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Dr Oscar Schmalzbach, a Sydney psychiatrist well known to members of the legal profession died in January 1997 aged 85 years. For many years he was Secretary-General of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences and consultant psychiatrist to the New South Wales Attorney-General's Department. He edited the Journal of the Academy and wrote a number of books including *Profiles in Murder* 1971 which recounted some of his Court experiences.

He had a unique mixture of middle European charm, Jewish chutzpah and persistence that sometimes bordered on the brink

¹ Justice of the High Court of Australia. Past President of the Academy.

of frenzy. His appearance was usually quite extraordinary. He looked at all times like a central casting version of an eccentric European professor. Clothes were of no great interest to him. His shirt and tie were often awry. But from out of the chaos of occasional disarray came dark piercing eyes and deep, soulful looks which portrayed the thinking man that was behind the physical trappings.

He loved office and honours. I always suspected that he felt that the medical and scientific professions could not really compete with the legal profession in this regard. Perhaps that is one reason why he cultivated so many judicial and legal friends.

It was truly astonishing to see the way in which, within the Academy, Chief Justices and other mighty potentates of courts, hospitals and laboratories - holding in awe the flock of subordinates in their own domains - were organised and disciplined, even pushed around, by this remarkable man. We all did his bidding - at least most of the time - because, as if by magic, he bound us together in a most interesting association renewed in scientific sessions and international symposia. He did so by the exciting topics that sprang out of his mind and by the congenial social occasions that always followed their exploration. Let no one say that he lived in the past. A glance at the papers in the *Journal* which he edited for those long decades, will show the variety and contemporaneity of the topics he chose for our study.

During later years- the Academy moved its office to his rooms in Macquarie Street, Sydney. Those rooms overlooked the Harbour and the Royal Botanical Gardens. The vistas outside were nothing like the scene inside. Oscar's practice had shrunk to a virtual standstill. The Academy was now his all. Chaos and decay in all around we saw in his rooms. There were photographs from the 1940s. Manuscripts from the 1950s. Disordered past copies of the *Journal* from the 1960s. The place was not a model of discipline. Sometimes I asked myself what it was about Oscar that kept me, in a desperately busy life, rushing to his meetings, more often than not to be upbraided for some imagined slight or insignificant default. Yet despite it all, there was something infectious about Oscar's personality. It is hard to explain. The irritation was actually part of the attraction. Behind the irritation we all knew that he was the vital driving force. It was he who lit the spark at every meeting and kept the Academy a creative and innovative body of intellect.

I have to admit that when eventually Oscar Schmalzbach retired, there were painful moments. He knew how important the Academy was to his spirit and well-being. He did not want to let it go. However he was becoming a little forgetful. He was provoking all and sundry with politically incorrect remarks, such as his controversial assertion about a *Delilah Syndrome*. The speeches in Latin were becoming even longer. If the Academy were to survive, it had to have new blood. Eventually, Oscar

perceived this. But it took some skill on the part of those in charge to manoeuvre him into the honorific position of "Founder".

Something went out of the Academy when Oscar departed. For me, it will never quite be the same again. Yet if it continues, and goes on to attract new contemporary themes, it will be a lasting memorial to Oscar Schmalzbach. The little boy from Poland who, in his youth, escaped in perilous and deadly times through Hungary and joined the British Army to fight the tyrants made wonderful contributions to his adopted country, Australia. Those of us who knew him will never forget him. He was delightful, charming, irritating and infuriating in equal measure. If I close my eyes, I can still hear his voice presenting me, in the Latin he learned at school in pre-War Poland. Lauding me (as he had earlier done to Sir Harry Gibbs and Gordon Samuels) with some ancient tribute written by a poet to a long forgotten Caesar. Oscar was Oscar. Neither in the Academy, nor elsewhere, will we ever see his like again.

Oscar was Oscar. He was a great friend to many in the legal profession. We shall never see his like again.