

William Henry Welch : a brief tribute on his eightieth birthday.

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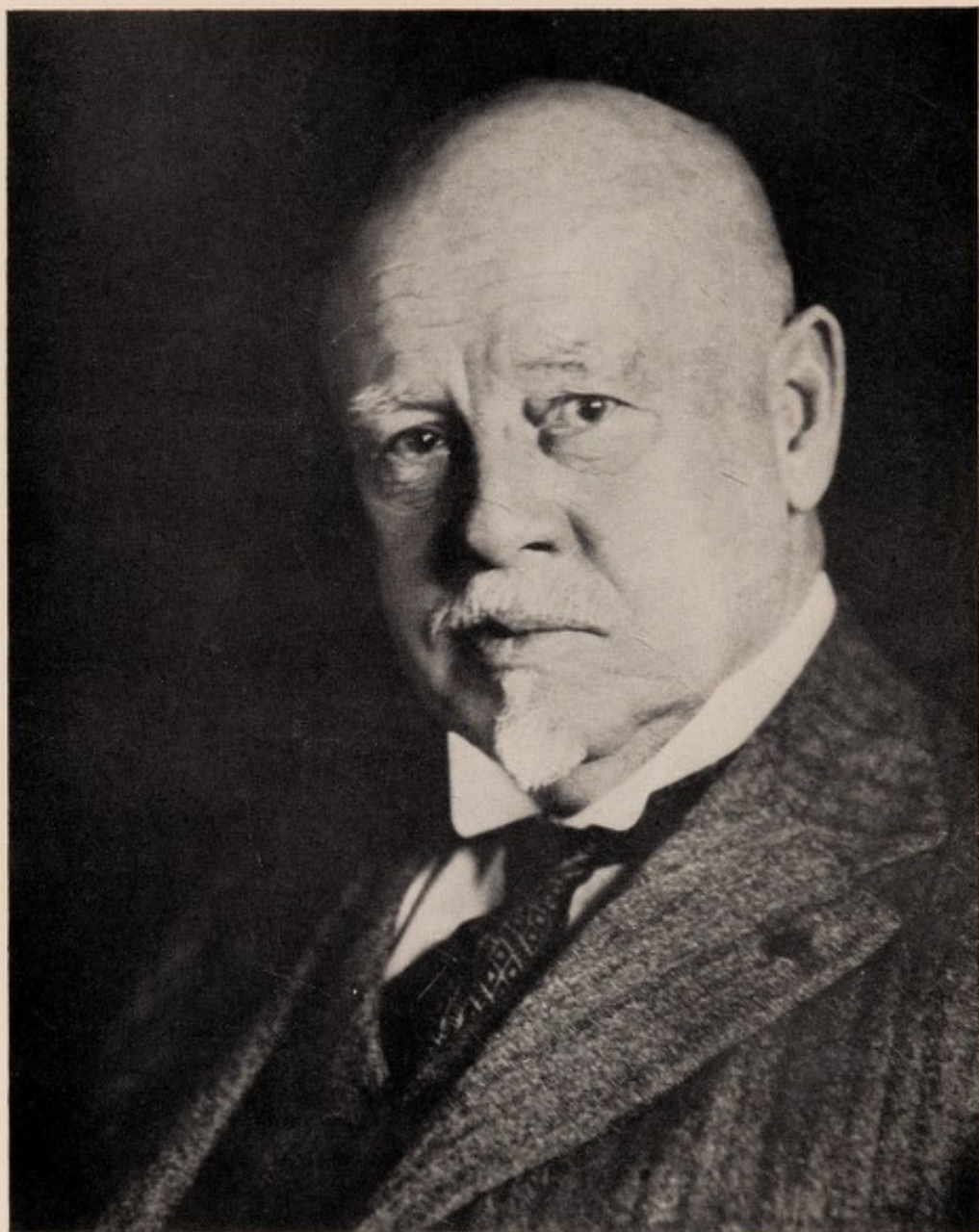
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DR. WILLIAM H. WELCH, WHOSE EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY WAS INTERNATIONALLY CELEBRATED ON APRIL 8

WILLIAM HENRY WELCH
A Brief Tribute On His Eightieth Birthday

by A. W. Meyer

WILLIAM HENRY WELCH
A Brief Tribute On His Eightieth Birthday¹

By A. W. MEYER, M.D., 1905

Professor of Anatomy, Stanford University

WE HAVE not come to appraise his worth, but to acclaim it, to wish him well and to rejoice upon this, his eightieth birthday. We cannot add to his honors. He has had many of them, and as he said of Jacobi, one marvels that they fall so easily from his shoulders. It is characteristic of him to use an occasion given in his honor to eulogize others, and to declare that he has been a child of good fortune; but fortune without a Welch would have availed naught.

Dr. Welch began to receive honors in 1894, and since then he has received an imposing list of the very highest both at home and abroad. Friends, students, disciples, colleagues, and confrères, all join today in gratitude for the many fruitful years he has devoted to the advancement of pathology, bacteriology, and medicine, and to the promotion of public health. If the public knew what his labors and his example and influence have meant in the alleviation of suffering, it would rise to call him blessed, for the entire world is indebted to him. Fortunate indeed is any people that is given such a man, and still more fortunate they who rightly value and further such labors.

All medical students at Johns Hopkins regarded him as a *magister magnificus*, whose words always arrested attention because of their broad learning and deep wisdom. He spoke in simple Anglo-Saxon with unusual fitness, great ease and reflection, and wholly without gesture and pretension. Though his eyes usually twinkled, his look penetrated deeply.

¹ Remarks on the occasion of Dr. Welch's eightieth birthday, commemorated at the Stanford Medical School, April 8, 1930.

We loved him for his freedom from bias and for his geniality, and admired him for his benevolent attitude, his large grasp, his wide knowledge, and his amazing memory. He never preached, and although he was not a *paterfamilias* in fact, we privately spoke of him as "popsy" without the least implication of familiarity. I never heard the word used except with the greatest respect and in tones of affection.

He showed great loyalty to his teachers and colleagues. The names of many of his masters often passed his lips. Their labors were apparently kept green in his memory and became familiar to us students. Jacobi, Flint, Delafield, Cohnheim, Koch, von Recklinghausen, Janeway, Prudden, Weigert, and Ehrlich seem to stand out in my memory, although I may be in error for I cannot claim to have been a disciple of his in pathology or bacteriology, having only been one of many students. No words of mine can add to the many glowing tributes paid him, but as I recalled the generous tributes paid by Dr. Welch to others I found sentences that applied to him as well, and even in fuller measure. By substituting Dr. Welch's name for those of his friends his own words are seen to become peculiarly applicable to himself. I shall read some excerpts from his tributes to Virchow, Billings, and Mitchell in illustration of what I say, merely substituting his name for theirs and changing the tense.

Welch possesses an extraordinarily suggestive mind, and many are the researches of others stimulated and inspired by him.

He received many honors and recognitions in this country and abroad.

He has the widest acquaintance and is the most highly esteemed of American physicians. He is the one whose presence is desired to represent American medicine on special occasions.

A final word as to Dr. Welch's influence upon the medical profession. He is a leader of the profession. His name and that of his intimate friend of many years, Sir William Osler, whom we still delight to honor as the chief ornament of American medicine, are of all the physicians of this country the two best known in Europe. His leadership is based upon intellectual power and above all upon strength and integrity of character. He is a singularly wise man, combining with far-sighted vision critical judgment, the gift of per-

suasion, and practical good sense. His perspective is true, removed as far as possible from all narrowness of view.

The name of Dr. Welch will always hold a place of honor in our profession. I desire to express the large indebtedness which we owe to the life and work of this man of large achievement, of high character, of enduring, beneficial influence upon this country.

The enthusiastic and inspiring celebration of his eightieth birthday affords opportunity for an estimation by many competent hands of the significance and value of Welch's manifold activities. The warm tributes so gladly paid by the scientific and medical world are still fresh in our minds, and we can but rejoice that their recipient lived to accept an homage which no conqueror in war ever merited as did our hero of science, leader, as he is, in the contest for the preservation and not for the destruction of human life. . . . We rejoice in the rich and abundant fruits of his long and well-rounded life.

His is a great name and a great influence in the world of medicine.

Dr. Welch has the happy gift of youth. He refuses to grow old. Perhaps the secret of this is found in the following quotation taken from his remarks upon the presentation of a medallion to him in 1910, at the time of his sixtieth birthday.

What are the attractions of a career in life? They lie, do they not, in the opportunities the career offers for service to mankind, in the congeniality of the work and in its rewards? The profession of medicine surpasses all others in its opportunities for service to our fellowmen. Besides this there are manifold fields of activity, appealing to the most varied personal inclinations and aptitudes, be these practical or scientific. The rewards of success in medicine, even of the highest success, lie not in money; they lie in the intellectual pleasure which one gets from his work as a physician, in the consciousness of service in the relief of suffering, and in the cure and prevention of disease. Or it may be that one may attain to the highest satisfaction of all—some contribution to useful knowledge that may be for the healing of the nation. The reward to be most truly prized is the expression of the esteem and of the confidence of one's contemporaries in the profession. So many of the greatest geniuses of our profession have lacked this recognition.

This most highly prized reward has come to me through your kind recognition, even though it be all too generous. It has come to me tonight in the very fullest measure, and in a form both inspiring and never to be forgotten. It has touched my heart with the most profound sentiments of gratitude, which I trust will animate me with a

stronger desire to make some return in a closer devotion to high ideals of service and of efficiency in such work as may remain for me to do.

Early in his career Dr. Welch called attention to the urgent need for ample facilities for medicine, but also emphasized that men, not buildings, make institutions of learning. An address on "Higher Medical Education and the Need for Its Endowment," delivered at Western Reserve in 1894, concludes as follows:


. . . . let us not forget that a university, or a medical college, may have large endowments, palatial buildings, modern laboratories, and still the breath of life be not in it. The vitalizing principle is in men—both teachers and students—who work within its walls. Without this element of life, this bond between teacher and taught, these things are but outward pomp and show. But let these greater opportunities receive the breath of life from the inspiration of great teachers and they then become the mighty instrument of higher education and scientific progress.

The great need for endowment for medical education had been emphasized two years before in an address at Harvard on "The Advancement of Medical Education." Dr. Welch had previously called attention to the fact that the total endowment of all the medical schools in 1892 was only a little more than \$600,000. Indeed, the Johns Hopkins Medical School itself had to wait for an endowment of half a million before it could open its doors in 1893. Fortunately, Dr. Welch has had an open sesame to the hearts and purses of men of great wealth, so that the present endowment of Johns Hopkins forms a princely sum indeed. In his address at Harvard, almost forty years ago, Dr. Welch said:

We fully realize that at the present day a medical school cannot get along with the simple appliances of former times. Large endowments are necessary, for laboratories especially, and here in the Eastern States at least, we must look to private philanthropy for this purpose. I think experience teaches that the community at large, even the educated community, takes little interest in matters pertaining to medical education and to medical legislation. There is no adequate appreciation of the present state of medical science. The very idea that there is any longer room for special schools and sects

and dogmas in medicine, any more than there is in physics and chemistry, is evidence of the ignorance of the general public in this respect. There is room here for a campaign of education. Have the needs of medical education for pecuniary support been as clearly and forcibly presented to the public as might be done? Well equipped laboratories are essential to medical education; and these, if properly conducted, cannot be made self-supporting. Is it generally known that in German universities at least three times as much money is spent in support of the laboratories connected with medical teaching as is spent on the salaries of professors? You cannot, here at Harvard, reach the full height of your endeavor without ample endowment.

It is a great satisfaction that he who wrote these words lived to see their fulfillment in a very generous way indeed, not only at Johns Hopkins, but also at Harvard, and in many other places both at home and abroad, often through his efforts, example, or influence. May time deal gently with him and grant him abundant health and happiness in the evening of his life, and may he live to see the realization of his ideal of medical education and endowment also here upon this coast, where medicine still seems to present the voice of one crying in the wilderness whenever it asks for larger pecuniary support.



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