

OBITUARY

ALBERT WILLIAM PHILLIPS WOLTERS

Outside his small and well-knit family, Wolters had three strong interests—his students, his University and the British Psychological Society. The order is his. He said so in an autobiographical paper he wrote some years ago for *Occupational Psychology*. But it was his work for the Society that most manifestly hastened his end. Visits to Paddington still make me think of him, clambering rather breathlessly out of my car to catch a train to Reading, after what proved to be his last committee meeting in Tavistock Square. This was in 1957, when he was 74. He was in poor shape, and his prospects had not been improved by the frightful way in which we others on the Council and the Articles and By-laws Committee took advantage of our willing horse. Soon came news of a stroke.

Wolters would not show up very well if he were a present-day aspirant for Fellowship in the Society and the 64,000-dollar question were put: "What has he written?" For many of us his record will provide for all time a useful and entertaining illustration of the limitations of that solemn query. British psychology would have been a substantial loser, if Wolters had been inclined to let private research interests choke his talent as a teacher, adviser and developer. Fortunately, he was a psychologist who liked people. And they liked him. Has anybody ever spoken—or even thought—of him without affection? The anxiety-reducing roses with which he regularly decorated his laboratory during examinations were indicative of his attitude to others. As an external examiner he was a joy to everyone.

Some of us have special cause to be grateful for his wisdom, his tolerance, his foresight and his sense of fun. In the Second World War he and Sir Frederic Bartlett were the two "outside" representatives of psychology on the War Cabinet Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services. This formidable-sounding body was set up because Churchill and Bevin were terrified that the war was going to be lost through personnel selection and psycho-analysis. It was thought up by the shrewd Cripps, as a way of keeping his Cabinet colleagues quiet while the psychologists and psychiatrists got on with their work. It was not a success. In their frustrations, the professionals raged at each other, breaking off only occasionally to heave bricks jointly at their scapegoat, John Cohen, who was then on the secretarial side of the fence. In such a situation Wolters was at his very best. For in addition to being generous, modest, industrious, intelligent and level-headed he was skilful in handling rebels. Moreover, he always did his homework thoroughly, even when it was uncongenial; he knew what everybody was probably trying to do, sometimes better than they seemed to know themselves; and patiently but firmly he set himself the task of seeing that we tackled our various jobs in a sensible fashion.

Like many good psychologists, Wolters became a psychologist gradually, unorthodoxly and by finding things out for himself. He took a London degree in philosophy in 1906 and became a lecturer in education at Reading in 1908. His later career there—as lecturer in charge of psychology, as professor of psychology and as deputy vice-chancellor—will be outlined by Magdalen Vernon in the *British Journal of Psychology*. He was on the Council of the Society for near twenty-three years. He was president for three of them, between 1938 and 1941, when he steered us through the mysteries of incorporation. He seems a good deal more likely to rest in peace than some of his predecessors and successors.

ALEC RODGER.