

WILHELM ERB.

The death of Wilhelm Erb in 1921 at the age of 81 removed one of the best known figures in German neurology. This place he had won not merely by the important work he had accomplished but from his distinct personality. This expressed itself in his manner of work and in the clarity and certainty with which he obtained his



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results. These same elements stamped all his personal relations. They marked him as a man who was a representative leader in the field of exact science. Erb set his face against everything tending to a mystic reliance on the unknown. His science was like his own character, a matter of surrender of impulsive speculation, of mere tendency in hypothesis, to the austere guidance of the law of intellect. His creed was one of action upon circumstances, never of passive dependent faith or submissive inaction.

He was interested in direct observation valuing only that which could be actually brought under sense perception. Yet in accepting such material in the interests of his science he knew how to coordinate it, rearrange it in interpretative form and so to make clear problems hidden under confused symptomatic pictures or definitely to further progress in the realm both of anatomical and clinical research. His scientific severity of ideal gave him the aspect of gruffness but this only concealed a kindness which belonged to his genuine interest in his work and in those who shared with him the advance of neurology. His interest in his patients as in the students to whom he was an inspiration was that of a sincere scientist and a genuine lover of humanity. He was peculiarly fitted to be a thorough clinical investigator, a sure diagnostician and an inspiring teacher.

Erb was born in Bavaria in 1840. He entered the University of Heidelberg at the age of 19. From there he proceeded to Erlangen and took his degree finally at Munich in 1864. He returned to Heidelberg as teacher of medicine and for a time was director of the Medical Polyclinic at Leipzig. Most of his life was spent in service at Heidelberg where he was made Professor Ordinarius in 1880 and Director of the Medical Clinic in 1883. He was sought after by Bonn, Leipzig, Vienna and Berlin but preferred to devote his life to the service in Heidelberg.

He contributed many writings to the subject of internal medicine but he is best known for his special contributions in the knowledge of nervous disease. He published many monographs among which may be mentioned his works on "Tabes Dorsalis", "Der Thomsensche Krankheit (Myotonia congenita) Dystrophia muscularis progressiva". Larger works are his "Handbuch der Krankheiten der peripheren cerebrospinalen Nerven", "Handbuch der Krankheiten des Rückenmarks und des verlängerten Marks". Important also is his "Handbuch der Elektrotherapie". Many other writings might be mentioned from his active pen. He edited with von Bergmann and von Winckel Kolkmann's "Sammlung klinischer Vorträge" and was one of the founders and editors of the "Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde".