Maurice Davidson, 1883-1967

Dr Maurice Davidson, President of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine and Consulting Physician to the Brompton Hospital, died in the Middlesex Hospital on 8 November.

Born in Liverpool in 1883, the son of the late Professor Alexander Davidson, emeritus professor of pathology in University College, Liverpool, Maurice Davidson was educated at Liverpool College, Trinity College, Oxford, where he gained second-class honours in physiology in 1905, and University College Hospital, qualifying in 1908. In 1912 he proceeded D.M. In the first World War he served with the R.A.M.C. in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine, and soon after his return was appointed physician to the Miller General Hospital, the Brompton Hospital and St Stephen’s Hospital. He was elected F.R.C.P. in 1927.

Maurice Davidson was well known, not only as a chest physician and as the author of A Practical Manual of Diseases of the Chest, of which several editions appeared after its publication in 1935, but as the historian of many institutions which he loved and for which he worked with devotion. ’Medicine in Oxford—A Historical Romance’ was the subject of his FitzPatrick Lectures to the Royal College of Physicians in 1952–53; ’Memoirs of a Golden Age’ was published in 1958. ’The Brompton Hospital: The Story of a Great Adventure,’ written in collaboration with Mr F. G. Fouvray, appeared in 1954, followed by ’The Royal Society of Medicine: The Realization of an Ideal, 1805–1955.’

None of the members of the Executive Council of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine who stood in silence on 8 November in tribute to his memory could remember a time when Maurice Davidson was not associated with its work. Elected Honorary Secretary in 1932, he became Chairman in 1945 and was elected the first President when the Fellowship was incorporated in 1962. In that year he generously endowed the Awards which bear his name, and are made by the Executive Council annually to those who have made outstanding contributions to medical progress in this country.

Maurice Davidson’s humanity, his reverence for tradition and his loyalty to friends and institutions were manifest in all his writings.

’The character and efficiency of any human institution, no less than the general atmosphere which surrounds it, are determined by the persons who represent it and who are, collectively and individually, responsible for the direction of its aims and the performance of its functions . . . . It is nowadays a somewhat thankless task to plead for the upholding of old traditions among a generation who mistake novelty for progress and to whom veneration of the past is regarded as reactionary, and at best an amiable weakness, to be pitied, even as it is tolerated. Nevertheless, there was something in that golden age, which is lacking today, and which, in university life and work, as everywhere else was responsible for more solid achievement and deserving of far higher value than is generally supposed by the many who have never known it or felt its influence . . . . I have tried to indicate what I feel to be one of the factors responsible for this metamorphosis—the alteration in the personal relationship between teacher and pupil. But there is yet another feature which has characterized the gradual change that has succeeded the two world wars, not only in university life, but in European civilization as a whole, and which has been a matter for comment by all clear thinkers who can still distinguish that which is fundamental from that which is ephemeral. All such as these have recognized the paramount need for a philosophy of life, whether in literature, or in art, or in medicine, or in commerce; and in any educational conference worthy of the name this point has been emphasized by speakers. Of the lack of such a philosophy there is abundant evidence; and this is true of university life as of any other sphere of human thought. It is equally true that in the pre-war years there was no such lack. The essence of such philosophy was the recognition by serious men of a something outside their own immediate instincts, a something not only external to themselves, but greater than they, to which they must perform bow in humility and reverence: in short a Faith, which, whatever actual shape or form it took for the individual, was other than material, and which in the last resort was absolute upon them. Such an outlook as this was inherent in those to whom, in days gone by, the University was in very truth an Alma Mater: it was to them an heritage from the past, the value of which was unquestioned, even by those whose perception of it was, maybe, largely subconscious: it was one of the fruits of a liberal education, that priceless gift of our premier University’ (Memoirs of a Golden Age)

Integer vitae, scelerisque purus.
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