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Editors:
HUGH O. BARBER and JOHN M. FREDRICKSON, Toronto

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Preface

The University of Toronto was host in August 1971 to the first session of the Barany Society held outside Europe. The meeting was lively, discussion of each presentation spirited and the Canadian summer weather characteristically pleasant.

Many contributions to the program represented important original work. It was felt that the papers were of such exceptional interest to the
vestibular world that they should be published together. The editors were successful in persuading nearly every speaker to allow his paper to be published by S. Karger in this volume.

We hope that this publication of the proceedings of the Toronto meeting of the Barany Society, 1971, will serve as a valued companion to those engaged in vestibular studies.

HUGH BARBER
JOHN FREDRICKSON

Recollections of R. Bárány

G. F. DOHLMAN

The image of personalities, of new creative ideas and of their impact on contemporary life rapidly fade away, and the historic heritage left to us is not always recognized in the bustling strain of scientific life. Exempli gratia: to some otologists Bárány’s name may nowadays merely be a trade name for a rotating chair or the Bárány noise box.

Therefore, being the only survivor of those who worked with Bárány at the clinic in Uppsala between 1920 and 1930, it might be appropriate on this occasion to recall a few glimpses of the man behind the name of this society and his story.

Bárány started his career at the ear clinic in Vienna around the turn of the century. At that time Vienna was the medical center for the whole Austrian empire and its reputation attracted patients and otologists from Europe and the Orient, as well as the whole American continent. In 1906, Bárány had published a comprehensive study of the reactions of patients and normal people to rotational and caloric stimulations of the semicircular canals. The results and ideas which Bárány presented in this and other papers stimulated a vivid research in the vestibular field over the next few years. When World War I came Bárány was stationed in the fortress of Przemysl where he, together with a surgeon, Dr. Ernst Jeger, made valuable contributions to the now totally accepted closed treatment of head wounds on the battlefield. But Przemysl soon fell to the Russians and the two surgeons were transported to a prisoner-of-war camp in Russian Central Asia close to the Afghan border. Dr. Jeger, however, was transferred to an unknown destination in Siberia and was never heard from again. Bárány

1 OCIEM Research Paper No. 888.
remained in the small town called Merv where life dragged along at a slow pace.

At that time, disabled invalids were being returned to their homeland. BÁRÁNY had a stiff leg and this had prompted the selecting committee to suggest his repatriation as a war invalid. However, with his scientific sense of objectivity, BÁRÁNY told the committee that his stiff leg was due to a tuberculous gonitis in early childhood. However, the final decision was that he was a war invalid and, thus, should be repatriated.

When the invalid convoy arrived in the Russian capital of St. Petersburg, BÁRÁNY was greeted by a message from the Swedish ambassador announcing that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for his work on the function of the vestibular apparatus and should leave the convoy for Stockholm.

Prof. ROBERT BÁRÁNY in Merano, 1920.

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to accept the award. It was through the foresightedness and organizing capacity of Prof. GUNNAR HOLMGREN in Stockholm that BÁRÁNY was awarded this prize. Furthermore, he now was given refuge in Sweden and made Extraordinary Professor in Uppsala.

The difficulties were great in establishing the first ENT clinic in this small university town during the time of World War I. The result was that the clinic was set up in an old wooden building, formerly a public bath-house. The out-patient office was the former ticket office for the bath-house with the 'pigeon-hole' still in the wall. Such were the surroundings in which the Nobel Prize winner was going to work. He started with enthusiasm and an abundance of ideas. His interests were directed toward the central connections of the vestibular system. He discovered and described positional nystagmus. He also studied optokinetic nystagmus and the mechanism of nystagmus movements. Furthermore, BÁRÁNY investigated deviations of limbs and trunk due to vestibular stimulation and, as far as I remember, he experimented with fenestration operations for otosclerosis before they were tried later by HOLMGREN, SOURDILLE and others. Some of these observations might have been noticed in physiologic studies earlier published by others. They had, however, aroused little attention when they were new and had usually passed unnoticed in scientific discussion. These personal observations made by BÁRÁNY were, therefore, new to him and original in their interpretation. They became valuable when his physiological observations were interpreted in physical terms and adapted for the use in clinical diagnostic work. He moulded the tools which have been developed to instruments.
for daily use in every otologic clinic and have been perfected for scientific use in sophisticated modern investigations.

When I visited BÁRÁNY’s home town of Vienna in the 1920s, where the competition at the clinics was intense and friends and foes were many, one disenchanted colleague asked me if BÁRÁNY’s caloric test really was worth a Nobel Prize - ‘it was actually not much more than a syringe of cold water in the ear canal’. When we now consider that every patient with any complaint of defective balance, head injuries or severe ear diseases cannot be considered properly investigated unless several of BÁRÁNY’s methods and ways of thinking have been taken into account and, further, considering the whole wealth of scientific vestibular research which has flourished from BÁRÁNY’s classical work up to the present time, I believe that this gives us the answer to the question.

BÁRÁNY was personally a timid and friendly man, and I remember gratefully many expressions of his friendship. He was prolific in creating new and challenging ideas. As one colleague expressed it: ‘His contributions are like a lottery with a few big prizes but also many blanks.’ However, he was a sufficiently great personality to fight for what he believed to be right and to admit to having been wrong when he recognized his error.

I am sure that the society which bears his name will always honor this same spirit. Finally, I would like to summarize the lesson I believe I am entitled to draw from the life and work of ROBERT BÁRÁNY, as it was during the ten years in which I had the privilege to work with him. In a few simple words, this experience could be expressed as a warning which is more appropriate nowadays than ever before, that the value of scientific research never can be measured by its quantity. The contribution we might be able to make to evolution and human progress can only be the result of well founded ideas pursued with audacity, sincerity and dedication.

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