

## WILLIAM HENRY WELCH

APRIL 8, 1850—APRIL 30, 1934

**I**N these days of specialization, the personality of Dr. Welch was peculiarly significant. He was not primarily a bacteriologist, a pathologist, a physician, a teacher or even a statesman—though he was all of these. He was primarily a human being. It was what he was, not what he did, that was of compelling importance.

He had windows opening on every possible aspect of life. He loved clear and honest thinking and he never in his eighty-odd years lost the thrill which comes with a new idea; but he had a keen sense of historical perspective which fitted the new into its place in due proportion. He felt keenly the charm of older days and his later adventures in the book-stores of Europe gave as much satisfaction as his earlier excursions into the young science of bacteriology. He had a highly cultivated esthetic sense; but he also appreciated a good dinner, good wine, and a good cigar. He slipped away from a meeting at Atlantic City to qualify as a licensed aviator. When travelling with a man thirty years his junior on a public health tour in Europe he would put his companion to bed after an exhausting series of interviews and roam about the streets by himself to catch the feeling and the meaning of old Brussels or old Vienna. He lived longer than the Biblically allotted span; and in each day of his long years he tasted more of life than the average man in a week.

From this variety of experience came the richness of his wisdom. He knew the past as a scholar. He knew the present as a *bon vivant*—if we may use the term not in its common sense but as including a savoring of the higher and subtler as well as the simpler values of life. He absorbed and com-

## DR. WELCH'S DEFINITION OF A "NEW PUBLIC HEALTH"

*Two years before his death on April 30, 1934, Dr. Welch recorded phonographically for Science Service an evaluation of the great crusade for a healthier nation, a campaign that he led so effectively. The following is an excerpt from his statement as published in the SCIENCE NEWS LETTER for May 12, 1934*

¶ It is evident that a crusade directed in the first instance against a single disease, without losing sight of its immediate goal, has assumed in recent years the proportions of a general health movement and this not merely on the negative or preventive side, but even more on the positive side of improvement of the health and increase of the vitality of the whole community.

¶ These newer directions of public and individual health, started by the antituberculosis campaign, have been reinforced and greatly expanded by similar popular movements organized to promote maternity, infant and child hygiene, social hygiene, mental hygiene, the control of cancer, the prevention and relief of heart disease, and the end of like beneficent movements is not yet in sight.

¶ Among the great lessons taught by these recent health movements is the necessity of securing by popular educa-

tion the cooperation of all the forces of society, both governmental and voluntary, in support of efforts of health departments and of the medical profession to prevent disease and to improve health.

¶ Another lesson is that the attack upon one disease may have incidental and often unexpected benefits not to be measured solely by lessening the incidence of the disease which is the immediate object of attack.

¶ Still another lesson is that existing social, industrial and economic conditions set limits to what is at present attainable in the field of disease prevention.

¶ The most important lesson of all is that success is dependent upon accurate knowledge concerning the causes and mode of spread of preventable diseases, and that the hope of the future lies in increase of useful knowledge by the methods of experimental science.

bined it all into a ripe philosophy which made it possible to plan wisely for the future.

This philosophy was always at the disposal of his colleagues, his friends, his students, even casual acquaintances and correspondents. He responded to people with the same openness and zest which welcomed ideas and experiences. They were not objects of study, not pawns in some game, but human beings. Thousands of young men in particular and by no means only those who were pupils and associates will remember his unfailing kindly encouragement and guidance with lasting gratitude.

He early attained a position so commanding that he was free to say and to do what he felt to be right without the sense of insecurity which paralyzes leadership; and his vitality freed him also from those internal protective mechanisms which make a new idea so alarming to the average man. Thus, to wisdom and kindness, courage was added to make him the ideal counsellor.

This was Dr. Welch's function as we have known him during the past quarter of a century—the counsellor-extraordinary of American medical education and American public health and social welfare. In a hundred enterprises within these fields, his influence has been determining. Nowhere perhaps has it proved more significant than in the work of the Milbank Memorial Fund. In my judgment this Fund has displayed an almost unique combination of creative vision and sound judgment. It owes these qualities of its work in considerable measure to its two wisest and most imaginative counsellors, Hermann M. Biggs and William H. Welch.

C.-E. A. WINSLOW, DR. P. H.