



DAVID NICOLSON, C.B., LL.D., M.D., M.R.C.P.E.

Born 1844.
Died 1932.

Ordinary Member, 1869.
President 1895-6.

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Dr. DAVID NICOLSON was of a family that came originally from the Isle of Skye, but had been, for four generations, established in the redoubtable county of Aberdeen. He was born on December 25, 1844, at Cruden Brig, now a sanctuary of the game he loved so well, and within a few miles of Longside, formerly the home of the Rev. John Skinner of Tullochgoram fame, whose genial disposition and desire to diffuse feelings of kindness and good humour among his fellow men he undoubtedly shared. Of his home life he has left no record, but he always referred to it as a happy, bracing time, and free from the Presbyterian rigidity which surrounded it, for his family were Scottish Episcopalians. His elder brother became a Scottish Episcopalian clergyman and Dean of Brechin Cathedral, and his death in the prime of life, after an operation, cast a long shadow on Nicolson's career.

Educated at the Aberdeen Grammar School, the intellectual nursery of many distinguished men, Nicolson, as was the system in Scotland then, passed into the University in 1860 when he was only sixteen years old. During his curriculum there in arts and medicine he gained honours in several classes, and in all of them his good nature made him exceedingly popular. He used to tell that in one class, in which a prize for exemplary conduct during the session was awarded by the vote of the students, he was unanimously elected amongst uproarious applause, although in the exuberance of youth he had been guilty of quite an exceptional number of breaches of discipline. Graduating M.B. and C.M. in 1866 with honours, he set to work at once as House Surgeon in the Dundee Infirmary, relieving Dr. J. T. Maclaggan, then at work on the salicylates. He suffered, as was not uncommon among House Surgeons in Scottish hospitals in those days, from an attack of typhus fever. After his convalescence, an immediate income being desirable, he entered the Convict Prison Service, declining the offer of an appointment as Assistant Medical Officer in the Perth District Asylum, at Murthly, of which that eminent

naturalist, Dr., afterwards Prof. Carmichael McIntosh, F.R.S., was then Medical Superintendent. In the Convict Prison Service Nicolson held office in Portland, Woking and Millbank Prisons successively from 1867 to 1873, when he was put in chief charge of Portsmouth Prison, and there he remained until 1876, when he was appointed Deputy Medical Superintendent of Broadmoor Criminal Asylum, then under the able and humane headship of Dr. William Orange. Here he became acquainted with other phases of aberrant mind than had confronted him in prisons, and was specially equipped for the responsible and indeed hazardous duties which devolved on him when he succeeded Dr. Orange as Medical Superintendent in 1886.

At Broadmoor he proved himself an able administrator and secured the confidence of the Home Office and of his staff, while he did what was possible to ameliorate the condition of "the strangely visited people" under his charge. He was largely instrumental in carrying out a change suggested by Dr. Orange—the separation of two classes of inmates, the one composed of persons whose offences had been isolated criminal acts, the direct result of their insane state, and who up to the time of the outbreak of their insanity had in many cases led honest and industrious lives, the other composed of those removed from convict prisons while undergoing penal servitude, and whose offences against law and order had been part of their everyday lives. The result of the separation of these two classes, when ultimately effected, was increased tranquillity in the wards, and comparative freedom from acts of insubordination and disorder.

During his sojourn at Broadmoor, Nicolson made a careful study of the various factors that have to be taken into account in estimating the mental state of insane criminals, and from time to time published useful monographs on the relations of criminal insanity to mental defect, alcoholic excess and epilepsy. He was always more practical than scientific or philosophical in his attitude; he never attempted any subtle mental analysis, and had no sympathy with Lombroso or his school. He took a common-sense view of the problems submitted to him, and thus commended himself to the authorities in the many doubtful cases in which the defence of insanity had been set up and about which he was consulted.

While at Broadmoor, Nicolson served with acceptance on several committees, such as the Home Office Departmental Committee on Habitual Drunkards and the Irish Government Committee of Inquiry into Dundrum Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

In 1895 Nicolson received what he regarded as the highest compliment paid to him in his professional career, in his election as President of the Medico-Psychological—now the Royal Medico-Psychological Association. He delivered an able and lucid Presidential Address on "Crime, Criminals and Criminal Lunatics," in which, while deriding criminal anthropology, he made an important

contribution to it in a statistical review and classification of the crimes and sentences of patients admitted to Broadmoor during a long series of years.

In 1896 Nicolson was appointed by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, one of his Visitors in Lunacy on the resignation of Dr. Lockhart Robertson. His colleagues on the Board feared at first that his special experience in dealing with criminals might have made him a little suspicious and peremptory, but they speedily found that there was no ground for such apprehension. He performed his duties with the utmost tact and consideration, while his reports were models of clearness and succinctness. Behind a somewhat rugged exterior and blunt manner he had genuine sympathy and kindness of heart, and established friendly relations with his patients, many of whom expressed deep regret when failing health necessitated his retirement from office in 1921.

Outside his professional and official work Nicolson had many interests and pursuits. He was a keen cricketer, a member of the M.C.C., and a frequent spectator of matches at Lords and the Oval. At golf and at lawn tennis he played a vigorous game up till his seventy-second year, and took a hand at whist and bridge frequently at the Garrick and Baldwin Clubs. He was a collector of china and antiques and a connoisseur of old prints.

Nicolson was an Honorary Member of the Medico-Psychological Societies of Paris and Belgium, and in 1921 had conferred on him the LL.D. degree of the University of Aberdeen. He married in 1886 Edith Margaret, daughter of William Case, of Fareham, Hants, who predeceased him, and he leaves three daughters, who have been his devoted companions in his declining years.

JAMES CRICHTON-BROWNE.