William Dameshek, A Personal Remembrance

I FIRST MET Bill Dameshek over twenty-five years ago. I visited my old friend, Dr. Siegfried J. Thannhauser, in Boston, and discussed with him some of my thoughts about medical publishing. Because of my long-standing interest in hematology even at that time, I presented the idea of launching a journal in hematology to Dr. Thannhauser and asked him whether he could recommend an Editor. He jumped from his chair, embraced me and said it was an excellent idea. He said that he had a man eminently fitted for the job. He immediately called the young Dr. Dameshek, who had offices on the third floor of the same building. A few minutes later a tall, handsome man with bright eyes and extremely alert, entered the room. I was very much impressed by his personality, his great interest in hematology and his desire to help with dissemination of knowledge in this growing field of medicine. Six months later a bimonthly journal called BLOOD—The Journal of Hematology started publication with Dr. Dameshek as Editor-in-Chief.

There is nothing but praise for his work as Editor. From a seventy-two-page bimonthly, BLOOD became a monthly with 128 pages a month, and many an issue with considerably more, “Special” and otherwise. The subscription list mounted steadily, from the original 500 to over 7500. The journal not only grew in size, but also in quality. It became the nucleus of national and international hematology.

Together we established the Blood Club, which meets yearly in Atlantic City. With the same faith in the growing importance of the field the International Society of Hematology was founded with a small group of devoted City. He was elected President of the International Society in 1954. The Boston congress in 1956, under his Presidency, brought together for the first time about 2000 hematologists from all corners of the world. The American Society of Hematology was started during this meeting. He guided it as its president, counselor and adviser up to the tragic moment of his death.

More qualified people will have something to say regarding his achievements in hematology research and its clinical application, but let me add that in addition to his most untiring work as Editor-in-Chief, he wrote innumerable papers, published many monographs—HEMOLYTIC SYNDROMES together with Greenwalt, Tat and Dreyfus; THE Rh FACTOR with Hill; MORPHOLOGIC HEMATOLOGY; and THE SPLEEN AND HYPERSPLENISM with Estren, the second revised edition of which was entitled HYPERSPLENISM AND SURGERY OF THE SPLEEN, which he did together with Welch. Then he prepared a textbook on THE HEMORRHAGIC DISORDERS with Stefanini, which was translated into many languages. Last but not least, he prepared a classic handbook on LEUKEMIA in collaboration with his old friend, Frederick Gunz, from Australia. At the time of his death he was just finishing the third edition of this book which will be published in 1970. He
also edited, together with Raymond Dutcher, PERSPECTIVES IN LEUKEMIA. He was not only, thus, a writer of substance in his own right but a master of the language and a trusted editorial advisor to his peers.

He attended practically every congress or conference dealing with hematology. He either presented a paper which was widely discussed or sparked the discussion with ideas which later became a reality.

Bill Dameshek was not only a scientist, a clinical hematologist, a physician of great general knowledge, but first of all a human being—a man of great sentiments. I have never forgotten an episode I witnessed many years ago in his office in Boston. While visiting him in his small but beautifully and artistically furnished office, his technician brought the results of an examination and laboratory findings of a patient who was in the waiting room. Dr. Dameshek diagnosed acute leukemia with tears in his eyes. He said to me: “This man is lost. I cannot do anything for him.” For quite sometime tears were running over his cheeks. This was Bill Dameshek—a human being.

When people leave us forever, we think that time will heal the wound and here I may not only speak for myself, but for many others who have written to me; it does not always. I will miss him and I will never get used to the fact that he is no longer with us.

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