OBITUARY

Ralph Pemberton, President of the International League against Rheumatism since 1938, died of a coronary occlusion on June 17 at his home in Paoli, Pennsylvania. He was 72.

Ralph Pemberton was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1877. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Pennsylvania Medical School with the degrees of B.S., M.S., and M.D. After working at the Philadelphia General Hospital he practised in Philadelphia. While at the hospital he was deeply distressed and interested in the plight of the many "rheumatics", for whom morphia offered the only form of treatment and relief. His practice naturally centred around this interest, and he became known for his writings on the subject. When the World War 1914-18 came, he was assigned, as a Major in the Medical Corps of the United States Army, to the intensive study and treatment of arthritis. He carried on the observations begun in the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia (where he served for eighteen years). The result of these studies stimulated increased nation-wide interest.

After the war he returned to research as Woodward Fellow in physiological chemistry at the Pepper Laboratory of the University of Pennsylvania. Before the war (1912), he had already taken a course of graduate study in Berlin and Strassburg. On his return from Europe he inspired a group of younger men to help him and so to build up a well-known clinic. In 1926 he was appointed chairman of the American Committee for the Study and Control of Rheumatic Diseases, the American Branch of the International League against Rheumatism, which had been organized in 1925. In 1933 this committee organized the American Rheumatism Association, of which Dr. Pemberton later became president. His wisdom and guidance were invaluable, as he had been a member of the council of the International League from its beginning. In 1938 he became President of the International League against Rheumatism. His illness tragically prevented him from enjoying the recent congress, held in New York, for which he had striven for eleven years.

Dr. Pemberton was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1939. In 1944 he was made the first president of the Pan-American League for the Study and Control of Rheumatic Diseases. He was national consultant in Rheumatism and arthritis under the programme of wartime graduate medical meetings. In 1946, in recognition of his research on arthritis and for work on physical medicine, he was awarded the Gold Key of the American Congress of Physical Medicine.

At the Abington Hospital Dr. Pemberton was physician in chief, Service of Rheumatoid Diseases, and he was made Professor of Medicine, Graduated School, University of Pennsylvania in 1931. Both positions he held until his death. He was chairman of the committee on rheumatic diseases of the Department of Health of Philadelphia; Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, London, England; Honorary Member of the Societatea Anatomo-Clinica, Bucharest, Romania, of the Liga Argentina Contra el Reumatismo, of the Liga Uruguya Contra el Reumatismo, and of the Liga Brasiliera Contra o Reumatismo; and an Honorary Member of the International League against Rheumatism.

Dr. Pemberton was known for his many excellent writings on arthritis, physical medicine, and rehabilitation of the disabled soldier. He was a pioneer in the scientific study of rheumatic disease, which he was convinced was a systemic condition that should be studied against the background of all available knowledge and with as profound an understanding as possible of basic metabolism. The whole subject was, Dr. Pemberton felt, "a big horse to ride," and one well worthy of a lifetime effort, both because of the confusion of tongues in regard to the treatment and nature of rheumatoid diseases, and also because of the deep sociological distress brought about through the economic loss to individual sufferers and to society as a whole. He was therefore untiring and direct in his determination to solve the problem, with his great affection for people as the driving force.

He was a true internationalist, and made a host of friends all over the world. Both those he had met in his frequent travels and those with whom he had corresponded respected and admired him, and loved him for his cordial friendly manner. He was untiring in his efforts to organize world co-operation—and this not only in the studies in which his interest lay; he never forgot that friendship and international goodwill work for world peace. This interest may even be said to have been closer to his heart than the study of rheumatic disease.

His death will be a misfortune to his friends, and his wise opinions and counsels will be missed by the world organizations with which he was associated. He was a great man in a difficult field of medicine.