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A SYMPOSIUM ON GLAUCOMA

MOST medical people have been to many professional meetings ranging in size and importance from the meeting of the local society to the monstrous and multilingual international congress; but few have been to a meeting of greater professional or scientific value than the Symposium organized by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, held in Canada in September, 1954, on the subject of Glaucoma. The function of such a symposium is well defined. It should concern itself with a relatively small subject which is going through a period of rapid evolution, preferably a subject which different workers in different countries are approaching from different aspects. It so frequently happens that the methods and conclusions of workers in unrelated disciplines are not understood or are misinterpreted by those whose training and habit of thought have been on other lines; the clinician, for example, fails to understand the language of the chemist or the physicist in papers which may be highly technical, and therefore does not derive the help from him that he might. The ideal subject for a symposium is one to which contributions are being made from many angles, and the ideal participants those who would not normally meet unless special facilities were made available.

The subject of this symposium was glaucoma, on which a vast amount of research has recently been done in several countries in Europe and America. At the meeting there gathered from different countries in the world a physiologist, a biochemist, a pharmacologist, and a pathologist, as well as a number of workers engaged on active clinical research on the problems presented by this disease, all of whom had a right to be heard by reason of the excellence of their researches; these were confronted by a number of senior clinicians, surgeons and physicians, with long experience of the practical problems which abound in this disease. There is always a danger that new knowledge may be given a disproportionate importance by the generation which is thrilled by it, and it is often some time before it sinks into its proper perspective in the mass of the old and proved knowledge gathered by previous generations. There is also the danger that in a problem of this sort those actively engaged may be mesmerized by the exciting possibilities of new techniques—that the biochemist, for example, will see the whole answer to a clinical question in his laboratory studies, or that the gonioscopist will confine his reasoning to one particular aspect of clinical investigation. When these various specialists meet and argue amongst themselves a sense of proportion emerges. The

clinician learns to appreciate the value and, what is more important, the limitations of the laboratory studies with which he may have been so impressed hitherto that he had accepted them without criticism; the laboratory worker learns to appreciate the variability of biological material and the complexity of clinical problems, and, at the same time, can assess the aspects of his work which are of practical importance.

The subject of the present symposium was ideal for such a meeting; the problem presented by the normal and abnormal intra-ocular pressure has recently been approached from many angles—the biochemistry of the aqueous humour, the vascular pathology of the eye and particularly of its drainage channels, the pharmacology of the many drugs, old and recent, at present employed in therapeutics, while many important new clinical methods of investigation—gonioscopy, tonography, fluorometry, and so on—have been applied to the study of the disease. During the last decade many of those engaged on these investigations appear to have been contradicting each other, so much so that it was commonly said that there was an “ American school ” and a “ European school ” of thought on the matter. The symposium made it abundantly clear that this distinction did not in fact exist; differences in approach and in the technicalities of language accounted for differences in view-point which were discovered to be more apparent than real. In the discussion most of these divergences were ironed out and the participants understood that in the fundamental facts they were all in essential agreement and had been so all the time. Most of the general conclusions reached at the meeting were unanimous; the most important thing that emerged was that definite lines of presumptively fruitful research were laid down for the future in which it is confidently expected that the various contributors to the symposium will happily collaborate.

From the technical point of view, the first essential of a symposium is that the meeting be kept relatively small; it should be conducted so that all inhibitions are lost and argument is free and untrammelled. This implies considerable technical help. In this symposium, as in other symposia conducted by the C.I.O.M.S., the papers were distributed previously so that all the participants were acquainted with what each contributor proposed to say, and the plan was adopted that each paper was merely summarized with the main points emphasized; much more time was therefore available for the discussions. These were tape-recorded and the record of each session distributed in typescript among the participants for correction before their final condensation and editing for publication in due course.

The participants in this Symposium on Glaucoma were well known to each other by their writings and reputations, although all were by no means personally acquainted. They formed a very happy family and the atmosphere of the entire meeting was rendered as nearly perfect as it could have been by the isolation and beauty of the Alpine Inn, at Ste. Marguerite, situated in the midst of the Laurentian mountains. Immediately after the symposium the participants went to the International Congress of Ophthal-

mology, held in Montreal and New York—a huge gathering of 3,000 delegates with continuous sets of meetings running in parallel and necessarily strictly limited discussion. Although this provided an excellent opportunity for colleagues all over the world to meet each other, there was no question whatever that the scientific value of one half day at the symposium was greater than that of the whole eight days of the Congress. The C.I.O.M.S. and its two sponsoring bodies, UNESCO and WHO, are indeed to be congratulated on the conception and organization of meetings of this type which probably do more for the advancement of medicine than any other type of conference.

Those taking part were: Ashton (*London*); Bárány (*Uppsala*); Berens (*New York*); Duke-Elder (*London*, Chairman); Elliot (*Toronto*); François (*Ghent*); Friedenwald (*Baltimore*); Goldmann (*Berne*); Grant (*Boston*); Hartmann (*Paris*); Hodgson (*Toronto*, Secretary); Kinsey (*Detroit*); Kronfeld (*Chicago*); Langham (*London*); Leydhecker (*Bonn*); Malbran (*Buenos Aires*); Scheie (*Philadelphia*); Sourdille (*Nantes*); Vail (*Chicago*); Weekers (*Liège*).

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NOTES

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF OPHTHALMOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

Résumé of the minutes of the meetings held at the XVII International Congress of Ophthalmology at Montreal in September, 1954

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

Apart from current business, the following is a summary of the main decisions taken:

(1) *International Standardizations*.—The main business of the meeting concerned the international standardization of visual requirements for transport workers. The reports of the committees dealing with the standardization of optotypes, the colour sense, and the limits of spectacle correction recommended for transport workers were considered and referred to the International Federation for confirmation. A scheme for the codification of the colours of labels of ophthalmic drugs was also agreed. These recommendations will be noted in the Minutes of the Federation.

(2) *Ophthalmological Education*.—The Council considered the report presented by Alvaro on behalf of the committee which had been studying the question of ophthalmological education. This was thought to be of such importance that it was decided to submit it to the principal ophthalmic journals in the world for publication.

(3) *International Dictionary of Ophthalmic Terms*.—The committee concerned reported on the progress of the "International Dictionary of Ophthalmic Terms"; it is hoped that this dictionary, which contains such terms in six languages (English, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish) will appear in the near future.