It is with sorrow we have to record the death on 21st April of Carl Prausnitz Giles in his 88th year, at his home in Ventnor, Isle of Wight.

Carl Prausnitz was born in Hamburg on 11th October 1876, the son of Hamburg physician Dr. Otto Prausnitz and his wife Edith Maria Giles of Bonchurch, Isle of Wight. He studied at Leipzig, Kiel and Breslau, obtaining his German qualification in 1901. After a year as house physician to the Freemasons’ Hospital, Hamburg, Dr. Prausnitz became assistant to Prof. William Dunbar at the State Institute of Hygiene, where he worked on cholera and allergy. It was here, in 1904, that Dr. Prausnitz administered to his chief what was probably the first trial therapeutic injection of pollen extract ever to be given to a hay fever subject. The early clinical immunologists seem to have been in the habit of trying rather heroic doses, and Dr. Prausnitz was no exception.
- Prof. Dunbar was soon unconscious on the laboratory floor, and in those days before adrenaline and other anti-allergic drugs his reviving was a very tricky and anxious business. As the result of this mishap Prof. Dunbar turned his attention to passive immunization with animal antisera, and the discovery of active desensitization was thus delayed until Noon and Freeman started their work a few years later.

While at Hamburg Dr. Prausnitz obtained his M. D. of Breslau (1903), and two years later decided to come to London, where he was demonstrator of bacteriology at the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene. He took his M.R.C.S. (England) and L.R.C.P. (London) in 1908. From 1908 to 1910 he was assistant bacteriologist to the Metropolitan Asylums Board. He then returned to his old university at Breslau as assistant in the Institute of Hygiene, in charge of the hydrophobia department for eastern Germany, and in 1912 was made Privatdozent. After the war, in which he served as adviser in hygiene to the 14th Army Corps, he returned to Breslau as professor extraordinarius; then to the University of Greifswald in 1923 as deputy professor; and finally back to Breslau to succeed his old chief Richard Pfeiffer in the chair of bacteriology and hygiene. He took an active part in the work of the Health Organisation of the League of Nations, and in 1928 was seconded to the Secretariat for a year.

With the rise of national socialism his position became increasingly difficult, and by 1933 Nazi oppression caused him to resign his post.

He decided to come to England – in spite of the fact that he was offered a chair in Switzerland. For the next two years he worked on cotton-spinners’ asthma at Manchester University, with a grant from the Medical Research Council.

Then, in 1935, he forsook the academic and research fields, and joined an old friend, Dr. Bruce Williamson, in general practice in Ventnor, near his mother’s birthplace, and where he had spent many happy holidays as a boy. Though by now in his 60th year – when many would be considering retirement – he applied himself with characteristic zeal and energy to a new life and a new speciality. He not only became an outstandingly-successful ‘Doctor’ (also providing an expert clinical pathology service from a laboratory he set up in his house), but he was adored by his patients and achieved true contentment in his work. He became a naturalized British citizen in 1939 and adopted his mother’s name of Giles by deed poll.

Though he once said ‘never again shall I set foot in Germany’ he was persuaded by the late Karl Hansen to return to his native land in 1958 to receive the Aronson award of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin, and again to Hamburg in 1960 for the honorary M. D.

When he retired from the National Health Service in June 1960 the citizens of Ventnor presented him with a cheque for over £300 which he used to buy a Zeiss microscope with photographic attachments.

Prausnitz loved his fellow-men and was beloved by them. When, in 1955, he agreed to return to the sphere of international allergy by accepting founder-membership of the C.I.A., the impact of his personality was such that the honorary title of ‘Father’ was bestowed upon him as a mark of the affection and esteem which he engendered, and thereafter he was known to one and all as Father Giles.

Though his scientific eminence and the wide range of his research work in bacteriology, immunology and allergy are well-known, and his name is assured of an honourable place in that select band of medical immortals for the discovery of the Prausnitz-Küstner test, perhaps he would have liked his epitaph to be ‘Here lies an old-fashioned country G.P. who used to be a professor once-upon-a-time’, for thus did he describe himself, such was the humility of the man.
Though for some months before his death he knew his life was coming to its close, he kept right on to the end of the road – in the British Medical Journal of 11th May there appeared not only his obituary notice but also a contribution from him on the subject of hypersensitivity and hypnosis. Never shall we see his like again.  David Harley, London