On July 10, 1959, Professor Korenchevsky, the famous pioneer and fighter for research on ageing, died in London. Many of us had met him at the last meeting of the “British Society for Research on Ageing” in April 1959, where old antagonisms seemed to have disappeared and only friendship surrounded the honoured enthusiast whose mental activity was as lively as ever. Prof. Korenchevsky was born in Russia, in Lida, and took his medical training at the Tzarist Medical Academy at Petrograd, from whence so many famous physiologists have come. From here, he published his first paper (in Schmiedeberg’s Archiv für exper. Path. und Pharm. 49: 7, 1903) “On pharmacological actions on unicellular organisms”. – He then spent 4 years in the Russo-Japanese war as head of a military laboratory, and in 1908 worked in Metchnikoff’s laboratory in the Pasteur Institute. This fact had a lasting effect on his scientific interests. He liked to speak of Metchnikoff as his master, and it was from him that Korenchevsky became interested in the idea of intoxication as a cause of ageing. His other master was Pavlov, in whose laboratory he worked on problems of intestinal physiology in 1910 and 1911, when he became Professor of Experimental Pathology at the Military Medical Academy and later (1915) at the II. University of Petrograd. The revolutionary government removed him from his chair and he emigrated to England in 1920. Here he became a research worker at the Lister Institute for Preventive Medicine from 1920 till 1945. He published over 100 papers during this second period of his life, and his interest in gerontology increased with the years. He studied the influence of sexual, thyroid and adrenal cortical hormones on ageing, using mainly histological methods. He once expressed the opinion that every physiological function should be analyzed in young and in old animals and no limitations should be set to the working problems in gerontology. In his later work, he became interested in what he called “auto-intoxication”, i.e. changes in intermediate metabolism accelerating the ageing process. After his retirement in 1945, he founded the Nuffield Unit for Gerontological Research in Oxford. There he worked until 1953, when he dissolved the unit to Professor K. J. Franklin’s chair of Physiology (St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, London) and the Whittington Hospital, where a geriatric department existed and where he hoped to finish his research on human subjects. After the second world war, he became intensely interested in the idea of increasing world-wide interest in gerontological research. He travelled to almost every university on the continent, in Britain and in the United States to agitate for experimental research on ageing. He soon found that a central organization would be needed, and in 1950 he organized, together with Professor Brull of Liège, the First International Congress of Gerontology in Liège. This was followed one year later by the Second International Congress in St. Louis, USA, and by the foundation of the International Gerontological Association. Here also a special Research committee was elected, of
which he was the first chairman. His committee then invited experimental gerontologists to a
special conference in Liège in 1952, which was followed two years later by a similar conference
in Basel (1954) at which he gave a paper on “auto-intoxication” and animated several other
gerontologists to give papers connected with this subject.
His eagerness to found research centres for experimental gerontology became
sometimes almost an obsession, but it cannot be denied that he willingly gave all the
energy of his later years, even to his last days, to the ideal in which he so passionately
believed: that only through exact pure research can reliable knowledge be gained on
which to base our advances towards health in old age. It is for this devotion to his ideal
that he will be remembered and honoured by all gerontologists. F. V.
1 Journal of Gerontology/ 319 (1946); 2:31 (1948); 7: 291 (1952); 8: 415 (1953); ii: 261 (1956).