OBITUARY

ROBERT CECIL DAVENPORT, 1893–1961

One of the best known—and certainly the best beloved—of British ophthalmic surgeons died on June 17, 1961.
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Robert Cecil Davenport was born in Chungking in China, the country where his father, C. J. Davenport, F.R.C.S., was a surgeon of repute. He came to England for his education at Mill Hill School, and subsequently studied medicine at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London. He qualified in the middle of the First World War and immediately joined the Army with which he served through the campaign in Mesopotamia, by no means an easy medical assignment for a young officer. After demobilization in 1920 he returned to St. Bartholomew's where in succession he held the posts of House-Surgeon, Ophthalmic House-Surgeon, Demonstrator of Physiology, and Chief Assistant to the Ophthalmic Department. During this time he took his qualification from the University of London in 1920, and he became an F.R.C.S. in 1921.

Thereafter he came to Moorfields Eye Hospital in 1922 as Clinical Assistant and won the Moorfields Research Scholarship. At this early stage of his career he acted as Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon to the East London Hospital for Children, the Western Ophthalmic Hospital, and the Central London Ophthalmic Hospital; but it was to Moorfields that he gave his professional life, serving the Hospital in one capacity or another for 39 years. He was made a Consultant Surgeon in 1930, was Senior Surgeon in 1948, and Honorary Consultant from 1959 until his death, sitting continuously first on the Committee of Governors and then on the Board of Governors from 1937 onwards. This long service to Moorfields was broken only in the Second World War, on the first day of which, with a team of Sisters and Nurses from Moorfields, he took charge of the medical arrangements at St. Dunstan's, the great institution which made itself responsible for the treatment and rehabilitation of servicemen blinded in the war, with which he remained the Principal Medical Consultant until his death.

His greatest work, however, was in his capacity of Dean of the Medical School, initially at Moorfields (1938–1948) and subsequently at the Institute of Ophthalmology (1948–1959). Holding this office as well as that of a senior consultant surgeon, he played a prominent part in the combination of the Royal London, the Royal Westminster, and the Central London Ophthalmic Hospitals to form the new Moorfields Eye Hospital, and in the founding of the Institute of Ophthalmology. In addition, he took a wide interest in the broader activities of our specialty. Joining the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom in 1922, he served as a Secretary from 1934–36, was a Member of the Council from 1936–39, a Vice-President from 1948–51, and President from 1958–60. He was also President of the Section of Ophthalmology of the Royal Society of Medicine from 1955–57; was on the Council of the Faculty of Ophthalmologists from its inception in 1948 until 1960; and in the whole post-war period until his death he was the representative of Great Britain on the International Federation of Ophthalmological Societies.

These are the facts; impressive though they are they reflect but little of the immense influence which Robert Davenport exerted on ophthalmology, not only in Great Britain but in many countries throughout the world. He was the perfect Dean of a medical school, sparing neither time nor energy in fulfilling a task which is too frequently regarded as a routine and lacking the warmth of humanism. Each student he got to know well, on each he expended himself freely, telling them not only how to work but where to live and how to live, helping them when they got into trouble or comforting them when they were homesick—a problem of no small magnitude when the trainee surgeon comes from a far-off land with a totally different culture. And at the same time he treated them with absolute integrity and understanding, assessing their future possibilities for them, and continuing to advise them when they had gone back to their homes. To him a student was not merely a candidate for examinations but a future doctor whose care should be for sick men and women. When he retired from the office of Dean in 1959, hundreds of his old students from 63 countries—from Chile in the West through Africa and Asia to the Philippines in the East—subscribed to make him a gift, and in practically every case the subscription was accompanied by a spontaneous letter of appreciation. None
of us has amassed such a wealth of devotion so widely cast as had Davenport; and there was no greater Commonwealth-builder than he.

To his patients he was the perfect doctor, not only taking an infinity of care with each individual but with his kindly and gentle humour tiding them over their illnesses. To him a patient was not a case requiring technical treatment but a human being in trouble; and in no circumstances was he greater than in extending a helping hand when medicine, as it often does, fails to mend the damage of disease or decay. Nowhere was this more required than at St. Dunstan's in his care of those wounded in the war; never was a sympathetic understanding tinctured by common sense more effectively offered. The transition from light to darkness is less easily borne by the young and active than by those whose urgencies have been dimmed by age; and to a whole host of such—and to their families—Davenport was a doctor and remained a counsellor and friend, rehabilitating them into an active if more restricted life.

It is for these qualities that ophthalmology both at home and internationally will miss Robert Davenport; at Moorfields and the Institute of Ophthalmology where he knew and was loved by everybody, the feeling of loss is particularly acute. It is indeed sad that it all finished so abruptly and so soon, leaving him so little time to look back at leisure on a task well done. Our warmest sympathy goes out to his widow—a doctor herself who gave up medicine to help him in his life's work—and to his two sons and his daughter.

KARL LINDNER, 1883–1961

Every reader of this Journal knew—or knew of—Karl Lindner, and particularly to those who have known him and liked him, his death will be a cause of sadness. He was born in 1883 in Vienna, where he studied medicine with a short sojourn at the Sorbonne in Paris. He joined the world-famous clinic of Ernst Fuchs in 1908; in 1916 he became