

## *Editorials*

### THE RENAISSANCE OF GENERAL PRACTICE IN EUROPE

One of the sequels to the foundation of our College upon which its members can look with particular pride is the establishment of so many sister colleges and equivalent organizations throughout the world. It is fascinating to watch their development. The joint meeting of the Canadian and British Medical Associations in July 1959 brought together many members of the Canadian College of General Practice and of our College, and the exchanges of opinion which were then made were interesting and useful to both. Though we found that each had stressed particularly some objective more than another, in general all our aims seemed to be the same.

We are kept aware of the progress of the College in Australia by frequent visits from distinguished members of their Council, and though conditions of practice may seem quite different there, again the aims of both are identical. Those who founded the Dutch College first came to England to study our methods and their College has developed along lines similar to ours. The American Academy of General Practice, senior to ourselves, is passing through a period when its problems also are much the same as those that we find most hard to solve. It is, therefore, with particular pleasure that we report the foundation last year of an International College of General Practice in Vienna, mostly through the efforts of Dr Robert N. Braun who was elected president. Dr Braun is known to some of us as an enthusiastic worker for the improvement of general practice in Austria. Several years ago he visited members of the research committee to study the methods employed by the College in this country. It seems to us only right and proper that the first congress of the new College was held in the second medical clinic of the University which is the successor of the New Vienna School whither the teaching of Skoda, Rokitanski and Hebra drew so many from all parts of the world during the last half of the nineteenth century. This inaugural congress attracted representatives from both the

German Federal and Democratic Republics, from Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Spain, and was attended by four members of the American Academy of General Practice. Messages of congratulations and best wishes were received from our College, the College of General Practice of Canada and the Société de Médecine de Paris. The international flavour of the meeting was worthy of the great reputation of the postgraduate school of old-time Vienna; we hope that this is a sign of a revival of its ancient glories. The Art knows no frontiers, and the fellowship of general practice may add its moiety towards the harmony of nations.

This new College got off to a good start. Its aims were the subject of much discussion from which they emerged, by and large, similar to those of the English-speaking bodies. The Teutonic craving for tidiness is reflected in some of its statements. It considers general practice as a special scientific field and will strive to raise it to the maximum standard by exact scientific methods and keep it at the highest degree of perfection by constant scientific research. Thus it hopes to consolidate the social position of the general practitioner within the medical profession and complete the "renaissance" of general practice. In research, it hopes to fill the scientific vacuum that exists in Europe regarding the specific problems of general practice. It aims to bring together and enlist the co-operation of all fully and legally qualified medical practitioners with a genuine interest in the field of research, and to co-ordinate their efforts with those of other research bodies.

The College does not regard itself as a group of heretics fighting an existing social order. It is not in opposition to other specialties. It recognizes specialist medical activity as necessary and indispensable. However, it wishes to plough its own field, because it believes that nobody is better able to do this than the general practitioner himself. It believes that the contribution of the general practitioner to scientific research is possible and necessary.

It was stressed at the congress that the meeting was not an ordinary postgraduate course, but a convention where members of the College could present the results of their own original research. From comment it would appear that a congress of this sort in Europe might take some getting used to, in that general practitioners were not there to listen only to scientific papers by others, but to present the results of research done by themselves. Doctor Gartner, a general practitioner from Hainewalde in Saxony, in a paper entitled "The Special Foundations of Medical Knowledge as Applied in General Practice" had some wise things to say. He pointed out that current clinical and hospital terminology was of little use in average general practice. He appealed for cleaner diagnostic thinking and terminology as the first objective of the college. He called the general practitioner "the specialist of the first consultation". This task he said could not be assumed by any specialist

of other fields, nor even as a member of a team. "The medical specialist as a family doctor is an aberration from common sense".

Some would argue that the concept of the general practitioner as a specialist in general practice is a contradiction of terms. We are all specialists, therefore there is nothing special about us. There are those we can think of whom we could class as consultants in general practice; doctors who, because of their experience and the breadth of their understanding, are sought after by others for advice, by teaching schools for their capacity to instruct, and by trainees who wish to study and follow their example. This is, however, by the way. We most sincerely congratulate our colleagues in central Europe for the initiative they have taken and extend to them our good wishes for the future.

The success of the first meeting and its unique character was appreciated by all present. Notice has now been received of a second congress to be held in Salzburg from the 23rd to the 25th September at which there will be arrangements for simultaneous translations into English and German. Amongst the speakers will be Dr Richard Scott of Edinburgh and Dr Roth of New York.

Further information will be found on page 362. Members who plan to take their holiday in Europe this autumn may well find it worth their while to be in Salzburg at that time. They will not be disappointed by their reception. Arrangements have been made for tours and entertainment besides a full two days of congress.

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## THE PREVENTION OF BREAK-UP OF FAMILIES

In 1955 a joint committee was set up by the Bristol Division of the British Medical Association and the Bristol Local Medical Committee with the following terms of reference: "In regard to the prevention of the break-up of families . . . that consultation should take place . . . and that policy in regard to an approach to the local authority be agreed". The joint committee paid particular attention, in all its deliberations, to the place which the general practitioner might take. Although the approach was local, the committee felt (quite rightly) that the material produced deserved wide publication.\*

It is not possible to detail here the committee's findings and recom-

\*The report is available on duplicated sheets from the Bristol Local Medical Committee, 7 The Dell, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, for 5s. 6d. post free.