In memoriam Emil Froeschels

On January 18th, 1972, Professor Emil Froeschels, founder and Honorary President of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics, died in New York after a brief illness at the age of 87 years.

Born in Vienna he studied medicine there and in 1907 began his extraordinary career in the field of speech and voice disorders. In 1924 he was appointed Professor of Logopedics (a term he had coined himself) at the University of Vienna and remained there until he was forced in 1938 after the Nazi conquest of Austria to leave his beloved home town. He settled in New York after brief assignments in St. Louis and Ann Arbor. From 1940-1949 he was director of the Speech and Voice Clinic at Mount Sinai Hospital and from 1950-1955 at Beth David Hospital. In 1947 he founded the New York Society for Speech and Voice Therapy and remained its President until his death. In 1961 the Austrian Government awarded him the Cross of Honor for Science and Art. A few days before his death the German government bestowed on him a similar decoration.

Up to the last days of his life he saw patients with the invaluable help of his associate Mrs. Helen Beebe, he lectured regularly at Pace College, and he went often to the Library of the New York Academy of Medicine to keep up with the newest literatures. After the death of his wife, a few years ago, he became a very lonely man who lived only for his profession. He was not afraid of death, he may even have welcomed it as a friend, but, as he told me only a short while ago: ‘My philosophy can be expressed in the single word “now’;’ only the presence is important.’

With the death of Dr. Froeschels the last of the great pioneers has gone who created the modern science of logopedics and phoniatrics at the beginning of this century. The importance of his work has been discussed in detail in this Journal on the occasion of his 80th and 85th birthdays. On the latter occasion the late Dr. Deso A. Weiss wrote an article for the Folia Phoniatrica (20: 239-253, 1969) which contains a complete listing of all of Dr. Froeschels’ publications: 23 books and 317 articles. It is not the sheer number of these publications alone that is so impressive but even more so the breadth and depth of his interests ranging over the whole science of speech and voice with many excursions into psychology and philosophy.

Even more than in other branches of medicine in logopedics and phoniatrics a gap between the laboratory researcher and the practitioner has opened up and is steadily growing wider. Dr. Froeschels was always proud to think of himself as a clinician, or, to use the now less popular word, a therapist, a healer. He understood research, liked to learn about it, but he did not feel at home among the complex machinery of the modern research centers. He believed in the importance of the intimate personal contact of the therapist with his patients. He constantly stressed the importance of and was a master in thorough direct clinical observation. Searching for all possible visual and acoustic clues and using his great knowledge of the human mind he sometimes did amazing diagnostic work-ups on his patients. He would then turn the force of his
strong, stern, and sometimes overpowering personality on his patient. This often yielded results
that more conventional methods could not have achieved.
Whether one follows Dr. Froeschels in all his ideas or accepts all his
teachings does not matter. What remains is that we all are deeply indebted to
him. When Honoré Balzac died Victor Hugo delivered the eulogy. In his
speech he said: ‘That is the work he has left us, built solidly on rock – a
monument. Great men lay their own foundations, but it is for posterity to
erect the statue.’ Science goes on after the life of a scientist has come to an
end. The truth of today is replaced by more complete knowledge of tomorrow, but the fundament remains. We should preserve the gratitude for a
great man whom we knew as a teacher and a friend, and who gave us through
out his life an example of single-minded dedication to the ideals of his profes-
Friedrich S. Brodnitz