

Of true greatness

by CLIVE COLLINS

One of Jamaica's most illustrious daughters, Dr. Cicely Williams, who has been honoured abroad and in her own country is to receive a special honour on November 30 on the occasion of her 80th birthday.

This function is being organized by the University of Maryland School of Medicine and will comprise a morning symposium, a luncheon and a formal subscription dinner for one whose full story of service to mankind has yet to be told.

Dr. Williams has been described by Dr. Marvin Cornblath, chairman of the arrangements committee and head of the school's department of pediatrics, as one of "the great women, physicians and human beings of our time." It would be hard to put into words a more worthy tribute.

From the proceeds of the Cicely Williams' Day function it is hoped to raise sufficient funds to establish an on-going Cicely Williams' Lectureship. This would enable a single individual to speak on topics near and dear to Cicely's heart at universities, medical schools and hospitals throughout the United States each year. After the pioneering work of her earlier days this has been the sort of work Dr. Williams has been engaged in and which has brought her life to fruition.

Interned by Japanese

Outside of medical circles in Jamaica this gallant lady is hardly known by her compatriots. One of the reasons for this situation is that she has done most of her work outside her homeland and because travels have taken her from one end of the world to the other.

This vital woman was born near Bethel Town, Westmoreland, in 1893 and into a land-owning family. Her ancestors were among the first English settlers in Jamaica following its conquest by the English in 1655. With this background she could have led a life of ease but, instead, chose to serve mankind to the best of her ability. And it turned out to be a very great ability.

After receiving private tuition Dr. Williams attended Bath High School before going to Sommerville College in Oxford where, in 1920, she obtained her B.A. degree. She followed this with the Bachelor of Medicine and

Bachelor of Surgery in 1923. Her other professional qualifications were earned over the years + Diploma in Tropical Nutrition and Hygiene, 1928, her M.R.C.P. in 1938, while in 1949 she became an F.R.C.P. of London.

Dr. Williams' early experience was in London hospitals and welfare centres for women and children and which set the pattern for all her future work. From 1929 to 1936 she did medical work in Greece. Her next move was to what is now Ghana in West Africa and she then arrived in Singapore in time to be interned by the conquering Japanese for a period of three and a half years. The experience left her undaunted.

It is interesting to note that kwashiorkor + a disease of malnutrition so evident in the Biafran struggles + was first discovered and treated by Dr. Williams while she was serving in Ghana in the late 1930's.

There is no doubt that Cicely's professional work was, and is, tremendous, and countless people, particularly women and children, owe a great debt to her.

Home for research

After the war she became, in 1948, the first head of the Maternal and Child Health section of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva. A year later she held the first appointment in the same WHO section for the South-East Asia region. In 1951 she came to Jamaica to do research into vomiting sickness and then left for London University to be senior lecturer in nutrition.

Her travels stepped up in 1959 when she was appointed visiting professor in Child Health at the American University of the Family Planning Association in the United Kingdom. This appointment entailed visits and lectures in some 70 countries in Europe, Asia, Australia and North America as well as conducting surveys in child health in such countries as Italy, Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Tanzania, Uganda and North Borneo. She was also the Milroy Lecturer at the Royal College of Physicians in London on social medicine in developing countries.

Awards

Professional awards came thick and fast. In 1965 she was awarded the James Spence Memorial Gold Medal by the British Pediatrics Society and, in 1967, was the first foreign recipient of the Goldberger Award of the American Medical Association. In turn the American Public Health Association gave Dr. Williams its highest award, the Martha Elliot Award in Maternal and Child Health which was presented in 1971.

Dr. Cicely Williams was honoured by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II when, in

1968, she was made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (C.M.G.) while in 1969 she received an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies. While for the layman these awards catalogue her worth it is only in the citations which accompanied them that the real value and courage of this lady become apparent. Her true greatness lies in her day-to-day work for suffering humanity.

Since 1971, Dr. Williams has spent most of her time in the United States for in that year she was appointed a visiting professor of Maternal and Child Health at the Tulane School of Public Health, New Orleans; a visiting professor of pediatrics at the University

of Maryland, Baltimore; and consultant in maternal and child health at Meharry Medical College, Nashville.

This redoubtable and evergreen lady co-incidentally shares the same birthday as the late Winston Churchill and, indeed, shows the same bulldog courage and determination. While Churchill's role was, perhaps, to save mankind from a lasting tyranny, the task of Dr. Cicely Williams has undoubtedly been to preserve mankind from his own physical follies.

Cicely Williams' Day will be officially marked on November 30 in far-off Baltimore but if will also be a day that all Jamaicans can share with her and offer her a heartfelt "well done".

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DR. WILLIAMS



PRINCESS ALICE confers an honorary doctorate on DR. CICELY WILLIAMS at the presentation of graduates ceremony at UWI in 1969.

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