THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE LIGUE INTERNATIONALE CONTRE LE RHUMATISME*

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NEARLY three years have elapsed since the International Congress on Rheumatic Diseases was held in London, Oxford and Bath, and nearly eight months have elapsed since the date planned for the Seventh International Congress on Rheumatic Diseases which was to have been held in the United States in New York, Philadelphia and Boston in June, 1940.

In view of the unsettled state of affairs throughout the world in general and the war actively going on between many countries, it becomes appropriate to set forth the present status of the Ligue Internationale contre le Rhumatisme. It is to be borne in mind that many countries constituting part of the membership of the Ligue are not actively engaged in war, and there would, therefore, seem to exist in these countries a tacit obligation to preserve for future use such activities and lines of affiliation as had been already inaugurated or laid down. Those countries whose potential is presumably most significant at the moment in this connection are obviously the United States in North America and the Argentine Republic in South America. There are other nations whose non-belligerent status permits of participation, but for many reasons the fullest co-operation can hardly be expected from them. It is further to be recognised that, even in countries engaged in actual warfare, observations of great value may conceivably emerge. It remains, therefore, to ascertain what, if anything, can be expected in attempting at the present juncture to further the original purposes of the Ligue.

There is importance in realising that affiliations along scientific lines have long been regarded as having a potential which can leap over barriers and are not confined by international boundary lines of any sort. This can hardly ever be expected to take place completely, least of all now, and yet there is no doubt that to a certain extent something in this direction is always operative.

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There are other considerations, however, which assume added significance at a time like the present, when institutions of democracy are everywhere threatened. For example, it is axiomatic that only in democratic countries can true freedom of thought be said to exist, since democracy exists, not as a regimented order, but rather as a collection or aggregation of independent thoughts and activities which, loosely welded together, constitute a whole. In this view, there is obviously value in times of stress of developing each of those units which may be reasonably regarded as contributing to such a whole. Importance of a nature other than scientific or medical must therefore attach to any movement which has reached the proportions achieved by the *Ligue Internationale contre le Rhumatisme*. As the war as a whole has developed, opinion everywhere has crystallised in one of two directions, favourable or unfavourable to democratic thought, and in so far as the *Ligue* is a child of democratic thought there can be small doubt as to the direction in which it, as an institution, must also face.

Significance must attach, therefore, in the minds of thinking persons, to the preservation of such lines of communication and of free thought as have been already created by the *Ligue* for its specific purposes. The extent to which the *Ligue* can, individually, contribute to resolving the affairs of the world to-day is, perhaps, small, but that it can, and should, contribute something to this end admits of no dispute. Certain it is, in any event, that many members of the *Ligue* residing in countries not actively belligerent at the moment, feel very acutely their obligations as citizens of these countries to express themselves in word and deed as forcefully as may be possible toward the furtherance of free thought and the free expression of opinion. Regarded in this light the *Ligue*, indeed, affords perhaps one of the best corporate opportunities which present to us. This brief communication, therefore, sets forth to the membership of the *Ligue* as a whole, and particularly to the membership in democratic countries, the resolve of the members in the United States to live up to the traditions which the *Ligue* has already imposed upon us, to plan for its future, and to plan for world-wide collaboration as soon as this becomes possible.

Another chief purpose of this letter is to state that the affiliations established in the field of rheumatic diseases, in both Great Britain and the United States, are regarded in the United States

of America as strengthened rather than weakened by the stresses put upon them. The only way in which the present hiatus can be regarded is in the light of a temporary deceleration of the work we have in hand, with the aim of greater acceleration in the not distant future. In planning to maintain present affiliations, and indeed to add to their significance, members of the Ligue, in common with the people of all democratic countries, those in bonds as well as those still free, can look with admiration at the example presented by Englishmen everywhere and from this example take up renewed determination to carry on.

The basis of function of the Ligue Internationale, so far as the United States of America is concerned, can be regarded as secure. The specific nucleus of the Ligue in this country, arising directly from the American Committee for the Control of Rheumatism which was created by the Ligue, is the American Rheumatism Association, a body of 250 close students of the subject which, in June next, will hold its eighth annual meeting. Notwithstanding the extent to which this country is now engaged in preparations for defence, a lengthy and significant programme has been prepared to which many of the leading workers in this field will contribute. Apart from this, wide interest has been aroused in this country by the American Rheumatism Association in the various phases of rheumatic disorders, and work is now proceeding from many quarters along lines parallel to the basic topic as a whole. This trend is well reflected in the annual scientific exhibits of the American Medical Association and in other exhibits and meetings of the kind. Homogeneity of thought is undoubtedly slowly arising in regard to the importance of this group of diseases and as to the way in which they should be approached from the sociologic and therapeutic standpoint. Many of the shibboleths which in the past twenty years have acted as a brake to independent thought and research have been modified or broken down. The changed viewpoint in the United States of America towards the exclusive, etiologic rôle of focal infection has given way to a wider-angled outlook which sees the problem of rheumatic diseases as the resultant of imbalance in many systems of the body. This more tolerant and broader form of inquiry can have only useful consequences.

In addition to many centres of independent study of these diseases, there have been established in the United States of America in the past few years several great foundations whose

funds and potential are directed solely or chiefly to the rheumatic field. At the University of Michigan the Rackemann Foundation has provided for a comprehensive, long-range study of arthritis, and in New York a large hospital has been built and dedicated to the treatment of, and research in, chronic diseases, arthritis being one of the three diseases selected. In Boston the Lovett and Commonwealth Foundations, with large-scale assistance from the State of Massachusetts, have inaugurated basic studies, already bearing significant results. It is much too soon to attempt to evaluate all that is being accomplished in this connection, but it is fair to state that by the time peace returns to the world, be this soon or late, the members of the American Rheumatism Association will have a full message to deliver.

It is at such a time that the postponed meeting of the *Ligue Internationale contre le Rhumatisme* should be held. Unusual stimulation will derive from renewing interchange of thought, and it is not too much to suppose that added impetus will also be given to those plans, which must then be formulated and executed, to bring about that stability which the world will then everywhere need.

RECENT STUDIES ON ARTHRITIS AND RHEUMATISM IN THE UNITED STATES*

BY PHILIP S. HENCH

DISEASES OF JOINTS RELATED TO TRAUMA

AFTER acute trauma to a small joint, such as the wrist or ankle, the bones of the adjacent hand or foot may rarefy and notable regressive changes may occur in overlying soft tissues (muscle atrophy, vasomotor and trophic changes in skin, perhaps swelling of soft tissues). This not uncommon condition is known as "Sudeck's atrophy" or "Leriche's disease." Little is known of its underlying pathology. It is now reported that a somewhat similar series of events also may occur after trauma without fracture to large joints.⁴³ A violent wrench or blow to a knee occasionally may lead to a severe disabling atrophy of the local

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