

The Conflict of Theories

The lecturer thought there was no valid evidence that malignancy in general was produced by a virus or viruses entering the body from outside. Experimental facts appeared to exclude that possibility. Malignant growths could be set up by carcinogenic agents so regularly, not only when applied externally but when introduced into the tissues, that the access of a virus from without on each occasion seemed impossible. The conclusion appeared to be inevitable that if a virus was necessary for malignancy it must be present within the normal tissues in the interior of the body and act only when proliferation had been previously set up by carcinogenic agents or in some other way. It was a hypothesis on which nothing definite could be said. No one could prove or disprove the presence of a virus in normal tissues ready to produce malignancy when occasion offered.

Both theories—that malignancy was the result of a change in the mechanism of the cell, or that it was due to the presence of a virus—had their strong supporters, but a decision was not to be arrived at by the votes of "authorities." On either view there seemed to be a failure on the part of nature. In the one case normal proliferative processes evolved for defence and repair passed into malignancy, in the other the animal body had somehow come to harbour a virus which, given opportunity, led to its destruction.

"The fact that the problem as to the essential nature of malignancy has not been solved has unjustifiably obscured what has actually been achieved. That malignancy may supervene on cellular proliferation brought about in various ways, by irritants, cell stimuli, and hormones, and as a result of compensatory hyperplasia; that in most cases a long period elapses between the onset of proliferation and malignancy; that in the case of chemical substances the tendency to institute malignancy is in certain instances related to molecular structure; that inherited susceptibility plays an important part, especially in certain organs; that the development of malignancy depends in some cases upon congenital abnormalities; and that these factors may be combined in different ways—these are facts which have been completely established. Knowledge of causes brings with it the possible means of prevention, and has already been effective."

Sir Robert Muir concluded on a note of hopefulness. Fresh stimulus had been supplied by recent advances. Much was being learned from a close co-operation between clinical observers and pathologists. Workers in any one field naturally pushed the implication of their results to the full, but all results must be co-ordinated and tested in relation to the fundamental questions. The picture he had tried to present had come chiefly from researches in the last twenty-five years. He had little doubt that in the next quarter of a century it would be greatly changed, and that what he had brought forward in his lecture would be only a record of what had been.

BRITISH EMPIRE CANCER CAMPAIGN

At the fifty-eighth quarterly meeting of the Grand Council of the British Empire Cancer Campaign, held at 12, Grosvenor Crescent, London, on April 6th, a communication was received intimating that His Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to become Patron of the Campaign.

A letter was read from the Dowager Marchioness of Reading accepting the invitation of membership of Grand Council, and invitations to become members were extended to: Lady Barrett, C.H., M.D., M.S. (of the Royal Free Hospital and the Marie Curie Hospital), Sir David Wilkie, Ch.M., F.R.C.S. (a member of the Medical Research Council and professor of surgery, Edinburgh University), Mr. W. Heathcote Williams (to represent the Lancashire, Cheshire, and North Wales council of the Campaign), and Sir James Parr (High Commissioner for New Zealand, to represent the New Zealand Branch).

The following grants, amounting to £5,530 and making a total to date of £30,990 for the year 1936, were approved:

£1,100 to the Radium Beam Therapy Research; £1,750 (in addition to the grant of £1,850 already made for the year 1936) to the Mount Vernon Hospital; £500 (in addition to the grant of £600 already made for the year 1936) to the Marie Curie Hospital; £100 and £80 to Dr. C. R. Amies, at the Lister Institute, and P. R. Peacock of Glasgow respectively for the purchase of special types of centrifuges; £1,000 to the Manchester Committee on Cancer to cover the cost for two years of investigations to ascertain whether there is any connexion between the use of heavy oils in motor vehicles and the apparent increase in the incidence of cancer of the upper air passages and the lung; £1,000 to the North of England branch of the Campaign to meet the cost for the second year of the "short-wave" investigations being carried out at Newcastle, on behalf of the Campaign, under the direction of Professor W. E. Curtis and Dr. F. Dickens. In this connexion Grand Council expressed its appreciation of the technical assistance afforded the workers by the technical staff of the Marconi Company.

Approval was given to requests for affiliation to the Campaign from the British Columbia Cancer Foundation at Vancouver, and from the Cancer Committee of the Department of Health of Ontario at Toronto. Notification was received that the Royal Society and the Medical Research Council had nominated Professor Matthew Stewart, F.R.C.P., of Leeds University (a member of the Medical Research Council), to succeed Professor R. T. Leiper as one of their five nominees on the Scientific Advisory Committee.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MEDICAL HYDROLOGY

The annual meeting of the International Society of Medical Hydrology, which is open to non-members on payment of a fee of £1, is to be held this year in Austria, from October 10th to 16th.

The opening ceremonies and the first of the two medical discussions will take place in Innsbruck, by kind invitation of the university and of the municipality; the party will then proceed to Badgastein, visiting Hofgastein also, and from there to Salzburg. An optional one-day motor tour of the Salzkammergut follows the meeting, and there will also be optional excursions to Vienna and Budapest, beginning on October 17th.

The two principal subjects for consideration are: "The Spa Treatment of Disorders of Old Age," to be introduced by Sir Humphry Rolleston, followed by Professor Pap (Budapest) and Dr. J. Schneyer (Badgastein); and "Radio-activity in Medicinal Waters," studied in its physical, physiological, and clinical aspects, by Dr. Penkava (Prague), Dr. Gerke (Badgastein), and Drs. Pierret and Stieffel (La Bourboule and Plombières). Supplementary papers may be offered, and there will also be an open session for communications on any hydrological subject.

A party will be formed to travel from London on October 9th. The anticipated costs of participation are, if a party of fifteen can be formed, £10 to £11 return fare to Innsbruck and back from Salzburg, plus the "inclusive charge" of 180 Austrian schillings (about £7 at the present rate of exchange) for travelling, accommodation, board, etc., after arrival at Innsbruck. Fuller particulars may be obtained from the General Secretary, International Society of Medical Hydrology, 109, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

We are asked to announce that the Savill Prize, value £15, which is offered biennially by the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases, will be awarded this year. Candidates, who should be post-graduate students, are required to write a thesis on a neurological subject of their choice, which subject must be submitted for approval not later than May 31st; they must also have attended the practice of the hospital on at least ten occasions. Theses must be received not later than November 30th, and are accepted only on the condition that they will not be published except with the written consent of the examiners. Further particulars may be obtained from the secretary of the hospital, 73, Welbeck Street, W.1.