WILLIAM HARVEY

April 1, 1578—June 3, 1657

A Tercentenary Congress to commemorate William Harvey was organized by the Harveian Society of London with the help of the Royal College of Physicians and other Societies and was held at the Royal College of Surgeons, London, from June 3 to June 7, 1957. It was concluded at Folkestone two days later with a memorable address by the President, Dickson Wright, before the statue of Harvey, which looks across the Channel from the cliffs where he played as a boy. The Congress included some historical papers as well as many dealing with our present knowledge of the circulation, excellent scientific exhibitions, and films and colour television. It need not be recorded in detail, for the Committee intend to publish the Proceedings.

A special meeting of the British Cardiac Society was held as part of the Congress on Thursday, June 6, and abstracts of this meeting appear as usual in the Proceedings. We are glad to print this pertinent historical paper by Morgan Jones.

There seems no doubt that William Harvey was greatly influenced by the four years he spent in Padua from 1598 to 1602. At this University there was a freedom of thought and of expression that was hardly found elsewhere at the time. Harvey was a pupil of Fabricius (1537–1619) who followed the great teachers Vesalius (1514–1564) and Fallopius (1523–1563)—earlier occupants of the same Chair.

If Harvey is to be regarded as the father of modern experimental physiology and medicine, the publication of *De Fabrica Humani Corporis* by Vesalius in 1543 marked the beginning of modern anatomy. Harvey has acknowledged the influence of Fabricius, who had published beautiful descriptions of the valves of the veins but was still too much under the influence of Galen to make the deductions that Harvey did.

There was some glimmering of knowledge of the circulation through the lung before this. Servetus (1511–1553) in *Restitutio Christianismi* (1553), most copies of which were burnt with him at the stake, had surmized the existence of the pulmonary circulation; Columbus (1516–1559), perhaps following Servetus, taught this at Padua; and the philosophical physician Caesalpinus (1519–1603) included a rather fuller description of it in his *Questiones peripateticae* (1571); but none of these authors brought forward any evidence to support their rather speculative views or had any real influence on contemporary thought.

As Morgan Jones points out, we owe a debt to Harvey for his clear demonstration of the experimental method, as well as for his discovery of the circulation. Those who have seen the beautiful film originally produced by Sir Thomas Lewis and Sir Henry Dale for the Royal College of Physicians in 1928, and now remade by Sir Henry Dale in colour, cannot fail to realize the wonderful simplicity of his experiments and the decisiveness of the deductions that he made from them.