In memoriam Professor Jean Trémolières

Professor Jean Trémolières died on July 30, 1976 at the age of 62. He once said ‘Death leaves us only the glimpses of eternity we have caught in the departed.’ An intense presence is the heritage Jean Trémolières has left us. His personality was so strong, rich and courageous that it could almost make us forget his considerable scientific achievements.

As a professor of Biology at the ‘Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers’ in Paris, where he lectured on the biology of nutrition, his teaching was a model of excellence and his principal contributions to the field form the contents of a work in 4 volumes. Director of the first ‘Unité de Recherches de l’Institut National d’Hygiène’, which later became the ‘Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale’, his work resulted in over 550 publications, all dealing exclusively with human nutrition. His research focused mainly on nutrition surveys, protein metabolism, obesity, malnutrition, alcohol metabolism, digestive fistulas and metabolic toxicology.

From the outset of his research, at the beginning of the second world war, he devoted his career to the study of methods of measuring the nutritional status and the role of nutrition in public health, both in developed and in underdeveloped countries.

An expert whose opinion was much heeded, he openly challenged the concept of fixed standards of nutrition. Shortly before his death, although aware of the gravity of his illness, he decided to organise a symposium on the meaning of standards of nutrition which was to take place in September 1976.

Very early in his career, he realised that the nutritionist should not remain cooped up in his laboratory. His unfailing availability to others compelled him to involve himself wherever he felt that he might be of help to mankind.

Consequently, he undertook numerous duties on various national and international committees, where it was his constant endeavour to convince others that the science of nutrition should be both useful and humane. His increasing sense of responsibility led him to wage a campaign to educate the public in nutritional matters using the press, radio and television as well as publishing specialised books such as Le Manuel d’Alimentation Humaine, or books for the general public such as Diététique et Art de Vivre and Partager le Pain, which was his last ‘message’, to use a word he was fond of. He was the founding father of research in human nutrition in France, he established the Cahiers de Nutrition and was on the editorial boards of numerous French and foreign journals including Nutrition and Metabolism of which he was one of the founders.

It was impossible to meet Jean Trémolières without falling under his spell. His fine, ascetic face crowned by a mass of white hair was illuminated by extraordinarily intense eyes. His gaze, which could be serious, even hard when he was deeply involved, could also be marvellously welcoming and loving or show his pleasure in mutual understanding. He found his source of inner strength in his faith and in the unremitting support of Mme Trémolières.
He gave his full attention to everyone he met; no one could be indifferent to this man. Many know how much they owe him, but many more will remain unaware of what he has done for them.
Professor G. Debry