



SOMA WEISS

Resolution on the Death of Dr. Soma Weiss

The first shock of the news of the sudden death of Soma Weiss on January 31, 1942 caused among his friends and colleagues the almost universal reaction expressed in words by one, "It is incredible, he was so much alive." Indeed, his vital personality, boundless energy, and excellent health did make him seem to be invulnerable.

He was born in Besterceze, Hungary, on January 27, 1899. During the dark years of the War and of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire he attended the Royal Hungarian University at Budapest, where he was appointed Demonstrator and Research Fellow in Physiology and later in Biochemistry. In 1920 he came to New York. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Columbia in 1921 and only two years later was graduated from Cornell University Medical School as one of its finest products. There he came to know Dr. Eugene F. Du Bois as teacher and as a friend through the years. While a student he also held an appointment as Assistant in the Department of Pharmacology of Cornell University. Working at first under the guidance of Dr. Robert Hatcher, he soon published fundamental observations on the reflex nature of the emetic action of digitalis. The interest in the action of drugs so acquired was to continue as an outstanding characteristic of his entire subsequent clinical career.

After graduation he spent two years as intern at the Bellevue Hospital. In 1925 he joined the group of young physicians attracted by Dr. Francis W. Peabody to the newly opened Thorndike Memorial Laboratory of the Boston City Hospital. From his first days there to the end of his fourteen years at that hospital, he devoted himself whole-heartedly to the success of the Thorndike and its associated teaching services. His first appointment in the Department of Medicine was as Research Fellow. He rose in only seven years to the

rank of Associate Professor—a title perfectly descriptive of his devoted relationship to Dr. Peabody's successor, Professor George R. Minot. In 1932, on Dr. Minot's recommendation, Dr. Weiss was appointed Director of the Second and Fourth Medical Services. In this position his tact and persistence enabled him to make progressive improvements in the clinical services amidst the complexities inherent in the administration of a large municipal hospital. In order to draw together in a common interest in medicine and in the City Hospital the many interns of the Boston University, Harvard and Tufts Medical Services, he for several years conducted a fortnightly Grand Round, on which were presented and discussed patients of interest from those various services.

Soma Weiss' contacts with his interns and students were especially close. His ward rounds, conferences and lectures were always popular; and his interest in therapeutics was especially welcome to students. His excellent powers of observation, wide clinical and research experience and knowledge of the American and foreign literature, allowed him to contribute significantly to any discussion in the laboratory or at the bedside. He was always in demand as a consultant on various of the hospital services and would answer such calls, when necessary, in the small hours of the night with the freshest interest in the problem presented by the patient. If the case was unusual or representative of a clinical condition in which he was interested, he would jot down a brief note on one of a pack of library cards which he kept in a side pocket of his white coat. The accumulated cards, like his own clinical recollections, were classified and filed for future reference. They were also occasionally produced to confound the friendly scepticism of colleagues who expressed doubt that Soma had really seen, as he stated, "several such cases." For everyone he had a kindly

or cheery word and if a compliment caused a young nurse to blush, he might later remark that such "vasomotor breezes", as he called them, were beneficial to the female organism. In his earlier years his hospital day often ended late in the evening with an impromptu visit to the Accident Floor to see what clinical treasure might have drifted in with the flotsam and jetsam of disease.

In 1939 Soma Weiss left the City Hospital to succeed Dr. Henry A. Christian as the second Physician-in-Chief to the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and the eighth of the distinguished line of those who have held the title of Hersey Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic in the Harvard Medical School. For the post of the Professor of Medicine in the hospital so closely associated with the Medical School he was, because of his many and varied interests, a particularly fitting choice as one who should continue and foster the development of mutually stimulating relationships between these institutions. The qualities of heart and mind which had enabled him to adapt himself so quickly and so well to the translation from Europe to America were scarcely taxed by a move from one clinical division to another of a medical school of which he had already become an important and respected member.

His sound advice was sought by many. As Chairman of the University Committee on Pharmacotherapy and as a member of various committees in the Medical School, he rendered the conscientious service which he felt he owed to Harvard. He was an active contributor to the meetings of the leading national medical and scientific societies. He was a member of the Committee for Revision of the U. S. Pharmacopoeia, and of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry of the American Medical Association. Through these many channels and by his connection with problems concerned with National Defense flowed his ever-increasing influence upon the medicine of America.

Soma Weiss' chief research contributions were in pathological physiology of cardio-

vascular disease and in clinical pharmacology and therapeutics. They are contained in nearly two hundred publications replete with data especially from painstaking studies on patients. The selection of problems, often suggested by shrewd observation on the wards, seemed to present no difficulty to his active imagination, and his ability to avoid the blind avenues which appear to open so temptingly in the course of experiment, was uncanny. His collaborators included men representative of several branches of medicine, using the word in the broad sense in which he conceived it: pathology, roentgenology, physiology, neurology, surgery, biochemistry and obstetrics. His predominant and constant activity in making original observations rendered him loath to take the time to write summary articles or books. He did, however, contribute a few chapters to systems of medicine, and shortly before his death, published with Dr. Lewis Dexter a comprehensive monograph on the Toxemias of Pregnancy. He took the keenest of interest in the intellectual development of the young men who came to work with him. Today many of them hold important posts in academic medicine in this country and abroad.

Men like Soma Weiss do not exert an influence on their fellows by their ideas alone. Thus, his self-reliance, kindness, enthusiasm for living and sense of humor were felt by all who knew him. These qualities may have been the result of his having lived on two continents, seen much of sickness and misfortune, and found many friends. He took a deep satisfaction in the life of his family, who enriched the sense of welcome felt by the many friends and strangers invited to his home. His death at forty-three terminated a career short in years but long in terms of accomplishment. Soma Weiss' contributions to medicine are spread upon the permanent record of the literature of medical science but his true memorial is in our hearts.

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