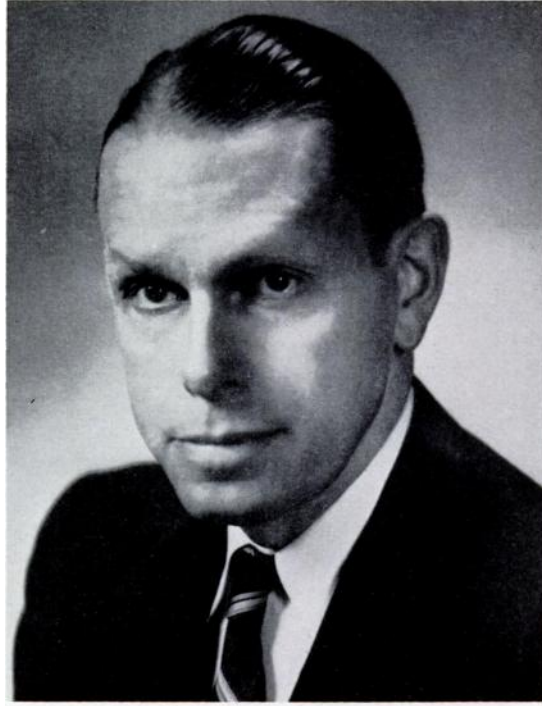




## In Memoriam



C. A. ELVEHJEM

*Scientist—Teacher—Friend*

THE untimely death of Dr. C. A. Elvehjem in July of this year came as a stunning blow to his legions of scientific colleagues but particularly to his students. It is unlikely that the science of nutrition will again see a person with the breadth of perspective, dedication to work and tremendous productivity as that exhibited by Dr. Elvehjem. More importantly, few teachers will ever earn and receive the respect, loyalty and devotion that students held for him. He meant so much to each one of us that we all feel a strong personal loss as well as the loss to society in general. Truly he was a remarkable man! A great deal has been written that recounts the extensive scientific and educational contributions of Dr. Elvehjem. The scope and significance of his published work speak far more eloquently than these words. In order to gain some insight into the life of Dr. Elvehjem, not so much as a scientist but as a warm, friendly, kind and thoughtful person, I have invited Dr. L. J. Teply to portray some of his impressions gained through his years as a student at the University of Wisconsin and as a close friend and devoted co-worker. I know of no one better able to do this.

W.A.K.



THE professional career of C. A. Elvehjem is well known, especially to those who have a special interest in the science of nutrition. His research accomplishments are recorded in the hundreds of published papers by him and his co-workers. A smaller circle knows about his personal relationships with his students and close professional associates (to whom he was "Connie") and his influence, through them, on nutrition science.

I was privileged to train under Dr. Elvehjem at about the middle of his career. He was then perhaps at the peak of his research productivity, since afterwards he was drawn more and more into the administrative responsibilities of the University of Wisconsin, finally as its President.

I have no difficulty in recalling the first meeting with Dr. Elvehjem. My undergraduate training in chemistry was almost completed and the idea of applying chemistry in some area of biology was appealing and challenging. Fascinating reports had circulated around the campus concerning the interesting work that Professor Elvehjem was doing in the unraveling of the vitamin B complex, especially the identification of the anti-blacktongue factor.

As a brash young undergraduate I dropped in on the professor to explore the possibility of graduate training in biochemistry. The pleasant, friendly reception gave no indication of the decisiveness and efficiency with which he was to arrange for a graduate assistantship. These first contacts with Dr. Elvehjem suggested then that I would never regret my choice of career and professor. I never have!

Probably more graduate students were trained in biochemistry-nutrition under Dr. Elvehjem than under any other man. Yet, at least until the later years, the close contact he was able to maintain with his graduate students and their research was truly remarkable. His daily tour of the animal rooms beginning at 8:00 A.M. sharp (a little later on Sundays, yet early enough so he could go to church services) became traditional. During the day his graduate students, which in some years numbered over twenty-five, would drop into his office for conferences or to discuss a special problem that had come up. In addition he might stop by to see some of his students several times to make a suggestion which had just occurred to him or to check on the progress of an experiment. Often, with a certain shy pleasure, he would pass along an amusing story picked up on his last trip. He would enjoy joining in for a few minutes on graduate students' discussion of world affairs, the importance of social sciences, or whatever the topic might be. This side of the man did not come through to those who saw him only as a public speaker or at formal gatherings.

His tremendous breadth of knowledge in the nutrition field combined with an unusually original mind and the willingness to put almost any reasonable theory to scientific test, made for a research program with unique approaches that sometimes led to new and exciting discoveries. There was, however, always a certain amount of more prosaic research which he considered a university had an obligation to carry out in order to fill in gaps in scientific knowledge and to provide useful practical information. Sometimes he had to argue long and persuasively to get a graduate student to try something that seemed like a waste of time to the student, and yet, more often than not, the effort turned out to provide useful data. On one occasion when a remark was made that "Elvehjem guesses quite a



bit” one of his associates quietly replied, “Did you ever notice how often he guesses right?”

It was characteristic of the man that, although it was not easy to know exactly what his opinions were on the more transitory controversial issues of the day, there was ever-present evidence of his deeper convictions as to basic principles, integrity, honesty and fair play. He practiced the teachings of his religion in his daily life and work, not ostentatiously but as a matter of course.

Dr. Elvehjem had an extraordinary capacity for gaining collaboration in research projects from other professors in the Department of Biochemistry and from other university departments as well. All things considered, it was not surprising that at the annual Federation meetings, he was the rallying point for all Wisconsin alumni attending. He represented the *spirit of Wisconsin*.

Dr. Elvehjem never lost touch with his former students. When they needed his help he was ready to give it. It was his practice to try to reply to any letter requesting a recommendation on the day it was received.

Although President Elvehjem had spent a year in postdoctoral research in England, had students from many countries and maintained contact with friends and scientists all over the world, his work was so dedicated and concentrated within the United States it left little time for professional activity on an international basis. Only three months before he died, I had a chance to have a leisurely visit with him over lunch at the World Food Forum in Washington D. C. He was very much interested in hearing about recent food and nutrition developments throughout the world and talked enthusiastically about the expanding international activities of the University of Wisconsin. Only a few days before his death he met with a state committee which was planning a new research program on the relationship of diet to heart disease and was organizing a world symposium on this subject. Despite his administrative burdens, there were indications that, given more time, his influence on nutrition might have ranged wider than ever.

Those of us who knew him well feel a tremendous personal loss, but we are grateful that he had a chance to do the work he loved during his life and that we had the privilege to work with him and to know him as a friend.

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