

from Russia, joined the staff of *The Times* as a leader-writer. In May, 1922, he was appointed Director of the Foreign Department, where his literary ability and political judgment were abundantly shown in the numerous leading articles he contributed to *The Times* in the following years. Not only was his knowledge of international affairs both extensive and accurate, but he had a remarkable gift of sympathy which enabled him to write of them definitely but without offence, while his origin as a New-Zealander preserved him from too narrow a regard for the politics of Europe.

As a natural corollary to his character, his travels, and his official position, Williams had many friends in the diplomatic world. In all circles, however, his essential kindness and modesty won friendship as much as his erudition won respect. His home at Chelsea was constantly thronged with friends and acquaintances of many different nationalities. So far as his work for *The Times* permitted, Williams kept up an active interest in the work of the School for Slavonic Studies in the University of London. He was also one of the editors of the *Slavonic Review*. He never abandoned his linguistic studies, and his friends were from time to time surprised to find that he was conversant with the latest theory as to the affinities of Hittite, or had learnt to read and converse fluently in Turkish and Arabic.

Williams was always far too modest to admit how many languages he knew, and always gave an evasive answer if questioned on the matter. His wife's biography of him says that he knew twenty-six, but that philology by no means exhausted his interests. He was amazingly well and widely read, and his familiarity with current political, national, and social movements was encyclopædic. Even Lord Northcliffe, at that time proprietor of *The*

*Times*, who rarely said anything pleasant to anybody, showed his respect for Williams' knowledge and ability. When they met, which was not often, Northcliffe was always cordial; he never attempted to impose his views on Williams, nor did he try to influence his leading articles.

Little by little, also, Continental readers of *The Times* felt the presence and personality of a new foreign editor: the extent of his erudition, the balance and discretion of his judgment, his intuitive goodwill towards all peoples. Personal meetings with Ministers and diplomats strengthened his authority. He had the gift of inspiring confidence, and deserved it.

By 1928 Williams' health was beginning to fail. He was examined by Harley Street specialists, but nothing beyond overwork, it was said, was wrong with him. Here the doctors made a mistake, taking the effect for the cause. He was suffering from a gastric ulcer, an exhausting complaint, but one which might have been cured if taken in time. On Monday, November 5, almost on the eve of his departure for a holiday in Egypt, he wrote a leader, spent some time in the office, and wound up all sorts of business. Next day he collapsed. An operation was performed which failed to save his life, and he died on Sunday, November 18, 1928. The day after the funeral a close friend, Robert Vansittart, wrote in *The Times*: "We have to-day returned from seeing, but not from feeling, our last of Harold Williams. Of his gifts of thought and knowledge I will say nothing; they spoke for themselves to all who knew him and to many who did not. But if ever in a long and loving friendship I had been able for a day to believe that I had a character like his, it would have been a happy day for me; and if many of us could have or had that illusion, even for a day, the world would be a happier place."

