

Appreciation of JHS

J.D. Eccles

Perhaps the adjective that best describes James Scott is “unique”. His relaxed manner, his shuffling gait and his unkempt appearance hid a sharp and enquiring mind, a kindly nature and an ability to see humour in many situations. But during his early years he apparently did not apply his intellect to academic matters. At school in the Methodist College, Belfast he was known as “Midnight Scott”, perhaps because he did not really come to life until evening. It was only after he qualified in medicine and took up a lectureship in the Anatomy Department of the Queen’s University of Belfast that his great ability came to fruition. At that time there was much in the structure and function of the mouth and teeth which had yet to be explained; it was a fertile area for research and he applied himself to this assiduously.

Study and learning came easily to him and he tended to feel that this also applied to his students. He is known to have cancelled a lecture on a bright sunny day, telling his students they should sit in the quad and enjoy the sunshine, or read their textbooks, which of course he had written. These were the basic dental undergraduate textbooks on this side of the Atlantic for many years.

Scott’s contribution to dentistry cannot be overestimated. Coming into the teaching of anatomy to dental students at a time when the teaching of dentistry was gradually passing from an amateur (in the best sense of the word) to a professional status, he was the one person attached to the School of Dentistry who was capable of supervising research and had the use of the necessary facilities at his disposal. He established a course of study for a B.Sc. in dental anatomy and accepted a stream of the brighter students and graduates, who achieved B.Sc. or Ph.D. degrees. Most of these ended up in teaching and research within the British Isles, and a few in the USA, and made a contribution much greater than might have been expected from the small size of the school from which they originated.

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