

Abrahamson, Leonard

by Helen Andrews

Abrahamson, Leonard (1896–1961), doctor, was born 29 April 1896 into a Jewish family in Semiatich, latterly in Belarus, second of four children of David and Frances Abrahamson. To escape pogroms his family emigrated to Newry, Co. Down, when he was 3 years old. He was educated at the CBS, Newry, and gained the highest marks in the country in Irish and Greek in the intermediate certificate (1910). In 1914 he wrote an article in Irish on the contribution of the Christian Brothers to his education and to that of the poor, and was subsequently appointed vice-president of the CBS Past Pupils' Union. Entering TCD in 1912 with a sizarship in Irish and an entrance prize in Hebrew, he was awarded a foundation scholarship in modern languages (1915), graduating BA (1918). An active member of the Dublin University Gaelic Society, he was elected hon. librarian and represented TCD in the Irish inter-university debate (1914), which was held in Irish. When, despite the provost's opposition, the society invited Patrick Pearse (qv) to address it, Abrahamson was disciplined and the society suspended. Turning to medicine, he graduated MB, B.Ch., BAO, *stip. cond.* (1919), won the Fitzpatrick scholarship (1920), the postgraduate medical travelling prize, and the Banks medal (1921), and studied in Paris and London before graduating MD (1922). He became a member (1921), fellow (1922), and subsequently president of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (1949–52).

In 1920 he was appointed assistant physician and anaesthetist at Mercer's Hospital, Dublin, and subsequently visiting physician (1927–30). A pioneer of cardiology and founder of the first department of cardiography, he introduced the cardiograph to Dublin, which was placed in his charge by a patient whom he had sent to a London specialist and who had decided that Dublin should also have the instrument. In his lecture 'An introduction to electrocardiography' to the Section of Medicine of RAMI (9 December 1921), Abrahamson described the methods, mechanisms, and value of the cardiograph; and in 1927 he gave the first report to the academy of the diagnosis of a coronary thrombosis, later verified by autopsy. He published papers in professional journals and developed the clinical application of the cardiograph when he was appointed physician (1932) and subsequently senior visiting physician (1934–61) to the Richmond (St Laurence's) Hospital, Dublin. An outstanding clinician and teacher, and a magnetic personality with his ever-present cigar and acerbic wit, he was known by his students as 'Abe'. He was the first Jew to be appointed professor of pharmacology (1926–34) and of medicine (1934–61) at the RCSI. Other appointments included external examiner in materia medica at TCD (1932–61); examiner in medicine for RCPI (1934–61); and hon. consulting physician to the Drogheda cottage hospital. He was a founder member of the British Cardiac Society; a member of the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland (1834); council member and chairman of the executive committee of the Irish Medical

Association; fellow (1921) and president (1939) of the Medical Section of RAMI; and president of the Biological Society of TCD, of RCPI (1933–4), and of the Section of Cardiology of the BMA (1952).

Active in Jewish community affairs, he fought against anti-semitism and supported the establishment of the Anti-Defamation League in 1914. In response to anti-semitic attacks on his father, a British subject, he wrote to the national press pointing out that not all Jews are German and that Jews are invariably loyal to their country of birth or adoption. He played an important role in founding (and as a member of) the Jewish Representative Council: established in 1938 to monitor affairs affecting the Jewish community, it acted as an advisory body to the chief rabbi and, during the second world war, advised the government on Jewish concerns. Abrahamson was also hon. president of the Jewish National Fund and chairman of the Jewish Refugee Aid Committee (founded 1938). He died 29 October 1961 at his home, 138 Merrion Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin, and was buried at the Jewish cemetery, Dolphin's Barn, Dublin. He is commemorated by a bust presented by his son Max to the RCPI, and by the RCSI with the Leonard Abrahamson memorial lecture endowed by the Dublin Jewish community, and the Leonard Abrahamson gold medal and prize.

He married (1920) Tillie Nurock; they had one daughter and four sons. Mervyn Leonard Abrahamson, FRCPI, served as physician at the Richmond Hospital and as professor of pharmacology and therapeutics at RCSI (1961–74). Maurice Abrahamson, stockbroker, was the first Jew to be elected president of the Irish stock exchange (1961–3), and was chairman and honorary life president of the Jewish Representative Council. Max William Abrahamson, solicitor, lectured in law in the school of social studies, TCD, and published *Engineering law and the ICE* (1969). David Abrahamson specialised in psychiatry and settled in London.

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