Obituary

WILLIAM HENRY WELCH, M.D., LL.D.

Formerly Professor of Pathology and of the History of Medicine,
Johns Hopkins University

The death, on April 30th, in the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, some months after a severe operation, of Professor W. H. Welch removes a great figure in scientific medicine.

The descendant in the direct line of other medical men, he was born on April 8th, 1850, at Norfolk, Connecticut, in a house which eighty years later was distinguished by a plaque inscribed: "To Dr. William Henry Welch: Dean of American Medicine." Graduating with classical honours at Yale in 1870, he entered the medical school of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, in 1871, and became M.D. in 1875, serving

William H. Welch.

After the dry-point engraving
by Alfred Hutton

as an intern at the Bellevue Hospital, before he went, in 1876, to work at Strasbourg under von Recklinghausen, at Leipzig with Ludwig, at Breslau with Cohnheim, and at Vienna under Chiari and Hebra. On his return to New York in 1879 he was made professor of pathological anatomy and general pathology at the Bellevue Medical College, and held the chair until 1884, when he was appointed the first whole-time professor of pathology at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, where he remained in one capacity or another for

the next fifty years of his long life. Johns Hopkins, a Baltimore merchant and Quaker millionaire, who died on Christmas Eve, 1873, endowed "a university, for there will always be youth to teach; and a hospital, for there will always be suffering to relieve." In 1884 a provisional medical faculty was established, and Welch's chair was one of the first. He at once went to Germany to gain a thorough mastery of the rapidly developing science of bacteriology under Koch, whom he had previously met at Breslau, at Berlin, and elsewhere. In the autumn of 1885 he began research and graduate teaching in his laboratory at Baltimore, where among his co-workers and pupils were G. M. Sternberg, Walter Reed of yellow fever fame, W. S. Halsted, W. G. Councilman, and Simon Flexner. Financial difficulties, however, delayed the opening of the Johns Hopkins Hospital until 1889, and of the undergraduate medical school till 1893. Welch had much say, together with J. S. Billings, the medical adviser, in the selection of the clinical professors—William Osler, W. S. Halsted, and Howard A. Kelly—who, like Welch, were all under the age of 40, and later appeared in J. S. Sargent's portrait of "The Four Doctors" (1905), which now adorns the W. H. Welch Medical Library. Welch became pathologist-in-chief to the hospital, and was the first dean of the medical school for five years (1893-8).

As a pathologist he had the broadest possible outlook, and covered the whole field of this biological science. Thus, to give a few examples only of his enormous output—his Bibliography in 1917 contained 335 items—he worked on haemorrhagic infarction, embolism and thromboses, discovered the *Staphylococcus epidermidis albus* and the *Bacillus aerogenes capsulatus*, both in 1892, and carried

out experimental work on pulmonary oedema (1878) and on glomerulonephritis (1886). His pupils filled pathological chairs in many American universities; and not only in the New World, for the Emeritus Quick professor of biology at Cambridge, G. H. F. Nuttall, worked in his laboratory forty-four years ago. His pupils have often arisen to call him blessed and express their deep debt of admiration and lasting affection—for example, on the more or less public occasions of the twenty-fifth anniversary in 1900 of his doctorate, when he was presented with a *Festschrift*, and on his seventieth and eightieth birthdays.

As an able administrator and shrewd judge of men and their capacities, so that his recommendations for appointments were eminently successful, he was much in demand by scientific bodies connected with medical research, and freely did he give his services and sacrifice his scanty leisure. Thus he had been president of the Board of Scientific Directors of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research since 1901, and Carnegie trustee from 1906. On several occasions during the last decade of the last century he came to the rescue by successfully preventing legislation against animal experiments. In preventive medicine he long took a leading part; in 1897 he became president of the Maryland Public Health Association, at a time when action was sorely needed, and remained in office for a quarter of a century; in 1903 he was a member of the subcommittee of the Committee of Fifty to investigate the liquor problem, and wrote the report on the pathological effects of alcohol; and in 1916 he resigned the chair of pathology at Johns Hopkins University to become director of the important School of Hygiene and Public Health at Baltimore.

Welch was a man of wide sympathies and culture, and years ago was described by Osler as "extraordinarily well versed in the history of medicine, and, apart from technical knowledge, having a fund of information on all conceivable topics—from bridge to baseball, from Horace to Herrick." He was a bibliophile who also knew the contents of books with extreme accuracy, and his interest in medical history was not the hobby of an old man, for he was in 1889 the first president of the Johns Hopkins Medical Historical Club. In 1926 he was elected to the new chair of medical history in the Johns Hopkins University, and at once set out to journey over Europe in order to buy books. Six years later he resigned, and was succeeded by Professor Henry Sigerist. The W. H. Welch Medical Library, in charge of Lieut.-Colonel F. H. Garrison, and the Osler Library at McGill University, Montreal, presided over by Dr. W. W. Francis, were by a happy coincidence dedicated in the same year (1930).

The revolution in medicine that has taken place in North America in the last half-century should be mainly ascribed, as is most justly due, to the two great leaders and friends of the Johns Hopkins School—Osler and Welch—who in so many ways resembled each other, especially in their humanity, genius for friendship, wide vision, and entire unselfishness. Welch was a bachelor, a clubbable soul much given to hospitality, and a charming companion. Honours, entirely unsought, crowded upon him: he was an original member in 1886 of the Association of American Physicians, then limited to a hundred, its president in 1901, and was elected an honorary member in 1913; there is now one original member living. He was President of the American Medical Association in 1910, and of other societies too numerous to mention. He was elected Foreign Corresponding Member of the British Medical Association in 1932, was an honorary Fellow of many scientific bodies in Europe, and was the recipient of a number of foreign decorations.

HUMPHRY ROLLESTON.