

THE MATHEMATICAL GAZETTE.

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Obituary.

ROBERT FREDERICK DAVIS.

My friendship with Davis dates from the time when we were together at King's College School and used to travel up every day to Waterloo, he from Wandsworth and I from Twickenham, and pay the toll at the turnstiles of the bridge, the dear old bridge whose fate still hangs in the balance.

Davis soon reached the top of the school in mathematics and passed on into King's College, when he worked for a year under Professor Drew, author of the text-book of the day on Geometrical Conics. Here, no doubt, Davis developed his natural gift for Pure Geometry. He gained an Entrance Scholarship at Queens' College, Cambridge, and followed me there in October 1871. He was a good musician and a keen cricketer; for cricket he had small scope at Cambridge, Queens' being then too small to have a club of its own (though he did, occasionally, organise a scratch team and arrange a few matches), but his music told in the University Musical Society and led to a close friendship with Stanford (Sir Charles Villiers Stanford), then organist of Queens'. He often devilled for Stanford on the college organ and he took his place when Stanford moved on to Trinity.

His private coach was Besant, who turned out so many brilliant mathematicians and who seems to have had the gift, not always possessed by coaches, of inspiring his pupils with a lasting love of his subject. In 1875 Davis passed out 20th wrangler, and then went to join his father in business; this was according to promise, but many of his friends have thought it was a mistake, considering his special gifts and tastes. Whether he might have gone far if he had been able to give his whole life to mathematics, or whether his brain was all the fresher when he turned to his problems with relief from less congenial work, it is impossible to say; anyhow things did not turn out well, the business began to fall off, his father put in much of his private fortune in the hope of tiding over bad times, and died.

As mathematics was not to be his profession Davis made it his hobby, and soon began to send notes and solutions to the columns of the *Educational Times*, continuing to do so until that feature of the paper was dropped. Some of his work has appeared also in the *Mathematical Gazette* and the *Notes* of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society. His ingenious mind was always attracted by a puzzle, and he spent some time and labour on the Theory of Numbers and Diophantine problems, but his special gift was Pure Geometry.

His articles and solutions put him in correspondence with many other mathematicians—Langley, Tucker, J. J. Milne, Genese, T. C. Simmons, and others. He was much attracted by the Geometry of the Triangle, its allied circles and points, and here his expert knowledge of Trilinears fitted in and rounded off the subject.

Davis joined the A.I.G.T. in 1887, served his turn on the Council of the M.A., and for many years acted as Honorary Auditor.

In 1885 Milne published *Weekly Problem Papers*, followed by *Solutions of Weekly Problem Papers*. Davis read through the proofs of the latter and made several contributions; in the preface Milne writes “my thanks are due . . . especially to Mr. R. F. Davis of Queens’ College, Cambridge, who supplied many neat solutions, particularly of geometrical problems . . . it is a source of great regret to me that I was not able to avail myself further of his aid.” When these books were followed by the *Companion to the Weekly Problem Papers*, to Davis were entrusted several sections of the work, in particular a geometrical proof of Feuerbach’s Theorem, and the Rev. T. C. Simmons, who wrote a long section on the “Recent Geometry of the Triangle,” says, in a letter to Milne: “The whole work was reviewed and criticised by Mr. R. F. Davis, and to his genial advice and geometrical skill I have been, in almost every chapter, indebted.”

In 1890 appeared Part I. of *Geometrical Conics* under the joint authorship of Milne and Davis; Part II. followed in 1894. Of late years overwork, declining health, and other anxieties have lessened his output, but there was no falling off in his love of his subject or his mental power; almost to the last nothing gave him greater pleasure than to help a friend in some difficult problem, often solved on the back of an envelope, on his way to or from the city. All who knew him will, I think, agree with me that he was a man eminently built for friendship, with a very active brain and a most lovable disposition.

C. E. WILLIAMS.

GLEANINGS FAR AND NEAR.

449. Anagrams. Newton, as to primary ideas *not new*, but as to all else *went on*; in perceptions *no newt*; as to reputations *won ten*, that is, *ten now*, not being fully appreciated in his own time.—De Morgan to Sir W. R. Hamilton. Graves, *Life of Sir W. R. Hamilton*, iii. 554.

450. Newton’s ancestry appear to have been in no way remarkable for intellectual ability, and there is nothing of note that I can find out among his descendants, except what may be inferred from the fact that the two Huttons were connected with him in some unknown way, through the maternal line.—F. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, p. 220 (1869).

451. Anthony Sinnot, *Gent. Mag.*, July, 1800, writes that he had visited Westminster Abbey and noticed that many statues and monuments were injured. Unreproved youths were playing bat and ball among them, and throwing stones. The monument “erected over that luminary of science, Sir Isaac Newton, (had) two fingers broken from the left hand of the figure.”

452. Newton remarked of antiquaries:—“I cannot imagine the utility of such studies. All their pursuits are below nature.” He quoted with evident approval a saying of Barrow, that “poetry is a kind of ingenious nonsense.”

In the latter connection, cf. Gray’s *Ode for Music*:—

’Twas Milton struck the deep-ton’d shell,
And, as the choral warblings round him swell,
Meek Newton’s self bends from his state sublime
And nods his hoary head, and listens to the rhyme.