

Editorial



A Well-Deserved Tribute

If we need to be reminded of how young the laboratory science of nutrition really is, we should note that in April, 1956 a testimonial dinner was held in Washington, D. C., in honor of Dr. Robert R. Williams, who on his seventieth birthday stepped aside as chairman of the Williams-Waterman Fund for Combat of Dietary Diseases. For it was Dr. Williams who after many years of investigation and experimentation was able chemically to identify and synthesize thiamine—only twenty years ago!¹

What is perhaps most unique about this discovery is that Dr. Williams patented the steps in the synthesis of thiamine and turned the profits over to two organizations established to encourage further research (the Williams-Waterman Fund and Research Corporation). As Dr. Sebrell, who has succeeded Dr. Williams, says in this issue (pp. 582-84), more than six million dollars has been realized, all of which has generously and unselfishly gone into the war against human malnutrition.

Even more striking has been the recognition by Dr. Williams and his associates that achieving a laboratory triumph is hardly enough—the ultimate goal is the practical utilization of the discovery. Hence, he has devoted his untiring energy to bringing thiamine (which has dropped from about eight dollars to six cents a gram) to the millions in Asia and elsewhere who are sick and dying from the lack of it.

Presentation of Testimonial Letters to Dr. Robert R. Williams at Testimonial Dinner, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C., April 23, 1956

Mr. Chairman, Dr. and Mrs. Williams, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my very signal honor and, I must add, indeed my pleasure, to have been designated to present to you, Bob, this book of letters, written to you by about a hundred of your friends and

His work on grain (rice) enrichment is internationally known and his objectives can be stated as follows:

“Practical experience in trying to change dietary habits shows that unless cereal enrichment is made universal with respect to major staples, either by industry action or by government action, it may as well be abandoned. Any lesser action will have no more value than the simpler process of telling the people to take pills or to choose their food with scientific skill.”²

That beriberi is still a major nutritional problem in many areas of the world is readily documented.³ That it is slowly but surely disappearing from the earth is due in no small measure to a vigorous chemist who did not stop after synthesizing thiamine.

Two addresses, by Drs. Jolliffe and Sebrell, will be found in this issue. They indicate the significance of the man, his work, and, even more, the youthfulness of scientific clinical nutrition.

—S. O. WAIFE, M.D.

REFERENCES

1. WILLIAMS, R. R., and CLINE, J. K.: Synthesis of vitamin B₁. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 58: 1504, 1936.
2. WILLIAMS, R. R.: Food fortification in the Orient. *Nutr. Rev.* 12: 289, 1954.
3. WILLIAMS, R. R.: The world beriberi problem today. *J. CLIN. NUTRITION* 1: 513, 1953.

colleagues. These letters express sentiments of endearment, admiration, and respect that many, if not most, people find themselves too shy or embarrassed to say to you face to face; they can, however, express their true feelings in a letter or on public occasions such as this,