

## OBITUARY

W. W. FRANCIS, A.B., M.D. (1878-1959)

WILLIAM WILLOUGHBY FRANCIS, the son of George and Marian Francis, was born in Montreal on 2 April 1878. A year or so later the family moved to Toronto where he lived with his five brothers and three sisters. Their mother was a first cousin of William Osler who regarded the children as his own nephews and nieces. Educated at Trinity College School, Port Hope, Francis went on to Johns Hopkins University where Osler was then professor of medicine. He took the A.B. degree in 1898 and graduated M.D. in 1902. Two years of internship at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, were followed by another year at Baltimore as a fellow in pathology. He next studied paediatrics in London, Berlin, Paris and Vienna. In November 1906 he began practice as a physician in Montreal, and from 1907 to 1911 was also a demonstrator in pathology at McGill University. In 1907 he had a pleural effusion followed by pulmonary tuberculosis, but eighteen months of sanatorium treatment arrested the disease. From 1911-15 he was assistant editor of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and secretary-treasurer of the Association. In 1915 he went to France with No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill), which he served as registrar. After the war he worked at Geneva, editing all four editions of the *International Journal of Public Health*, published by the League of Red Cross Societies in English, French, Italian and Spanish.

From 1922 to 1929 Francis lived at Oxford preparing his *magnum opus*, the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*, in fulfilment of Osler's last wishes, with the help of R. H. Hill, Archibald Malloch and Leonard Mackall. As Professor J. F. Fulton has written: 'The *Bibliotheca Osleriana* will ever stand as an enduring tribute not only to the genius of a great collector but more particularly to the learning, perseverance and patience of a great scholar and a great librarian.' When the Osler Library at McGill was officially opened on 29 May 1929, Francis was already there to preside over its work with enthusiasm, scholarship and ability. For many years he was also lecturer in the history of medicine. He declined the tentative offer of a professorial chair at McGill as well as one from Johns Hopkins to be Director of the Institute of Medical History there. Never robust in health—he had five attacks of coronary thrombosis in recent years—he, nevertheless, lived to be an octogenarian. He died at Ormston, P.Q., on 10 August 1959. In 1921 he married Hilda Colley who survives him together with their daughter, Dr. Marian Francis Kelen.

Francis's bibliography is recorded here but, as Dr. Lloyd Stevenson writes to me, it cannot be taken as in any sense a measure of the man. He was a classical scholar, a good linguist, an expert bibliophile and his knowledge of the older medical literature was extensive and profound. His main task was to preserve the Osler tradition of good will and scholarship and to help earnest students of medical history. He toiled faithfully and often with insufficient recognition to

enrich the writings of others. For example, his contribution to completing the Cushing Bio-bibliography of Vesalius was substantial while his name appears in a thousand prefaces and notes of acknowledgment. He attracted and influenced multitudes of students and 'no inaccuracy escaped his scrutinizing and perceptive attention'. (H. E. McDermott.)

'Bill', as he was known to his friends, bore a close family resemblance to Sir William Osler in features, in dark eyes flashing with humour, in olive complexion, in stature and gesture. We lived under the same roof in London in 1906, and he would often come to my room and keep me listening to his wit and criticisms of men and books up to the small hours when he was at his best. A love of music was a great part of his life. He never had a piano lesson, but could read music and played and sang French songs and Scottish ballads with much charm. He enjoyed grand opera and, during the opera season in New York, would spend every Saturday afternoon beside the radio following with the libretto. I well recall his dreamy air and his genial smile, for we were friends for over fifty years and corresponded regularly; my last letter from him is dated July 6. He was a valued friend of the Osler Society of McGill University and of the Osler Club of London. In 1956 two things greatly pleased him: the volume of tributes from his friends presented to him by the Osler Society and the honorary fellowship of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Francis was happy in his home life, in a devoted wife, in his daughter and grandchildren and in his work. He retained the spirit of youth and laughter to the end. Here must be an end of writing and reminiscence, but not of affection and gratitude for Francis's gift of friendship, his selfless life-work and the generous services he rendered to the history of medicine.

ARTHUR S. MACNALT Y

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*W. W. Francis.*

Fig. 1.  
W. W. FRANCIS, A.B., M.D.  
(1878-1959)

## Obituary

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## *Society Reports*

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### THE SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

THE Report of Proceedings of the Session 1958-9 reveals that the Society pursues its active existence with excellent attendances at its meetings when papers of high quality are given. At the Annual General Meeting held in October 1958 at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the second meeting of the Society to be held there, Dr. W. S. Mitchell was unanimously re-elected President for a second session. This meeting was noteworthy in that for the first time in the Society's eleven years of life a lady member delivered a paper. Mrs. Mitchell, wife of the President, gave a charming account of the recipes and household remedies of a Northumberland lady, Jane Loraine, dated 1685. Dr. Ian Porter also gave a sketch of the life and writings of Dr. Thomas Trotter, Physician to the Fleet, who, born in Melrose in 1760, spent some years of his life in Newcastle.

At the ordinary meeting held in February, Dr. John Ritchie spoke on the influence of folk-medicine on the early use of digitalis. This important contribution appears in full in the Report which also contains a synopsis of the paper by Mr. A. L. Goodall on Granville Sharp Pattison, the distinguished but argumentative Glasgow anatomist. The summer meeting was held in Paisley when homage was paid to the memory of Dr. Robert Watt compiler of the great *Bibliotheca Britannica*, the original MS. of which is in the keeping of Paisley Public Library.

The usual medico-historical notes and book notices with two appendices complete the Report. The appendices give the contents of the exhibitions shown at the Paisley meeting and at the Royal Medical Society, Edinburgh, on the occasion of the Joint Meeting of the British and Canadian Medical Associations in Edinburgh in July 1959, when the Section of Medical History met in the historic Hall of that Society.