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Preface by Prof. Ag. H. H. Mollaret, Paris VII

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The extremely high incidence of mesenteric adenitis - higher than that of appendicitis - has long 'made it commonplace without awakening interest in it', as G. Laurence has written.

Regarded as a normal ganglionic reaction secondary to some lesion of the intestine, appendix etc. (although the theoretical primary lesion always escaped detection and was never found at operation), mesenteric adenitis viewed in this way posed no etiopathogenetic problem.

The clinical aspect, at the same time vague and indistinguishable from that of acute appendicitis, like the latter, led to surgical intervention and appendectomy, the spectacular results of which served to assuage even the most enquiring mind.

Of course, the extent of involvement of the ganglia was in striking contrast to the intact appendix and the absence of any other lesion to explain the lymphatic reaction, but the doctrine of adenitis preceding or even giving rise to the appendicitis was tacitly accepted.

From 1934 onwards the work of J. Reilly led surgeons to abandon their ideas of secondary mesenteric adenitis in favour of primary mesenteric
adenitis, essential and autonomous; the etiology and pathogenesis remained nonetheless mysterious. They were to remain so until microbiologists and anatomopathologists had available the material essential to their investigations - sufficiently large series of mesenteric ganglia to culture, examine and compare. The long and legitimate conflict between the proponents and opponents of adenectomy denied biologists for many years the biopsies which could alone provide an etiological explanation.

In 1953, W. Masshoff and W. Dölle, at the University of Tübingen, in an investigation covering 800 ganglia, discovered in 41 cases specific lesions. This led them to define the anatomical and clinical entity of abscess-forming reticular lymphadenitis, the etiology of which was revealed the following year by W. Knapp with the isolation of the Malassez-Vignal bacillus (Yersinia pseudotuberculosis) from the mesenteric ganglia of three children undergoing operation with a diagnosis of acute appendicitis and presenting specific agglutinins in their sera.

The interest of surgeons being aroused by these results, abundant material was channelled to microbiologists enabling them to discover further etiological factors of bacterial, viral or parasitic nature: salmonellae, Y. enterocolitica, adenovirus, toxoplasma. These various agents account at present for about a third of all cases observed. This means that the essential cause or causes of mesenteric adenitis are still evading us, and that close cooperation between the operating theatre and the laboratory must continue.

Dr. Tuchel’s work has been performed in this spirit. In 1963, Dr. V. Tuchel sent his first specimens to the Pasteur Institute. He then extended his collaboration to the Institut d’Hygiène in Geneva and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Bucarest, never departing from his methodical insistence on complete investigation of each case. In this way, he has amassed a particularly rich collection of clinical, anatomical, radiological, histological, microbiological and epidemiological material.

The present monograph is essentially the result of this long personal experience. It provides an indispensible review of an area which has suddenly expanded in the past few years. It will be read with advantage by physicians, surgeons, biologists and students.

Professeur agrégé H. H. Mollaret