bishop, I look like one”. He had a face I could only describe as battered as if prematurely riven by time, which resembled that of a famous archbishop of Canterbury of our time whose name I cannot remember. It struck me when he spoke of my son’s death, as it did much more forcibly later, that James had some saintly characteristics. I have often said so when talking about him after his death.

5 Remarkable people

I have known closely some remarkable people in my time: Robert Maxwell before he became infamous, J.Z. Young and a clever innovative Swedish paleontologist, rvig who was handicapped by polio. Worth adding also E. Wilfred Fish and Alex Comfort, poet and physiologist who started an interest in ageing. James bore comparison with them as having something very unusual indeed. I

cannot recall where and when, but I think in Belfast, but was in the period when they were writing their book or had done so, that I was with James and Barry Symons; they fell as if by habit into banter about their profoundly different religious views, all good humoured and with perhaps an eye to entertaining me (we had a relationship that can be called affectionate). Barry could gently but skilfully counter James's declarations of faith. I can only recall Barry telling a joke against his own side: One evening a pretentious Ulsterman had wandered into a Catholic enclave of Belfast and, greatly offended by the shops that sold crucifixes and pictures of the Virgin Mary, was breaking the windows and railing wildly. When challenged, expostulated "I can't abide bigotry!"

6 Visiting James

Some years later I was appointed to examine in Dental Anatomy for the L.D.S. of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland for two periods of three years in Dublin where I spent the morning and usually contrived to spend 2-3 days to visit various parts of Eire. Perhaps I slipped up to Belfast once or twice to visit James but mostly as far as the Connemara coast. It was then as far as I remember I was appointed to examine in Belfast with James where I went twice a year for three years. It was during these visits I got to know him best and to see much of his life, close in his family, and apart from being an important researcher in growth of the jaws.

Professor A. E W. Miles 13th April 2003