MEMORIAL

WILLIAM BENNETT BEAN

JAMES A. CLIFTON

"Yr serv't"

Many members of this Association received letters from Bill Bean with the above complimentary close. It became his trademark. The phrase was designed to be humorous, but in a real sense, it was serious. Bill was a servant—a servant of medicine, of students, of patients and of the countless thousands of physicians around the world who read his writings. He served us all, and for his service we are richer.

Bill was born in Manila on November 8, 1909. His father, a physician, anatomist and physical anthropologist, was in the Phillippines studying jungle tribesmen. Not long after Bill's birth the family moved to New Orleans and, after a few years, to Charlottesville, Virginia, where his father became Chairman of the Department of Anatomy. The campus was Bill's playground and on it were nurtured his love of learning, his life-long interest in sports and his irreverent attitude toward figures of authority. In spite of the burdens of attending school where his father was a prominent member of the faculty and of occupying the sometimes unenviable position, in the eyes of students, of leading his class academically, he remained a popular figure among his classmates. His offbeat manner regarding authority and his avid participation in sports served him well.

Following graduation from medical school in 1935, with top of the class designation and Alpha Omega Alpha presidency in hand, he interned on the Osler Service at Johns Hopkins. The following year he moved to Boston and joined the elite group at the Thorndike Laboratory and the Harvard Service at Boston City Hospital. His sojourn in Boston lasted only one year. Boston and Bean did not mix well. The environment was too formal, the Chiefs were too high and the Indians too low. Much to the dismay of his superiors he often took his tutorial group of four Harvard medical students to watch the Red Sox rather than patrol the wards. To a certain extent he was uncomfortable because much of the excitement at the Thorndike was centered in the laboratory, and Bill was not basically a laboratory person. His research while there was an extensive clinicopathological review of three hundred cases of myocardial infarction. Three excellent papers came from that study and constitute items 1, 2, and 3 in his vast bibliography.

The next year found him in Cincinnati; there he felt at home. The

warm, friendly faculty surrounding Marion Blankenhorn and the more relaxed atmosphere of the school and the city were more suited to Bill's nature. His career flourished as he finished his residency and a fellowship in nutrition. Lifelong friendships developed with Dick Vilter, Gene Ferris and Mort Hamburger. There he also met the most important single influence on his future life—Abigail Jane Shepard. Gail was the perfect wife for him—a talented poet, painter, student of French language and culture, gracious hostess and possessor of just the correct mixture of firmness and humor to keep him in some semblance of boundary. She called him "Billy," as did his family before. Billy was perfect for him in the familiar for it suggests the broad streak of mischievousness that lurked not so deep within him, a facet of his personality that helped make him the likeable person he was. Much of the boy remained in Bill Bean.

In association with Dick Vilter, Tom Spies and others, Bill made important contributions in nutrition, particularly in the study of pellagra and other vitamin deficiencies. His solid reputation in nutrition and metabolism earned him an Army assignment in the Armored Medical Research Laboratory at Fort Knox, Kentucky. For four years he participated in and directed research designed to make tanks safer for the occupants. Heat stress, water and electrolyte disturbances were major problems to be tackled. Nutrition continued to be a focus of his interest, and he did much to improve the often maligned C ration. By war's end he was a lieutenant colonel and commanding officer of the laboratory.

Upon his return to Cincinnati, he began a systematic program to rehabilitate himself as a clinician. Every weekday for one year, he went to the Outpatient Department and did a complete examination of one patient. He then proceeded to the library, read about the clinical problem and wrote a one page summary of what he had read. This sequence is a classic example of his incredible self-discipline. Much of his success resulted from his ability to establish personal goals and pursue them unwaveringly through the years.

In 1947 he took the American Board of Internal Medicine examination. By that time he had published 50 papers, achieved membership in the Young Turks and established a national reputation. When he went for the oral part of the examination, the examiners noted his reputation and, instead of quizzing him about the patients he had just examined, spent the allotted time asking him about his experiences at Ft. Knox. I suspect that most of us would have been very pleased at such a turn of events, but Bill was affected quite differently. His sense of fair play was offended for he felt he should have been treated as any other candidate. For many years thereafter he scrutinized the workings of ABIM and was quite free

in his criticisms. His views on this and related issues were vividly expressed in his presidential address to the Central Society for Clinical Research in 1951 under the title, "A Testament of Duty: Some Strictures on Moral Responsibilities in Clinical Research." Bill Bean was a fair man.

Soon, medical schools began inquiring about his availability for departmental headships. He was considering an offer from another institution when the headship of the Department of Medicine at the University of Iowa was offered. He accepted the position while still in his 38th year.

His impact upon the department, the college of medicine and the university was immediate and profound. He took over a department that had been without a chairman for two years, had only five or six faculty and very little research. Those first years were spectacular, full of excitement and great fun. Bill was everywhere—teaching, writing, seeing patients, recruiting faculty and, most importantly of all, creating a stimulating intellectual environment. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of medicine. He was fascinated by the obscure, the unusual and the overlooked. A highly competitive person by nature he delighted in finding a heart murmur or a skin lesion a colleague had missed. Without his great sense of humor and his ability to laugh at his own foibles, he would have been difficult to work with. The faculty poked fun at him whenever possible but were always mindful that, if you got into a battle of wits with him, you were going to lose.

Under his energetic leadership the department grew and prospered. Though not a laboratory worker himself he knew research and had a gift for suggesting the correct experiments for his junior faculty to carry out. The moribund research program he inherited flourished beyond his fondest hopes.

Bill will best be remembered for his contributions to the medical and philosophical literature. He was one of the most widely read physicians of his time. His early education in Greek and Latin, his pursuit of classical literature and his serious study of writing techniques gave him a perspective for writing that was unusual among physicians. Furthermore, he genuinely enjoyed writing. He worked hard to perfect his skills, and it was a labor that gave him great pleasure. He loved words, he toyed with them, savored them, rearranged them, finally putting down long flowing sentences strung together like glistening pearls, delighting the eyes and senses of his reader.

The incredible breadth of his interests becomes evident as you thumb through 97 pages of titles in his bibliography and 52 additional pages listing his formal presentations. The output is staggering. To read Bean

is to wander through history, touching most of the great eternal issues that face mankind, savoring the wit and elegance that is the fruit of a highly cultivated garden of intellect. It is a journey of light and delight.

On his 60th birthday in November of 1969 Bill resigned as head of the Department of Medicine with an effective date of June 30, 1970, ending 22 years of successful leadership. He was appointed Sir William Osler Professor of Medicine and continued to play a major role in the department until his departure for Galveston in 1974. There he became director of the Institute for Medical Humanities and Kempner Professor of Humanities in Medicine. He developed a vigorous multidisciplinary group focusing on ethics and the role of the humanities in medical education and practice. The position provided him an unexcelled opportunity to give full expression to his interests in these areas, unfettered by heavy administrative or clinical responsibilities. In 1980, he retired from the Institute and returned to Iowa City as Sir William Osler Professor Emeritus. He and Gail resumed their busy and productive life as if they had never left, which, in fact, they had not, for all during the time they were in Galveston they returned to Iowa City for two months each summer. Bill had retained his appointment in the department, thus having the distinction of occupying simultaneously two named chairs in two medical schools.

Bill fell easily into the activities of the department. His advice was sought by faculty, housestaff and students. Many came to learn about rare diseases, borrow reprints, discuss medical philosophy and history. He was often called to the clinic or the bedside to identify a peculiar skin lesion or a vitamin deficiency. This pleasant life was rudely interrupted in July of 1986 when he was found to have colon cancer and underwent surgery. Unfortunately, lung metastases later developed. In spite of this he continued his daily routine, coming to the office each day, reading, writing and even travelling to give talks. He was determined to attend the meeting of the Association in October 1988 at Sea Island, Georgia. Though weak and terminally ill, he bravely made what he knew was his last trip to "the Climatological." Difficult though the journey for him was physically, it was even worse emotionally. Many members have loved this Association dearly but few as dearly as Bill Bean. From his election to membership in 1951 until his last meeting in 1988, he claims to have missed no more than 4 or 5 meetings. Whatever the number might be, he looked upon the Fall meeting as the highpoint of each year. His closest friends are among the membership. The Association will not see his likes again soon—scholar, teacher, philosopher, physician, writer, orator and, through it all, a gentleman.

He died quietly at home March 1, 1989. Fittingly, the city was covered

with the pure soft white of an early spring snow, the neighborhood enveloped by the peculiar stillness which accompanies newly fallen snow. Bill and everything surrounding him was at peace.

He is survived by his widow, Gail, and three children—Bennett, a ceramic artist; Margaret, a psychiatrist; and John, a university professor.