FEBRUARY 1, 1957

FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON RHEUMATIC FEVER

MEXICO, 1956

On April 30, 1956, and lasting for four full days, there met in Mexico City the First International Symposium on Rheumatic Fever, attended by a large number of physicians from Central and North America and a few from Europe. The meetings were held in the National Institute of Cardiology, a large modern series of buildings lavishly equipped and enthusiastically staffed, directed by Dr. Ignacio Chavez. In its entrance hall there are two large frescos by Diego Rivera, illustrating in a vivid and powerful whole almost every famous figure in the long history of cardiology, from Galen up to Paul D. White and Charles Laubry (including William Heberden holding his Commentaries, with his forefinger, no doubt, marking Chapter 70 on "Pectoris dolor"); accurate to the last detail of Stephen Hale's mare or William Withering's foxgloves, these paintings present a wonderful symbol of the unity of medicine.

Dr. Chavez, after welcoming the participants, gave a general outline of the epidemiological problems of rheumatic fever in Mexico. This is estimated to be very common in young people, reaching a figure ten times as high as that given for schoolchildren in the notifying areas of England. Most of the cases referred to the Institute had severe disease of three valves and the Pathological Department usually carried out between one and three post-mortem examinations per week throughout the year on patients with acute rheumatic carditis, accumulating thereby a wealth of pathological material with which subsequent speakers from the Institute dealt fully.

A brief but comprehensive review of current concepts of the aetiology of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease was given by Dr. A. Dorfman (University of Chicago), who stressed not only the role of the Group A haemolytic streptococcus but also those possible host-factors which determine why so few of all those exposed to this organism develop rheumatic fever. Dr. E. G. L. Bywaters (University of London) reviewed the immunological aspects of rheumatic fever, including investigations at the Special Unit for Study and Care of Juvenile Rheumatism at Taplow on experimental auto-antibody mechanisms and recent work on the antistreptolysin-O response of children below the age of 5 with rheumatic fever. Contrary to expectations this response was significantly lower than in older children, paralleling what is seen in uncomplicated streptococcal infection. Dr. A. Kuttner (New York University), well known for her work on the prophylaxis of this disease, reviewed the role of the streptococcus, pointing out the many questions which still remain to be answered.

The next sessions dealt primarily with histopathogenesis. Dr. Isaac Costero and his collaborators showed a remarkable series of coloured slides from the vast material of the Institute, illustrating lesions, which in Great Britain would be considered as rarities, such as
tricuspid deformities and a severe type of encephalopathy, only rarely, if ever, seen elsewhere.

The histochemistry of fibrinoid material in the collagen diseases was described by Dr. Paul Klemperer (Mount Sinai Hospital, New York) including results with the ingenious methods such as microspectrophotometry perfected in his laboratory. He was followed by Dr. George Murphy (Cornell University, New York), who gave a detailed account of the lesions produced in rabbits' hearts with repeated streptococcal skin injections, a widespread fibrinoid necrosis involving the myocardial fibres and comparable with the somewhat similar lesions seen in man. Work recently published includes the breeding of a strain of rabbits which show a very high incidence of heart lesions following such inoculations and occasionally a subacute bacterial endocarditis.

Dr. Dorfman outlined the work of his group on the polysaccharide substances in connective tissue with particular reference to experimental diabetes, where a tagging technique showed a decreased turnover of both hyaluronic and chondroitin sulphuric acids and inhibition of polysaccharide synthesis by hydrocortisone.

The clinical picture of rheumatic fever was outlined by Dr. Benedict Massell from his long experience at the House of the Good Samaritan in Boston. He also described controlled studies on the home prevention of streptococcal infection in children who have had rheumatic fever, using for comparison the amount of streptococcal infection amongst the brothers and sisters of these patients in the same environment. Others dealt with specific aspects of the clinical course; carditis was discussed by Dr. Mendoza, rheumatic encephalopathy by Dr. De Gortari, and rheumatic pneumonitis by Dr. Cuellar (all from the Mexican Institute of Cardiology), and Jaccoud's syndrome by Dr. Bywaters.

Dr. Edward Bland (Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston), discussed the prognosis of patients with aortic regurgitation and the value of the new plastic prosthesis, against a background of the 1,000 cases of rheumatic fever which have now been followed for 20 years by himself and the late Duckett Jones. The electrocardiographic signs of the valvular lesions were described by Dr. Sodi Pallares (Mexico) and a detailed study was presented by Dr. Decourt (Brazil) of the acute phase reactants and electrophoretic protein changes in the serum during the course of the acute disease. Dr. Cesarman (Mexico) talked about chemotherapy and Dr. Robles Gil (Chief of the Department of Rheumatism at the Institute of Cardiology) hormonal treatment. The latter gave an interesting account of the decreased incidence of Aschoff-like lesions in the left auricle at commissurotomy in patients given pre-operative cortisone. After a discussion on mitral commissurotomy, the proceedings terminated with a full discussion of a programme for prophylaxis to be planned on a national scale and to be carried out from the Institute of Cardiology with assistance from the Department of Health.

This ended the formal discussions, but opportunity was given later for informal discussions on many aspects and for seeing something of the Mexican scene.

What impressed the English visitor most was the vigour and enthusiasm of the country, exemplified as much by the Institute of Cardiology as by the enormous amount of new and modern buildings, the virile mural paintings, and the magnificent archeological exhibitions. It was indeed apparent that the coming together in this country of the new world spirit and old world traditions,—the Spanish influence, the cultures of Pre-Colombian civilizations, and the 20th-century civilization,—have created a land of great promise and opportunity.

SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI REUMATOLOGIA

Fourth Rome Rheumatology Day

At meetings held on February 11 and 12, 1956, papers were given by the following speakers:


PROFS. T. Lucherini and E. Cecchi (Rome): Pulmonary Disease and Rheumatoid Arthritis.

PROFS. A. Marmont (Geneva) and C. Campana (Rome): So-called Visceral Lupus Erythematosus.

PROF. C. Cervine (Rome): Heredity and Constitution in Rheumatology.

Tenth Congress, Milan, 1956

The tenth Congress of the Italian Rheumatological Society was held in Milan on May 30 and 31, 1956, to mark the occasion of the fifth centenary of the founding of the Ospedale Maggiore di Milano. The following papers were given:


Biological Effects of the New Steroids on the Action of Cortisone: G. Sala and A. Amira (Milan).


Effects of Prednisone and Prednisolone on Renal Function: A. Bergamini and B. Bonati (Modena).

Prednisone in Rheumatism with special reference to Carditis: G. Casolo (Milan).
medium for the publication of developments in research and teaching in all fields of rheumatism, and general practitioners and others throughout the country were recommended to subscribe to the *Annals* so that they might be kept conversant with modern trends. As and when more material became available, it was hoped to increase the publication of the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* from four copies to six copies per annum.

**World Health Organization.**—The Executive Committee had accepted an invitation to become a "sponsoring body" of the United Kingdom Committee for W.H.O., and had nominated for appointment Dr. Ernest Fletcher and Dr. G. R. Fearnley as the Council’s representatives on their Executive Board.

**COMMONWEALTH**

By invitation of the Minister of Health, New Zealand, the Australian Rheumatism Council, and the Council of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and with the endorsement of his colleagues, the Chairman had visited these two dominions towards the end of 1955 as the official representative of the E.R.C. He carried with him a personal message from their Royal President to the Governors-General of Australia and New Zealand, and from the Rt. Hon. Iain Macleod (Minister of Health) to the Minister of Health, New Zealand. He was grateful to His Royal Highness for having graciously received him personally both before and after his visit and for his kindly interest in the tour.

He had visited all the chief medical centres and many lesser ones in both countries, and at all the main centres he carried out a prearranged programme of lectures, giving clinical demonstrations and holding conferences. He had also given several broadcast talks, some of a more popular nature. Everywhere he had been received most hospitably, both officially and privately. A detailed account of his itinerary and of his activities in both dominions was contained in the official report (which had been accepted by the Commonwealth Sub-Committee of the Council and by the Executive Committee), and appeared as a supplement to the Annual Report.

Dr. G. N. Watson, on his recall to Australia, left vacant the London representation of the Australian Rheumatism Council on the Commonwealth Sub-Committee, and Dr. S. C. Milazzo, M.R.A.C.P., had been appointed at their suggestion in his stead.

Contact has been established with Dr. Mark Horwitz, of Cape Town, with a view to establishing an affiliated autonomous South African Rheumatism Council in that country. It is hoped that by next year this will be a fait accompli.

**ADMINISTRATION**

It had been recommended that the key administrative committees, viz. Executive Committee, Finance Committee, and Scientific Co-ordinating Committee, be re-elected for 1956-57. The Chairman said that he could not refrain from paying special tribute to Dr. Oswald Savage for so ably deputizing as acting Chairman of the Council during his absence in the Antipodes, and for the great help he had rendered to Mr. R. V. Howell, the able general secretary, during that time in the many problems which had come to hand, and also to Prof. Tunbridge for his guidance and wisdom as chairman of the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee.

**CONCLUSION**

In the past year the Council had extended its activities in all directions and had been greatly encouraged by the generosity of subscribers and donors which had supported its efforts to overcome the rheumatic disorders which caused more absenteeism and invalidity than any other known malady.

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