BOOK REVIEW


Arthur Ernest Mourant will be remembered as a scientist of international repute and one of the greatest Jerseymen of all time. A true polymath, the areas in which he became an authority of world renown were anthropology, blood groups, and genetics. Yet prior to his career in medicine, which he began at the age of 34, he trained as a chemist and geologist at Oxford. To the majority of us, there can be no two subjects more disparate than blood groups and stones, yet it was the study of these and other equally diverse areas that led Arthur Mourant to make profoundly important discoveries concerning the origins and migration of human races. Arthur Mourant’s place in history would have been assured with his anthropological work alone, yet he made many other important contributions to scientific and medical knowledge. Such achievements were typical of the genius and vision of this most unassuming and gentlest of men.

Before his death, at the age of 90, Arthur Mourant left an incomplete manuscript of his final book, an autobiography. Whilst the main bulk of the work was essentially complete, the final chapter existed as a sketch and this has now been made suitable for publication by Gary Misson, his friend and associate. Blood and Stones charts Arthur Mourant’s career and life beginning with an account of his background and childhood where we can build a picture of a Methodist farming family in early 20th century Jersey. After school at Victoria College, (Jersey), Mourant went up to Oxford where he studied chemistry and geology. In this autobiography he gives a personal and anecdotal view of Oxford life in the 1920s and ’30s particularly with respect to the scientific community. Life was not always simple and Mourant gives a frank description of the difficulties that he experienced during the troubled years of the 1930s and the reasons for changing to a career in medicine with the intention of becoming a psychoanalyst. The Second World War coincided with his (medical) studies at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, London and, because of the German occupation of the Channel Islands, Mourant found himself exiled in England and isolated from his family.

Within several years of qualifying, Mourant made fundamental discoveries about blood groups, such as co-discovering the Coombs antiglobulin test. There are detailed accounts of Mourant’s meteoric rise in the scientific world with many anecdotes of personalities that he befriended during his career, such as the amusing stories of J.B.S. Haldane with whom the author shared both scientific and political ideals. Arthur Mourant soon became an important figure in the development of the UK blood transfusion service in the new NHS and later developed an international reputation facilitated by his fluency in European languages. He lucidly describes, with characteristic modesty, his many achievements both as a scientist and administrator. Despite his eminence as a medical man, he retained and practiced his interests in geology and archaeology particularly with respect to his beloved Channel Islands; indeed it is often for this that he is remembered by his fellow Islanders. After his retirement, Mourant married and returned to live at the family home in Jersey where he spent much of his time shared between geological ventures and completing three major books on blood groups and related topics.

This autobiography remained unfinished at the time of the author’s death; therefore, in order to give the reader a more complete picture of the personality of the author, several of his closest friends and associates have been asked to contribute short appreciations and anecdotes. Contributors include Hillary Finzi (née du Pré), Prof. Jacques Ruffié, Dr. Clive Bishop, Colette Stevens, Dr. Caroline Blackwell, and Dr. David Keen.

A bibliography of 460 publications completes the work and is included for anyone wishing to study the life and career of the author in greater depth. It also allows the general reader to gain an impression of the enormity and breadth of Arthur Mourant’s scientific life.

Published by La Haule Books Ltd. in the Jersey Heritage Series, Blood and Stones will be bound in top quality buckram with gold tooling on the front, back, and spine. Each book forms part of a limited, numbered edition. It will be published in November 1996 and will be posted free of charge within the Islands and the United Kingdom.