The task of writing the obituary of a colleague becomes doubly painful when this colleague was one’s good friend, whose good moments and weak, joys and sorrows, expectations and disappointments one knows so well.

I shoulder this task – the last thing I can do for him – knowing that many friends will want to read about him once more, and will wish that others read it too.

R. D. G. Ph. Simons – Robert to his friends – died on 26th November, having been comatose during the three weeks following a motoring accident.

He was born in The Hague on 12th March 1909 and received his dermatological training from Prof. Dr. H. W. Siemens in Leiden, who always held him in high esteem and under whom he obtained his doctor’s degree in 1937, with a thesis entitled “Arsenic in psoriasis and arsenicoderma”. In the then Netherlands Indies, he became a prisoner of war. During this period he laid the foundations of a book “Dermatology in the Tropics”, which was later published in two volumes and translated into English (1952) and Spanish (1953).

For the government of the Dutch Antilles and Suriname, he wrote a report about leprosy control and, in the same context, “Superstition and Leprosy”. Other publications during this period were “Venereol-ogy and genitopathology” and “Medical Mycology”.

The racial problem held his interest, and his concern resulted in “The colour of the skin in human relations”, for which the later president of the United Nations – Mr. Zafrulla Khan – wrote the preface.

Of his many other publications I would mention a book called “Homophilia” and “The enigma of the treponematoses”.

He founded the Codex Medicus, the most widely used medical book in the Netherlands, a modified version of which has meanwhile been published for Belgium.

He was an honorary member of the Dermatological Societies of Israel, Venezuela and Australia, lecturer extraordinary at the Pennsylvanian University, Philadelphia, instructor at Leiden University from 1947 to 1962, honorary chairman of the leprosy congress in Naples (1964), chairman of the Amsterdam Association of Specialists, etc. He was a man honoured by many and widely known.

As always, it is only now that he is gone that we realize just how much he meant to us. He was a man of energy and drive, honest and uncomplicated, who gave himself wholly and without reservation. So straight and sincere was his approach to all problems that it was inconceivable to him that anyone with different opinions might be offended by his directness.

Consequently he had a great many friends – more than anyone else I know – but he also had some opponents who could not understand his value.
He used to say that he practiced dermatology, not as a profession but from love. This is why he thought it a holiday to put up in a hotel with his books and, all alone, produce an amount of work which we, professors with large staffs of assistants, cannot hope to accomplish. He worked with a speed that, in retrospect, seems to suggest almost that he knew he would have but little time. And there was so much to be done, thought, suggested. He loved to make some suggestion, out of the blue, merely because he sought a discussion from which he might learn. Sometimes it was almost with eagerness that he awaited the reactions which his publications might elicit. None of his own.

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theories or hypotheses was ever sacrosanct to him; he enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate and joined in the dermatological fencing, not to win but merely to see what would finally stand as truth from his own statements and from those of others.

These characteristics were perhaps most clearly disclosed in his defence of his views on the pathogenesis of the so-called margarine disease.

He was a good loser, always “sans rancune” – as many of us must have heard him say. In victory he was always magnanimous to his opponent, as many will remember who read these lines. Only when the sincerity of his motivations was questioned could he become angry.

His patients were deeply attached to him, and it is not surprising that his was among the largest practices in the Netherlands. However much dermatological patients tend to blame their physician for the only too frequent shortcomings of medical science, I have never heard a patient refer to him in unfriendly terms.

Besides his family, his practice and scientific work, he managed to find time for what might well be described as a worldwide correspondence; since 1963, moreover, he was an exceptionally active secretary of the Netherlands Dermatological Society, in which his organizational talents made many improvements. Furthermore, he was editor of the dermatological section of Excerpta medica.

In this “in memoriam”, there has been no cutting of corners, no veiling, no embellishing; he would have seen through any such efforts, and laughed at them.

We shall miss his straightforwardness, his warm friendship and the solidarity which he displayed in so many situations, including private problems. As I put it elsewhere, he was the conscience of Dutch dermatology; we shall miss him keenly.

Incomparably more deeply will this loss be felt by his wife and children. We sincerely hope that the abundance of good memories will console and support them, and we know that the sympathy of his many friends will make them understand how dear he was to us all.