

SHARMA O.P. GERRY JAMES AND THE SARCOIDOSIS MOVEMENT BIOGRAPHY OF A MEDICAL LUMINARY Ithaca Press, New York 2011

Not many books are dedicated to mentors or teachers. This book opens with Om Sharma's quote: "This book is dedicated to all mentors who have influenced the lives of their students. It is a gift beyond telling and it reaps rewards beyond description". And it is so very true that the author of the book and the subject of this exceptional biography are two mentors and teachers who have been most successful in world of Sarcoidosis. They both seeded the idea, spread, and later cultivated the Movement of Sarcoidosis; first Geraint James, then both in collaboration, and finally, when the time came, Om Sharma succeeded his senior and helped the movement bloom.

Professor Sharma produced an exciting text about his teacher, mentor and friend in a most elegant and easy readable way, in the well-recognizable Sharma manner. And what I mean by that is that the texts he writes, even on the most academic and serious matter, are easily recognizable due to the beauty of the language, the syntax and the splendour of vocabulary. Once I was reading a text under the title: "The Cheshire Cat Syndrome: an unusual case of neurosarcoidosis", and I immediately suspected that it was written by Om Sharma. And so it was.

This book about the life of David Geraint James starts with the description of his ancestors, grandparents and parents, and the story of the land where

he was born, the land he had always on his mind and in his heart.

David Geraint (Gerry) James was born on January 2nd 1922 in Treherbert, Rhoda Valley, Wales. His father was a teacher who wrote Welsh columns in the national daily, *The Western Mail*. It was his father from whom he inherited his love for the Welsh language and heritage. By the age of ten he was bilingual, thus easily giving speeches in both English and Welsh languages. He also played organ and rugby. The early years of collecting knowledge through education, continuous work and gathering experience are covered in the second set of chapters.

To further his education David Geraint James moved to Pontypridd County School, and later, in 1939 joined Jesus College, a Welsh college at Cambridge. In 1941 he obtained a BA degree and honours in the National Science Tripos of anatomy, physiology and biochemistry. Over the period of the Second World War he continued his clinical studies at the Middlesex Hospital. During the day he helped to take care of casualties, transported them to safe havens, administered treatment, and during the night volunteered to fire watch, sitting and observing from London's rooftops. In 1945, he joined the Royal Navy as a doctor for seven minesweepers; the English Channel was full of mines and his task was to sweep the channel so the boats could cross.

When demobilized he continued his career as a house physician to Professor Scadding and Beaumont at Brompton hospital for Chest Disease. During that period he was for the first time confronted with sarcoidosis and stayed enchanted with this disease during his entire life.

In 1959 David Geraint James was appointed Consultant Physician to the Royal Northern Hospi-

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tal on Holloway, North London. It was there he started his multidisciplinary sarcoidosis clinic, the first clinic of its kind. It was unique because he invited clinicians, physiologists, immunologists, pathologists, radiologists and epidemiologists to gather together. Residents, postgraduate and medical students, and frequent international visitors also participated in the work, among them the author of this book. He recalls these weekly meetings as the most lively and rewarding in Britain. The sarcoidosis clinic became and remained for more than three decades a small United Nations. These gatherings were occasions of sophisticated, intellectual debate, lightened by agreeable repartee. Among the participants were Nobel laureates Peter Medawar and Baruch Blumberg. Geneticist Alexander Bearn; hepatologist Sheila Sherlock; gastroenterologist Christopher Booth; surgeon Dickson Wright; endocrinologists Raymond Greene and Sir John McMichael; sarcoidologists Guy Scadding, Sven Lofgren, and Louis Siltzbach; and immunologist Jan Costa Waldenstrom, made the clinic a Mecca for all the sarcoidologists in the world. The soul of all the events was David Geraint James, a fantastic, spirited and witty orator, and an authoritative teacher.

Several chapters of this book are devoted to Geraint James's family life which was engleamed by his lifelong companion, his wife Sheila Sherlock. He met his future wife at the Hammersmith Hospital in 1949. At that time she was already a well known hepatologist. They married in 1951 and had two daughters, Amanda and Auriole. Their marriage lasted for fifty years, until Dame Sheila's death in 2001. Their private and professional lives complemented each other; they traveled together, saw and shared patients, with no room for rivalry but only cooperation. Professor Sharma concluded very aptly that their marriage was greater than the sum of its parts.

In 1958 David Geraint James invited doctors from all over the world to the Brompton Hospital,

London, for a meeting on sarcoidosis. This was the First International Conference on Sarcoidosis. Professor D. Geraint James had sown the seeds of the movement that led to the formation of the World Association of Sarcoidosis and Other Granulomatous disorders (WASOG) in 1987, in Milan, Italy. He was its Founder President. Shortly after, the journal *Sarcoidosis* became the official gazette of WASOG. The sarcoidosis movement spread, the conferences on sarcoidosis became regular, knowledge grew.

Roger Allen, Famous Australian sarcoidologist wrote: "David Geraint James was and always will remain the 'Dumbledore' of the Magic School of WASOG; the Grand Master of Sarcoidosis, and we who are but his fellow magicians, have come from lands far and wide, hemispheres north and south, on our broom sticks or magic carpets to be rejoined every four years in the house of continents in order to sup in the Great Common Room of Life to learn of new magic spells and the latest potions."

I myself once wrote to Om Sharma: "Have you read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*? There is a fantastic character that you sometimes remind me of, but he was omitted and not mentioned in the movie. The character I meant was the good Tom Bombadil, the master (not the owner!) of all the woods, waters and hills and all the living creatures in the Old Forest, a character of great knowledge and power.

The lifelong friendship, collaboration and interaction between David Geraint (Gerry) James and Om Sharma, two magi from an intriguing and challenging World of Sarcoidosis, resulted in an interesting and vivid book. I recommend it to all who admire the work of David Geraint (Gerry) James, who witnessed the rise of the Movement of Sarcoidosis and also to admirers of worthy literature.

If professor David Geraint (Gerry) James could read this book he would no doubt say: "Splendid!"