Editorial

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One Hundred Years of Anatomical Terminology

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Key Words

Anatomical terminology

Nomina anatomica

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Abstract

Anatomical terminology was codified 100 years ago in Basel under the aegis of Wilhelm His, and it is fitting that this important event be commemorated in an international anatomical journal founded and published in the same illustrious city.

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The *Fabrica* of Vesalius was published in Basel in 1543 and was commemorated on the occasion of its 450th anniversary [O'Rahilly, 1993]. In a similar manner it is fitting now to celebrate the appearance in Basel, one hundred years ago, of the first thorough, modern systematization of anatomical terminology, known as the BNA (*Basler Nomina anatomica*). The indefatigable inaugurator of this important undertaking was Wilhelm His der Ältere [His, 1895; Eycleshymer, 1917], whose many distinctions include being the founder, the 'Vesalius', of human embryology [Miiller and O'Rahilly, 1986; O'Rahilly, 1988].

The history of anatomical terminology and its revisions has been recounted already [O'Rahilly, 1989], so that only a few points need to be stressed here. The most important is that the *Nomina* and its revisions are in no sense a 'new terminology' but rather a careful selection of, in general, previously existing names, most of which arose at least several centuries ago. The *Nomina* is primarily a terminology in Latin and, now that English seems to have become the lingua franca of science, it is worth emphasizing (especially for those working on a translation) that the Birmingham Revision [1933] of the BNA is still the best source of anatomical terms in the English language.

It is appropriate to conclude with a few words concerning Wilhelm His der Ältere. He was born in 1831 into a

Fig. 1. Wilhelm His der Ältere (1831-1904). Reproduced with kind permission of 'Verlag Hans Huber AG, Bern'.

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long-established noble family in Basel, in which city he later qualified in medicine. He spent half a century as Professor of Anatomy, first in his native Basel and subsequently in Leipzig (where he died in 1904). He founded the *Zeitschrift für Anatomie und Entwicklungsgeschichte* (which has more recently become simply *Anatomy and Embryology*) and he was a co-founder of the *Anatomische Gesellschaft*. A list of his publications was prepared by

Fick [1904] and his memoirs were issued by Ludwig [1965]. His son, who was also a physician, discovered the atrioventricular bundle.

Acknowledgement

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