

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

PROF. P.P. DEBONO

The Hon. Peter Paul Debono, who has recently vacated the Chair of Surgery in our Royal University has completed 25 years as Professor of Surgery and as Senior Surgeon to the Central Hospital.

Professor Debono was born on the 29th June 1890. He was born into the University since his father, the late Professor Francesco Debono M.D., in the previous April, had been appointed Professor of Botany, Zoology, Hygiene and Forensic Medicine. He was named Peter Paul after his maternal grandfather, Peter Paul Caruana, a merchant, and it was a pure coincidence that he happened to be born on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

After passing through the Lyceum, he matriculated and entered the University in the year 1904. In 1910 he graduated M.D. and gained the Government exhibition and the Bugeja Scholarship as the first student of the course. After graduation he spent a year or rather 13 months in post graduate study in London where he attended various hospitals and obtained the D.P.H. of the University of Cambridge. Besides attending hospitals he worked in the bacteriological laboratories of the Royal Institute of Public Health and the result of his researches was published in the *Central Blatt. f. Bacteriologia*. (Orig. 62Bd. 1912).

Returning to Malta near the end of 1911 he served for a short period as temporary Medical Officer of Health during the epidemic of Cholera which prevailed in that year, and then took up his first appointment in the University as assistant to the Professor of Anatomy and Pathology. He worked in the dissecting rooms and in the pathological laboratories, and in 1914, when his chief, Prof. C. Sammut, left for War Service he was made acting Pathologist to the Central Hospital, a post which he held up to his

transfer to the Public Health Department in 1918.

In the Central Hospital Dr. Debono did not confine himself to the laboratory but took an active part in ward work and gave Anaesthetics in the operating theatre, and was the means of introducing the use of Ether, both by open and closed methods, and of Spinal Anaesthesia. He also published a paper (*The Journal of State Medicine* August 1914) recording for the first time the occurrence of Amoebic Dysentery in Malta.

During the war 1914-18, whilst still continuing services with the Civil Government, he served as Civil Surgeon first in the Royal Naval Hospital Bighi both as Surgeon and as Specialist Anaesthetist, and later, when the Gallipoli Campaign was over, he worked in the Military hospital as a member of the staff of the Command Pathologist, Col. A.C.O. Sullivan, Professor of Pathology Trinity College Dublin, himself being a pupil of Wirchow. When Col. O'Sullivan returned to England he was left in charge of Tigne District Laboratory where he remained until his transfer to the P.H. Department.

At Tigné Laboratory, he carried out research work on Dysentery in conjunction with his colleague Dr. J. Spears which was published in the *R.A.M.C. Journal* (*Journal of the R.A.M.C.* June 1919).

After a brief period of service as Medical Officer of Health (February 1918-May 1919) Dr. Debono was selected for appointment as Junior Surgeon to the Central Hospital in succession to Dr. J. Galizia who was a victim of the epidemic of Influenza raging at the time, and was sent on a Government scholarship to the U.K. to obtain the F.R.C.S. leaving Malta on the 3rd. June 1919.

In London, through the influence of Sir Archibald Garrod who was one of the



Prof. P.P. Debono O.B.E., M.D., D.P.H., F.R.C.S.

consultants in Malta during the war, he entered St. Bartholomew's Hospital. He passed the Primary Fellowship in the following November and then joined the newly set up Professorial Unit under Geo. Gask. Beginning as a simple dresser he ended as "Locum tenens" to the Chief Assistant Mr. G. L. Keynes and also acted as house surgeon to Mr. now Sir Thomas Dunhill, Surgeon to the late King.

Having passed his final Fellowship examination in November 1920, through the influence of Sir William Thorburn who also had been consultant in Malta, he secured the appointment of Assistant Resident Surgical Officer in the Manchester Royal Infirmary, and had his full share of the abundant surgical material available there.

In July 1921, after practically eleven years of preparation in Anatomy, Pathology, Anaesthetics and Clinical and Operative Surgery, Dr. Debono returned to Malta and took up the post of Junior Surgeon and started practice in Surgery.

On the 5th October 1926, he became Professor of Surgery and Senior Surgeon to the Civil Hospital.

During the twenty five years that Professor Debono occupied the Chair of Surgery he worked wholeheartedly for the students and for the University as well as for the sick both in and out-side hospital. Professor Debono served for two periods of three years as a representative of the Faculty of Medicine on the General Council of the University, now the Senate, and, for a further period of six years, as a nominated member. His membership of the General Council for a consecutive period of nine years ended in 1947, during the last three years of which, he was elected as the Rector Magnificus' deputy. When the Royal University became autonomous, Professor Debono was elected a member of the new Council as a representative of the Legislature.

During the Siege of 1941 - 43, Professor Debono was the Chief Surgeon in the Emergency Medical Service, and by his

example, he contributed considerably to the setting up and maintaining a high standard in the treatment of war injuries.

Professor Debono kept himself well abreast of the advances of Surgery, and he took pains to keep the School of Surgery of the University of Malta well up to date. Thus, when Thoracic Surgery came into the field, he, as a pupil of G.E. Gask and J.E.H. Robertson who were amongst the pioneers of this branch of Surgery in the United Kingdom, was not slow in taking it up and he has been doing Thoracoplasty for Pulmonary Tuberculosis since 1929. The high standard both in teaching and in practice maintained in the School of Surgery of Malta has been recognised by Professor Debono's name being included amongst the members of the Editorial Board of the British Journal of Surgery along with those of the chiefs of the more important Surgical Clinics in the Commonwealth.

Professor Debono's activities were not limited to the professional field. In 1936 when he happened to be president both of the Camera Medica and of the Malta Branch of the British Medical Association he was nominated a member of the Executive Council under the Constitution of Malta of 1936. In respect of this service he was granted the title of "The Honourable". On the restoration of Self-Government he stood for election in the interests of Labour and was returned as a member for the Fourth District. He was made Minister of Health in the first Government under the Constitution of 1947, but he resigned the Ministry after a few months in order to return to his professional work. He was elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in April 1948. His heart, however, was not in politics and he definitely retired in 1950.

Professor Debono was created an officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in the New Year Honours of 1944 and an officer of the Venerable Order of St. John in the British Realm in 1938.