

James Wenceslaus Papez

August 18, 1883 — April 13, 1958

James Wenceslaus Papez, Emeritus Professor of Anatomy, died on April 13, 1958, in Columbus, Ohio, of a heart attack. The third in a family of eleven, he was born in Glencoe, McLeod County, Minnesota. He received his early education in the township of Brookfield and his college education at the University of Minnesota. After graduation in 1908, he entered the Medical School where he earned the M. D. degree in 1911. At Minnesota he became interested in the studies of the nervous system by the great comparative neuroanatomist, J. B. Johnston, and subsequently elected neurology and academic medicine as a career. Upon graduating from the Medical School, he joined the faculty of the Atlanta College of Physicians and Surgeons as Associate Professor of Anatomy; and then later (1914-20) as Professor of Anatomy, Histology and Embryology at Emory University Medical School. In 1920, he came to the Ithaca division of the Cornell Medical School as Assistant Professor of Anatomy and later was made Professor. When the Ithaca Division was dissolved, in 1939, he remained on the campus as Professor of Anatomy in the Department of Zoology, where he taught the following courses: Human Growth and Development, Physical Anthropology, Cerebral Mechanisms, Gross Human Dissection, and Comparative Neuroanatomy. He retired in 1951, after 31 years at Cornell, and left Ithaca to become Director for the State of Ohio of the newly established Laboratory for Biological Research at the Columbus State Hospital. Here he continued his productive works on the human and vertebrate brain.

At Cornell he served as Secretary and Curator of the Cornell Brain Association (also known as the Burt Green Wilder Brain Collection) whose officers included Professors B. F. Kingsbury, A. T. Kerr and H. D. Reed. The collection of human brains, housed in Stimson Hall, was begun by Doctor Wilder (1841-1925), first professor of Zoology at the opening of Cornell, who advocated . . . “the need of studying the brains of educated persons rather than those of the ignorant, criminal or insane, in order to determine their weight, form and fissural pattern, the correlation with bodily and mental powers of various kinds and degrees, and the influence of sex, age, and inheritance . . .”. In his early days at Cornell, Doctor Papez devoted most of his time to the accumulation, care, and study of the brains bequeathed by former Cornellians and others to the collection. He published a number of morphological studies on these brains including one on the brain of Doctor Wilder.

It is important and interesting in remembering Doctor Papez to remark that the first area of research interest in biology at Cornell was Comparative Neurology. At the suggestion of Professor Agassiz of Harvard University, who

served as visiting lecturer in Zoology in the early days of Cornell, Doctor Wilder, his former student, undertook the collection and study of vertebrate brains. Neuroanatomical research and teaching has remained to this time a part of the curriculum and research in biology; and the fact that Cornell is known today as a center of neuroanatomical work is due in large part to the efforts of Doctor Papez.

Professor Papez published approximately one-hundred works on the structure of the brain of vertebrates including man. He published a well-known and still widely-used book entitled "Comparative Neurology" and another, coauthored by Dr. W. Haymaker, "The Hypothalamus, Anatomic, Functional and Clinical Aspects." Perhaps his greatest single contribution, and certainly one of the most important publications from the Ithaca Division of Cornell Medical School, was his paper entitled "A Proposed Mechanism of Emotion" which appeared in the Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry in 1937. This paper served as the foundation for much of subsequent psychobiological experiments on emotion and for the elucidation of many clinical observations on the human, particularly after frontal lobotomy. It is to be regretted that many scholars missed the importance of this work until many years later and it is only in the last few years that it has attracted the attention it deserved. John F. Fulton, eminent medical historian and Emeritus Professor of Physiology at Yale, wrote as follows in his recent book, "Frontal Lobotomy and Affective Behavior", concerning the significance of this contribution: "At the time of its appearance it seemed to many to be highly speculative, for Dr. Papez was able to adduce little in the way of positive experimental evidence for his view that 'the hypothalamus, the anterior thalamic nuclei, the gyrus cinguli, the hippocampus, and their interconnections constitute a harmonious mechanism which may elaborate the function of central emotion as well as participate in emotional expression'. This shrewd deduction has been richly vindicated by all the recent experimental work herein described, and his further comment that 'emotion is such an important function that its mechanism, whatever it is, should be placed on a structural basis' will no doubt become something of a classic in the history of neurology." And, Gerhardt von Bonin, in his "Essay on the Cerebral Cortex", commented that the emotional mechanism was first propounded by Papez "in a brilliant synthesis of many hitherto unrelated anatomical facts." Still other of his papers, particularly those on the basal ganglia and subthalamus, are at present among the standards of neuroanatomical works.

The literary efforts of Doctor Papez include also a number of published verses and a book of poems entitled "Fragments of Verse"; many of the poems were written to his wife, Mrs. B. Pearl Sowden Papez. Mrs. Papez, an artist, is responsible for all of the illustrations in his publications. She was his constant companion and assistant in his studies. They have three children and nine grandchildren.

Dr. Papez was of gentle and kindly disposition; he was admired and appreciated by his students with whom he spent many hours in conversation and instruction. His best teaching was in the laboratory in personal instruction.

In 1957, Doctor Papez was honored by the University of Minnesota with its Outstanding Achievement Award medal. During the Second World War, Dr. Papez served as a member of the Selective Service Board, N. Y. and was awarded a Congressional Medal of Selective Service. He was a member of the American Association of Anatomists, American Society of Physical Anthropologists, American Association for Advancement of Science, Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Diseases, American Neurological Association, American Anthropological Association, Human Genetics Society, Society of Biological Psychiatry, Alpha Epsilon Delta, Sigma Xi, and Phi Kappa Phi.

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