THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HUMAN GENETICS, PART I

Copenhagen, August 1–6, 1956

T.	Tag	Kemp
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Dahlberg was one of the first research assistants of this Institute. In 1926 he published his first comprehensive scientific work “Twin births and twins from a hereditary point of view” for which he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine with full honours from the University of Uppsala. This monograph, which is still one of the corner stones of modern twin research, soon gave him a place among the leading human geneticists.

The same year Dahlberg became docent (associate professor) of human genetics and medical statistics at the University of Uppsala. In 1936 Dahlberg succeeded Professor Lundborg as director of the State Institute for Human Genetics and as Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Uppsala, a position which he held until July 1, 1956, when he retired because of ill health.

The unusual width of Dahlberg’s scientific interests and endeavours is documented by his publications, of which a list has been recently published in this journal (vol. 4, no. 2/3). To the readers of this journal, Dahlberg should be known mostly because of his contributions to theoretical human genetics and especially population genetics. The quality of his work requires no comment here. He received many honors and was awarded an honorary doctorate of law by the University of Aberdeen as well as an honorary doctorate of odontology by the Royal Dental School in Stockholm.

When Hitler came into power in Germany and the nazis began to interfere with science, especially abusing the new science of human genetics, Gunnar Dahlberg clearly foresaw the consequences and stood up to fight for scientific honesty. His book “Race, Reason and Rubbish” (Allen and Unwin, London 1942) exposed the nazi crime on human genetics. However, this book could still be recommended to many parties of 1956 who entertain outmoded ideas on human races. Gunnar Dahlberg’s fight against dictatorship was not only carried out from behind a desk. He took an active part in aiding many refugees during and after the war. For his activities during the war, he received from Great Britain the King’s Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom. I believe that he was more proud of this award than of any of his scientific honours. Later, Dahlberg took the same attitude against the interference of the communists with genetics and the freedom of science. He resented dictatorship in whatever external appearance.

The personal destiny of Professor Dahlberg was a hard one. In 1945, only 9 years after his appointment as director of the Institute, he suffered a stroke which resulted in a rightsided hemiplegia and severe impairment of his speech. The fact that he was back in office only two

months after the incident bears evidence to his remarkable energy and self-control. In spite of his severe physical handicap, he was able to continue his work at the Institute successfully until 1955.

Gunnar Dahlberg had a great influence on the development of scientific medical research in Uppsala. It is well known that many clinicians entertain a certain horror of statistics and this was much more pronounced 30 years ago. Professor Dahlberg did much to alleviate this horror and never failed to aid in planning research projects or to help with statistical analyses of a great variety of data. The last medical monograph for which he was an active adviser in scientific method and statistics bears the number 119.

Gunnar Dahlberg was an unusual man with a broad knowledge in science as well as in arts. His main interest was centered on the application of rigid statistical methods to various problems in human genetics. I can do no better than closing this obituary by quoting the following lines of Francis Galton. They represent something Gunnar Dahlberg lived up to.

“General impressions are never to be trusted. Unfortunately when they are of long standing they become fixed rules of life, and assume a prescriptive right not to be questioned. Consequently those who are not accustomed to original inquiry entertain a hatred and a horror of statistics. They cannot endure the idea of submitting their sacred impressions to cold-blooded verification. But it is the triumph of scientific men to rise superior to such superstitions, to desire tests by which the value of beliefs may be ascertained, and to feel sufficiently masters of themselves to discard contemptuously whatever may be found untrue.”

Jan A. Book, Uppsala

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At the business meeting on August 4., 1956, it was unanimously decided that The 7th Second International Congress of Human Genetics is to be held probably in 1961.

A provisional committee was elected to prepare this Congress and to investigate the idvisability of establishing an International Organization for Human Genetics.

The members of the provisional committee were elected as follows:

Franceschetti, A. Geneva

Kallmann, F.J. New York

Kemp, T. Copenhagen

Penrose, L.S. London

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Organizing Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the following institutions and organizations for their generous support of

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The Rockefeller Foundation

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Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

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Sydøstsjællandss Elektricitets Aktieselskab

A/S Tuborgs Bryggerier

Minnesota Human Genetics League

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Address at the Opening of THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HUMAN GENETICS

August 1st, 1956 Ry Julius Romholt

Danish Minister of Education

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and honour to me, on behalf of the Danish Governmznt, to bid you all a hearty welcome to this First International Congress of Human Genetics.

The years after the Second World War have to an ever increasing extent been characterized by international congresses; the ivorld has become smaller, and with the rapid development of the means of communication in our time it only takes a few days for research-workers from all parts of the globe to get together for the discussion of the present day's great scientific problems, of which many can only be solved really effectively by team-work extending across all national frontiers and the seven seas.

Human genetics and its importance in preventing the occurrence and spread of hereditary diseases have just now become of intense topical interest by the perspective arising from the peaceful use of atomic energy and have made this Congress and its subsequent results particularly momentous.

Man's first actual encounter ivith atomic energy about 11 years ago by now, was a terrific shock, and in the minds of all citizens of countries of all the world aprofound anxiety arose concerning the future use of this new devastating force.

It is the greatest international task of our time to secure that this force shall not in future be released for the destruction of mankind.

But at the same time it has proved that this new source of energy utilized in the service of peaceful purposes may mean a revolution of all our technical development, and at a single bloiv remove all concern about the sharply dwindling supplies of our globe of the sources of energy most frequently used so far—coal and oil. I feel convinced that we are standing on the threshold of a development which our imagination can hardly grasp—and ive in my generation have after all experienced a development ivhich you would not think could be surpassed (motor cars, aircraft, radio, T.V. etc.).

This development raises no end of problems, partly on an international level, partly to the government of the individual countries—and particularly to the small countries as Denmark; in fact the Government of our country is at present intensely occupied with these questions. But the technicians' continued endeavours to use atomic energy in the service of peaceful purposes have caused that with increasing vigour voices have been raised in warning by

geneticists and biologists calling attention to the grave responsibility undertaken—particularly towards the coming generations—by releasing these im-

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mense latent forces and exposing the human body to a radiation whose consequences cannot be fully foreseen.

We owe a debt of profound gratitude to the research-workers who have raised these problems. Their initiative has already resulted in keen watchfulness which cannot be keen enough. We now pin our faith on the ability of further research to combat and eliminate the risk that may exist, so that we may enter this new epoch with confidence, also with respect to the coming generations. The great importance attached to the discussions of the coming days is also seen from the fact that the United Nations have asked to be informed of the results of the Congress and that the World Health Organization has convened a session of experts here in Copenhagen, in direct continuation of the Congress for the discussion of its results.

Wishing you a series of fruitful discourses which may form the basis of a further extension of international cooperation in these fields, I hereby declare

The First International Congress of Human Genetics open.

Address at the Opening of

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HUMAN GENETICS

August 1st, 1956

By Tage Kemp

President of the Congress

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends.

On behalf of the Danish organizing committee of The First International Congress of Human Genetics it is my privilege and honour to welcome you all heartily to The First International Congress of Human Genetics in Copenhagen.

Within recent years very much attention has been drawn to the dangers which our load of mutations involves for the human race, the risk of reduced fitness and even the perils of genetic death have been strongly emphasized.

These dangers could, however, be considered from another point of view. Human beings possess a treasure of normal genes and a heritage of valuable hereditary factors.

It is the task and responsibility of mankind in our generation, and in particular of the students of human and medical genetics to protect this treasure and to shelter this heritage from harmful influences and threatening hazards.

Beyond a definite intensity further increase in radiation presents a potential danger to the human race as well as to plant and animal life. The most serious and effective precautions to control and to prevent this risk and this danger must be taken.

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On the other hand the danger must not be over-estimated, and unnecessary anxiety ought to be avoided.

This is why the study of hereditary lesions is of such great consequence. The knowledge of the conditions affected by heredity makes it possible to follow and control their development and fluctuation in the population and to ascertain the behaviour of hereditary diseases down through the ages.

An increasing social consciousness has been manifesting itself in democratic countries during recent years, a growing feeling that society must make living conditions tolerable for everybody.

At the same time, democratic social conditions prevent the misuse of genetic-hygienic measures and ensure that due consideration is paid to personal liberty.

The rise and rapid progress during the past 50 years of human genetics and its subdivisions, such as medical and clinical genetics as well as radiation genetics, population genetics and immunogenetics, has added largely to our knowledge of this subject. The first attempts have been made to organize an epidemiological control of hereditary diseases, and a medicogenetic registration has recently been established in some countries.

At the same time, genetic counselling is being practised more and more extensively within all branches of medicine.

If this development continues, the time is drawing near when man can control his own biological evolution and also command his environments and conditions of life to an increasing extent.

Medical genetics in connection with the associated advice and registration create the necessary foundation for measures aiming to prevent hereditary diseases. Consequently the time has come to intensify international collaboration within the vast field of human genetics.

As a step in that direction The First International Congress of Human Genetics is being held in Copenhagen to promote the progress of human genetics, thereby to create new possibilities for improving the health and happiness of man.

From more than 30 countries from all parts of the world the students of human genetics have crossed oceans and continents and have overcome the tediousness of the long travel, in order to attend the congress in Copenhagen.

It is our sincere hope that during our meetings we shall by our combined effort be able to elucidate the problems of hereditary characters in man, and to solve some of the riddles within the field of human inheritance.

With this wish, the Danish organizing committee welcomes you most heartily to the congress.

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inside (in brackets): Page-numbers of the Proceedings of the First International Congress of Human Genetics,

outside: Page-numbers of the "Acta Genetica et Statistica Medica".

Bedeutung der Zahlen am Kopf der Seiten:

innen (in Klammern): Seitenzahlen der Proceedings of the First International Congress of Human Genetics,

außen: Seitenzahlen der «Acta Genetica et Statistica Medica».

Signification des chiffres au haut des pages:

à l'angle interne (entre parenthèses): Numéros des pages des Proceedings of the First International Congress of Human Genetics,

à l'angle externe: Numéros des pages de l'«Acta Genetica et Statistica Medica».

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