Introduction

Symposium Dedicated to Professor Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob

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The 10th Congress of Digestive Surgery, held in Rennes on March 25, 1988, brought together the two greatest liver surgeons of our time: Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob on the occasion of his 80th birthday and T.E. Starzl, who was made Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Rennes.

The students and friends of Professor Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob paid tribute to him on that occasion by presenting their work. This symposium, with papers presented by the students and friends of Professor Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob, is a further tribute to their master.

Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob was born in Paris on August 30th, 1908. He was educated at the 'Lycée Lacordaire' and the 'Lycée Janson de Sailly' and then decided to study medicine. In 1934, he passed the 'Internat des Hôpitaux de Paris' and was appointed 'prosecteur' at the Faculty of Medicine in 1941 and 'chirurgien des hôpitaux' in 1944 as assistant of Professor Bazy at the Saint Louis Hospital. He became professor 'agrégé' in 1952.

Surgery of the oesophagus soon attracted his interest. He improved and extended procedures, although Europe was at war and he was cut off from the scientific activities which were continuing on the other side of the Atlantic. On July 25, 1944, he performed the first oesophagectomy in France, under local anaesthetic, via thoracic approach and continuity was immediately re-established.

Shortly afterwards, however, the battle to liberate Paris began, and his patient was taking walks in the courtyards of the Saint Louis Hospital. Jean Mathey, the friend who had helped him in this difficult premiere, advised him not to let his patient get himself killed by a stray bullet.

The beginnings of oesophageal surgery were nevertheless fraught with difficulties and testify to the pugnacity, willpower and perseverance which are characteristic of great personalities.

Professor Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob

By 1947, the problems had been solved and oesophageal surgery had become accepted. It was time for Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob to move on to other fields. Liver surgery was non-existent. He chose an important procedure which is still the major operation in liver surgery: the first extended right hepatectomy was thus performed. It is a landmark in the history of surgery and the gateway to modern liver surgery.

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He left Saint Louis for the Broussais Hospital where the prestigious team of Professor Gaudart d'Audaines was working. He was equally successful in cardiovascular and digestive surgery. He was then appointed head of the surgical department at the Tenon Hospital and soon became 'Professeur de Clinique Chirurgicale'.

The chair was created especially for him as a tribute to his exceptional qualities as a surgeon. With the help of his first students and colleagues, Claude Richard, Jean-Noël Maillard and François Fekete, oesophageal surgery entered into an extremely fruitful period of research and development. He perfected a new procedure for surgical treatment of hiatal hernias, defined the indications for surgical treatment of peptic oesophagitis, perfected a new technique in the treatment of peptic oesophagitis, created a new antireflux resection with continent anastomosis and took a keen interest in caustic stenosis of the oesophagus and cardiospasm.

Patients flocked to his department at the Beaujon Hospital. An article published in 1967 noted 1,769 operations for tumours of the oesophagus, 1,027 of which were resected. At the same time, Gavrilu's technique of tubularization of the great curvature of the stomach was used for oesophagoplasty.

But Jean-Louis Lortat Jacob is not only a surgeon of great repute, heading a school of surgery which has produced 36 'professeurs agrégés', who have worked throughout the whole of France; he has also assumed heavy responsibilities in a difficult sociopsychological context.

The principal Societies of Surgery in the world, such as the American College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Surgeons, have made him an honorary member. With Louis Hollender, he created the Collegium Internationale Chirurgiae Digestivae of which he is honorary president. Such recognition is only natural for a man who has given so much to the field of digestive surgery. The hallmarks of his surgical technique, were elegance and efficacy. But the man himself is no less remarkable for his warmth, love of life, courtesy and humour which is sometimes reminiscent of Raymond Devos!