Conferences – Kongresse – Congrès

The Ciba Foundation: A third Colloquium on Ageing was held on the 25th-26th July, 1956, on the “Methodology of the Study of Ageing”. Professor R. E. Tunbridge was in the Chair and the following papers were presented for discussion:


The proceedings are to be published.

Prof. Tunbridge presided at a C. I. O. M. S. Symposium “On Connective Tissue” from the 20th to the 24th of July, 1956, in Hendon (London). The meeting united about 25 participants from 10 countries: biologists, physicists, specialists in protein chemistry and in leather chemistry, as well as in electron microscopy. The problems of the structure of collagen and elastin fibers were discussed. In ageing, characteristic changes in the structure of collagen and elastic fibers occur which lead to morphological and functional tissue changes in old age. Besides the aging of elastin and collagen fibers, also the chemical changes of the ground substance were much discussed. It is hoped shortly to publish the lectures in full.

Dutch Society for Gerontology held a joint meeting with the British Society for Research on Ageing on the 27th and 28th of July, 1956, in Amsterdam. The meeting was held in the Netherlands Cancer Institute. O. Mühlbock and P. J. Thung gave demonstrations of their own work in this institution. G. H. Bourne (London) and H. Sax (Leeds) each spoke on histochemical observations. T. Gillman (Durban) spoke on liver diseases and ageing in Africans, and J. Groen (Amsterdam) on presenile osteoporosis, and M. Landowne (Bethesda, USA) on blood pressure and heart rate changes with age.

The First Pan-American Congress of Gerontology

The First Pan-American Congress of Gerontology was held in Mexico City, September 15-22, 1956. In the preparations for the Congress North American and South American Committees of Collaboration participated. Almost all of the Latin American countries sent official delegates and representatives to the sessions in Mexico City. A large contingent from the United States was present.
The Inaugural Session of the First Pan-American Congress of Gerontology was held in the Palace of Fine Arts in the heart of Mexico City. Speaking at this inaugural session were the President of the Congress, Dr. Manuel Payno, the Representative of the President of the Republic of Mexico, Dr. Cortines, the Representative for South America, Señor Doctor Joaquin Quintero Quintero, Doctor Edmund V. Cowdry, Director of the Division of Cancer Research of Washington University and others. Representing the Republic of Chile, Dr. Houssay Fromiovich, spoke at the inaugural ceremony.

On the evening of September 15, a reception was held, the first of a series of most interesting social events.

Meetings were held in sections on the Campus of the University of Mexico at University City. At each of the sessions simultaneous translation was available. Official languages of the Congress were English and Spanish. Among distinguished European delegates and visitors to the Congress were Dr. Enrico Greppi, who is the President of the Fourth International Congress of Gerontology to be held in Merano, Italy in July, 1957; Dr. Torben Geel, President of the Gerontological Society of Denmark; and Lord Amulree, official delegate of Great Britain.

Among the important conclusions reached by the Congress are the following: There should be proposed for each country of the Western Hemisphere the foundation of an Institute of Gerontology, the functions of which would be especially to plan and carry out investigations designed to solve the problems of old age in regard to their medical-biological aspects and also their social-economic aspects. It should be recommended to all universities of the countries of the Western Hemisphere that they include in their programs teaching courses in Geriatrics and Gerontology for their graduate and undergraduate students. There should be established in all hospitals departments of Geriatrics where geriatric cases can receive special attention. Besides other social re-commandations: Efforts are recommended for the support of research in Geriatrics and in Gerontology both from private and from governmental sources.

The Round Table Session of the International Biological and Medical Research Committee was presided by Dr. Albert I. Lansing of the University of Pittsburgh, Chairman of this Committee. The Session in Mexico City was presided over by Dr. Warren Andrew of the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. At this session two major papers were given: “Trends in Gerontological Research” by Dr. Nathan Shock, Chief of the Section of Gerontology of the United States Public Health Service, and “Mechanism and Explanation in Gerontology” by Dr. James E. Birren, Chief of the Section on Aging of the National Institute of Mental Health.

Dr. Shock, in his paper, attempted to analyze the direction of gerontological research through a study of the formation of professional societies, the establishment of journals specifically in the field, and the publication of articles in the various divisions in the broad realm of studies on aging.

In 1950 there were only 3 journals dealing with aging, while at the present time there are at least 10 in the field.

Contrary to the opinions of some other authors, Dr. Shock feels that progress along all fronts in gerontological research is being made and that studies in basic biology are not lagging behind studies in other fields although the growth and expansion of such studies are not as rapid as the importance of the problems warrants. The basis for this conclusion was reached in an analysis of the articles published in the Journal of Gerontology between 1952 and 1956, where we find one
of the most striking changes in publication to be the gradual increase in the number of studies on basic biology, which has risen from a low of 9% in 1953 to a high of 26% in 1956.

Another criterion of progress of Gerontology is afforded by an analysis which Dr. Shock makes of projects being supported through the Division of Research Grants and Fellowships of the National Institutes of Health. Here the author admits that although there has been an increase in the support for studies on aging, its magnitude is not at all commensurate with the increase of studies which are orientated more toward clinical and clinical-pathological fields.

Dr. Shock mentions as areas in which increased interest has been shown in the past few years: the studies on enzyme changes in aging, the investigation of the minute structure of the cells at various ages, studies on cellular metabolism, the role of the extracellular environment in aging, and the relationship of parental age to longevity in various organisms. In the field of Physiology, progress has been made in specifying age differences in functional capacity of various organ systems. In the field of Psychology, longitudinal studies on changes in intellectual capacity have been of great importance. In the Social Science field, much attention has been devoted to problems of employment and retirement.

Dr. Birren, in his paper, states that gerontologists can become involved in arguments concerning which aspect of the field is more important or more basic than another. As in other fields, what is more basic depends upon what we are trying to explain. There are, in Gerontology, two general classes of phenomena to explain: 1. the longevity of organisms and 2. age changes in isolated systems during the life span. Both are legitimate areas of study.

Dr. Birren believes that one of the current artificial issues is the extent to which the social sciences are involved in gerontological research and that in the future there will be a breakdown in our distinction of what constitutes the social and the biological variables. The distinction may prove to be much less important than some other distinctions in a dimension about which we now know very little. Indeed, the interaction of biological and social variables may prove most important. As an example, he points out how important the social and biological concepts will be if parental age in man is shown to be of great importance in longevity, a subject on which evidence already is accumulating.

Dr. Birren believes that we should avoid putting gerontology into a small rigid box and only selecting explanations or mechanisms from a limited category. The “Gerontology” of ten years from now may be something with a quite different aspect from our present field. In addition to the two major papers, each member of the International Biological and Medical Research Committee who was present had an opportunity to present his own views concerning the present state of gerontological research and of international co-operation in this field of endeavor.

Warren Andrew *

The Institute of Biology of London organized a Symposium on the Biology of Ageing on the 27th and 28th of September, 1956. The lectures were held in the Anatomy Theatre of University College. Lecturers were:

Sir Cyril Hinshelwood PRS: Ageing in Bacteria.
0. U. S. Heath, Imperial College, London: Ageing in Higher Plants.
Alex Comfort, University College, London: Ageing of Animals.
G. H. Bourne, London Hospital, Medical School: Ageing of Mammalian Cells.
A. Heron, Liverpool: Psychological Changes with Age.

Other lectures were on social aspects of ageing.
The lectures were already printed and the proofs sent to members in advance, an extraordinary advantage for useful discussions.

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The Institute of Biology which represents a society of nearly 2000 members and has its own premises at 41 Queens Gate, London SW 7, besides organizing Symposia, edits its own Journal which now starts its 4th volume. Besides much information on the activities of biologists in Great Britain, it contains very good book reviews.

W. Löffler, Zürich: Über die Haushaltshilfe in Zürich.
A. L. Vischer, Basel: Das Schicksal der alten Chronischkranken.
Kathleen Proud, London (Council of Social Service): Care of the Aged in Great Britain.

News Items – Nachrichten – Nouvelles
The British Society for Research on Ageing “exists to advance the knowledge of the causes and processes of ageing by clinical and other observations on human beings, or by related experimental studies on living organisms”.
Information through the Honorary Secretary, Prof. G. H. Bourne, London Hospital, Medical College, Whitechapel, E 1.

* Experimental Research into Problems of Ageing
The trustees of the Ciba Foundation for the Promotion of International Co-operation in Medical and Chemical Research, 41 Portland Place, London, W 1, wishing to encourage well-conceived research relevant to basic problems of ageing, invite candidates to submit papers descriptive of work in the field for Awards for 1957.
Copies of the Regulations and Form of Application must be obtained from the undersigned before an entry is submitted, but in general candidates should note:
Not less than five awards, of an average value of £300 each, are available for 1957. The announcement of awards will be made in July, 1957.
Entries must be received by the undersigned not later than 31st January, 1957.
Entries will be judged by an international panel of distinguished scientists including: Prof. C. H. Best (Toronto), Dr. E. Braun-Menendez (Buenos Aires), Prof. E. J. Conway (Dublin), Prof. G.
W. Corner (New York), Prof. A. Haddow (London), Prof. V. R. Khanolkar (Bombay), Prof. R. Nicolaysen (Oslo), Dr. A. S. Parkes (London), Prof. F. Verzár (Basle), and Prof. F. G. Young (Cambridge). They will advise the Executive Council of the Foundation on their findings and will also have power to re-