Eugene Lindsay Opie

July 5, 1873 — March 12, 1971

The Medical Board of the New York Hospital notes with a keen sense of loss on the death of Eugene Lindsay Opie, M.D., in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, on Friday, March 12, 1971, at the age of 97.

Since 1932 Dr. Opie has been a notably productive and valuable member this—and a much wider—medical community. Our high regard for him stems largely from our intimate knowledge of his important influence on medical affairs hereabouts. Before considering this influence in some detail, however, we must briefly take note of a number of previous events in his life.

He was born in Staunton, Virginia, on July 5, 1873, his parents being native Virginians and members of distinguished Virginia families. He received his bachelor's degree in 1893 from the newly founded Johns Hopkins University and his M.D. degree from Johns Hopkins Medical School in 1897.

During his training period in pathology under Welch at The Johns Hopkins Hospital (1897-1904), Dr. Opie won worldwide renown as a pathologist for his originai observations on diseases of the pancreas. His book, *Diseases of the Pancreas*, published in 1904, is generally considered a classic in the literature of pathology. During this period he also won worldwide renown as medical scientist—this for his discovery of the pathogenetic relationship between injury of the cells of the islets of Langerhans and diabetes mellitus. The observation provided substantial confirmation of the important concept–initally conceived some years previously by Minkowski and others that an internal secretion (a hormone) provided by cells of the islets of Langerhans is neccessary for the proper metabolism of glucose; the concept led directly to the experiments of Banting and Best a few years later in which the hormone (insulin) was directly demonstrated.

In 1904 Dr. Opie moved to New York for the first time (he was then 31 years old) to become a (founding) member of the then-fledgling Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. It is significant that Dr. Opie, while working "full-time" as a member of The Rockefeller Institute, also served as part-time director of a newly created Department of Pathology at Columbia's College for Physicians and Surgeons and part-time Pathologist at Presbyterian Hospital during the period 1907 to 1910, this arrangement having the full knowledge and approval of the Institute and Columbia- Presbyterian; it admirably served Dr. Opie's need to "keep his hand in" as a pathologist and also to remain in close contact with clinical medicine. Russell Cecil and Eugene DuBois served as interns in pathology in the new department under Dr. Opie's direction.

In 1910 he accepted the Chair of Pathology at the newly reorganized Medical School of Washington University, St. Louis, where he served with great distinction until 1923 as teacher, pathologist, investigator, medical administrator, and humanist.

During World War I Dr. Opie served as a colonel in the medical corps of the Army, first in France in association with the Barnes Hospital–Washington University Unit–later on a commission for the study of trench fever, and finally with Francis Blake, Thomas Rivers, and others on a commission for the study of epidemic influenza and other acute respiratory infections in soldiers who, coming from distant localities across the land, were inevitably crowded into military camps. The second endeavor led to the clear demonstration that vermin spread trench fever from one soldier to another, so that its elimination could be forecast. The third endeavor brought to light much valuable medical information about the epidemiology and pathogenesis of acute infectious respiratory diseases and led to the publication of an important book.

In 1923 Dr. Opie accepted the directorship of The Henry Phipps Institute for the Study and Treatment of Tuberculosis, The University of Pennsyl- vania, Philadelphia. Soon thereafter he was made professor of pathology and head of the Department of Pathology at the University.

In 1932, happily for us, Dr. Opie returned to New York as pathologist of the New York Hospital, professor of pathology at Cornell University Medical College, and head of pathology in what was presently to become the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center. Also, most fortunately for us, he soon became a member of this Medical Board. His immense erudition, his wisdom, his rich experience, his long perspective, and his uncommon good sense were welcome indeed. Moreover they proved exceedingly useful. For at this formative stage in the development of the joint institution, the Board was often confronted by knotty administrative and pedagogic problems; these nearly always became manageable under Dr. Opie's precisely reasoned and temperate influence. In addition, his influence was called upon with ever increasing frequency by more and more of his senior colleagues in relation to problems concerning the departments they headed.

Dr. Opie's accomplishments as teacher of pathology and trainer of young pathologists here are particularly noteworthy. Mainly by example, and in an unhurried and modest yet firm and effective way, he instilled in students and Young and older colleagues a devotion to learning—in pathology, in medical science, and in clinical medicine. He brought medical students and graduates alike into awareness of the wonders and the mysteries of the autopsy and of medical research. His standards were high; others were quick to see this and adopt them. With his own hands he collected and prepared a notable series of specimens illustrating a wide gamut of gross lesions;

further, while training a neighborhood boy in the arduous task of mounting, cataloging, labeling, and arranging these specimens into a museum, he created at once the post of museum curator on the staff of the Department of Pathology, a curator who became his friend and rendered yeoman service in the teaching of pathology long after his retirement, and a pathological museum having large teaching value today.

Dr. Opie gathered around himself here a number of young associates who were later heard from in their professional careers, notably—to mention only a few—Robert A. Moore, Murray Angevine, Jacob Furth, Jules Freund, and Charles Olcott.

Also, almost incredibly, Dr. Opie managed while here to tend his own research garden—a continuation of his exceedingly important and practical studies on tuberculosis begun years before in St. Louis and carried on with increased intensity in Philadelphia. Knowledgeable critics assert that here he came closer than anyone else has yet done to demonstrating an immunologic means for preventing tuberculosis.

While here Dr. Opie served for several years on the council of The Harvey Society and was its president during the period 1936-38. In 1939 he was granted a leave of absence in order to serve as visiting professor of pathology at Pekin Union Medical College; while in Pekin he collected many mementos of oriental medicine, some illustrating the practice of acupuncture; presently Dr. Opie wrote a book giving his perspectives on Chinese medicine.

Following his retirement from this Medical Center in 1941 at age 68, Dr. Opie accepted a unique position—that of guest investigator at a neighboring inistitution, The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, now become Rockefeller University. There he again took up his laboratory labors full time and pursued these steadily and fruitfully for 28 years, until he was 96 years old. During this period he published numerous scientific papers and gave a third Harvey Lecture, the only scientist ever to do so. His publications show that throughout his retirement Dr. Opie thought and worked effectively on a number of quite diverse and important scientific problems, all having basic significance for pathology and medicine—e.g., the pathogenesis of cancers of the liver induced by nutritional means, cytoplasmic basophilism of parenchymal cells in relation to their content of ribonucleic acid, and the movement of water in tissues. In each instance he published his observations and data in detail in the rigorously edited *Journal of Experimental Medicine*.

As a physician of note and a near-octogenarian, Dr Opie was interviewed by the *New Yorker* in 1952 (Talk of the Town, Nov. 22). He was characterized as "... an outstanding pathologist, an authority on tuberculosis and interstitial fluid ratios, and a man of extraordinary sweetness and courtesy," whose researches at The Rockefeller

Institute centered around changes in tissues that accompany almost all diseases. At the time, Dr. Opie said of his investigations: " . . . this kind of research goes down to foundations and has no practical aim in immediate view."

He had a lively and gentle sense of humor that was cherished by those of his colleagues who were privileged to share it with him. It often hinged upon medical academia. A story he loved to tell ran something like this: When Dr. Opie's much respected former chief, Professor Welch, retired from the Chair of Pathology at Hopkins, the faculty committee, appointed to recommend his successor, agreed after much deliberation that what they really needed was another Dr. Welch. At which point the professor of anatomy is said to have muttered: "Why don't we hire two of them?"

We of the Medical Board of the New York Hospital realize that we have lost—and that medicine has lost—a noble exemplar, a creative discoverer, and a great benefactor of our profession. In this time of serious questioning and rapid change, it is good that we can contemplate numerous tangible examples having large and enduring value for Medicine. Dr. Opie's life provides an unbroken series of such examples.

It is not possible to distinguish between nature and nurture as sources for Dr. Opie's exceptional qualities as physician, scientist, and humanist. But certain it is that determinations of his own largely influenced the lives of many others around him.

While trying as best we can to emulate the examples provided by Dr. Opie's life, and to attract to our midst others of Dr. Opie's kind, we are glad indeed to have before us this brief record to supplement the memories of his works and life which remain vivid to the minds of many of our colleagues.

John G. Kldd, M.D.