Obituary


One important link with the early development of British Rheumatology passed with the death of Dr. Francis Bach on November 16, 1975. When he took up his lifelong special interest in the rheumatic diseases the only beds for rheumatism sufferers in Britain were those in the old spa hospitals and help for outpatients in London was practically confined to the Red Cross clinics at Peto Place and Kensington. Francis Bach, together with the late Philip Ellman, encouraged by an enlightened London County Council, took charge of the first ward in London entirely devoted to the rheumatic diseases at St. Stephen's Hospital in Chelsea. Those were the days in the 1920s when the teaching hospitals, with their commitment to medical education, regarded arthritis patients as bed blockers and would seldom admit them. The partnership of Bach and Ellman was productive, but in widely different ways. Ellman built on his clinical experience to widen the scientific aspects of rheumatology and his papers on the rheumatoid lung are still classics. Bach, on the other hand (although he did produce a useful early study on splenectomy in rheumatoid arthritis), was a shrewd clinician and much more interested in patients as people and in their families and social problems. He was one of the first to insist on the team approach to treatment and the medical social worker, the physiotherapist, the occupational therapist, and the dietician would accompany him on his ward rounds. He realized, for example, that for the overweight patient with painful contractures of the knees doctors had relatively little to offer—but the physiotherapist and dietician had.

It was the same interest in patients as people which led him to be active for many years in the British Rheumatism Association (B.R.A., often affectionately thought of as Bach's Rheumatism Association). The B.R.A., in contrast to its bigger sister organization, the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council, concentrated on the welfare of sufferers rather than research. It took the formation of the federal British League Against Rheumatism in 1973 to bring the two organizations together 'under one hat', a development which Bach welcomed.

On an international level Dr. Francis Bach was a great traveller and active in the field of international aspects of rehabilitation. He was a member of the Council of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and through this and similar organizations he had friends all over the world. His other main interest was in the world of insurance medical examinations and he was frequently asked to consult on difficult cases.

Francis Bach was never one to waste time during his three score and ten years. He started work early, and I remember once interviewing with him a candidate for a job at breakfast. He continued at a fast pace, nonstop throughout the day, visiting the many hospitals where he held appointments and looking after his busy private practice.

He was a connoisseur of good food and wine and a member of the Georgian Society and had many other interests.

But I shall remember him most as a helpful senior colleague, a man who first made me realize that, whether one likes it or not, being a consultant is sometimes one branch of 'show biz'; a man who, although he made few contributions to the science of rheumatology, greatly changed its practice and was obviously loved and will be remembered with gratitude by a large number of patients.

A. St. J. Dixon