

ETIOLOGY OF ULCERATIVE COLITIS

SIR,—In the article by Dr. Arthur F. Hurst, which appeared in your issue of April 25th, the following sentence appears: "Several American physicians have told me that they have been quite unable to confirm Bargen's enthusiastic reports about vaccination with his organism, which has not been accepted by any other American workers as the cause of ulcerative colitis." I would like to point out that the final clause gives scarcely an accurate impression. The enclosed list of articles is only a portion of a number that have appeared, in which our work has been confirmed.—I am, etc.,

J. A. BARGEN.

Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, May 22nd.

* * The following is the list of references sent by Dr. Bargen:

1. Soper, H. W.: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis, *Ann. Int. Med.*, November, 1927, i, No. 5, 313.
2. Fradkin, W., and Gray, I.: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis (Report of Vaccine Therapy), *Journ. Amer. Med. Assoc.*, 1930, lxxxiv, 849.
3. Streicher, M. H., and Kaplan, B.: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis, *ibid.*, January 4th, 1930, xciv, 10.
4. Lynch, Jerome: Discussion, *Trans. Amer. Gast. Assoc.*, May 4th and 5th, 1930.
5. Portis, S.: Diagnosis and Treatment of Non-specific Ulcerative Colitis, *Illinois Med. Journ.*, February, 1927, li, 111.
6. Rouse, M. O.: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis, *Texas State Journ. of Med.*, January, 1931, xxvi, 649.
7. Kracke, R. R.: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis: Etiology, *Southern Med. Journ.*, September, 1930, xxiii, No. 9, 785.
8. Muniz, J. R.: La Endoscopia Recto-colica en la Disenteria Amebiana Cronica, *Vida Nueva*, August 15th, 1929.
9. Chisholm, A. J.: Symptomatology and Treatment in Chronic Ulcerative Colitis, *Colorado Med. Journ.*, January, 1928, xxv, 28.
10. Horgan, Edmund, and Horgan, Joseph: Chronic Ulcerative Colitis: Results of Treatment with Vaccine in Five Cases, *Journ. Amer. Med. Assoc.*, July, 1929, xciii, 263.

Obituary

A. T. MACCONKEY, M.B., B.Ch., D.P.H.

Late Bacteriologist in Charge, Serum Department, Lister Institute

The death of Dr. Alfred T. MacConkey, on May 17th, at the age of 70, recalls to bacteriologists his early researches connected with the bacteriology of sewage and water supplies. It was his work for the Royal Commission on Sewage Disposal which led him to devise the culture media known by his name. The most distinctive feature of the liquid and solid MacConkey media was the use of bile salts in order to inhibit the growth of bacteria not derived from the intestine, and so to recognize those of faecal origin. He also incorporated glucose or lactose with the bile salt in the nutritive media. Later the commonly used "MacConkey agar" always contained not glucose, but lactose and neutral red, so that not only were the characteristic intestinal bacteria given an advantage over other forms, but also colonies of various pathogenic bacteria in faeces which did not ferment lactose were made conspicuous and differentiated from the non-pathogenic *B. coli*. In spite of the many other prescriptions for media intended to fulfil the same purpose, "MacConkey agar" is still used in this country and in other parts of the world in preference to its many rivals, especially by British workers, on account of its simplicity and effectiveness. When MacConkey began to work for the Royal Commission in 1899 the knowledge of the great variety of bacteria present in faeces and their differentiation from others commonly found in water was very elementary. The task in this field of work must have appeared overwhelming. MacConkey became intensely interested in the important problems involved, and by his enthusiastic and persistent work added considerably to our knowledge of the most useful means of distinguishing the bacteria, generically called *B. coli*, which were of recent intestinal

origin from others associated with cultivated and uncultivated soils, and he helped to investigate the distribution in nature of the various somewhat similar bacteria, especially *B. lactis aerogenes*. Between 1900 and 1909 he published several papers on aspects of the same subject.

Alfred Theodore MacConkey began his medical studies at Cambridge, where he took an honours degree in Natural Science. After subsequent work at Guy's Hospital he graduated M.B., B.Ch. in 1889, and then served as house-surgeon at that hospital. He was in practice for some years at Beckenham, but illness following influenza determined his retirement from practice and devotion to bacteriology. In 1901 he joined the staff of the Lister Institute at Chelsea, and very soon was transferred to the serum department of the Institute at Elstree. In 1906, when Dr. George Dean retired, Dr. MacConkey succeeded him as bacteriologist in charge of the serum department, and thenceforward his interests lay in the technique of preparing serums. He devoted himself with characteristic attention to detail to the production of toxins and other antigens, the care and inoculation of the animals, and the management of the laboratories and farm. He took great personal interest in the individual horses, showing much kindly feeling for them. His work in producing therapeutic and prophylactic serums he looked on as a form of public service. The enthusiasm with which he rapidly enlarged the stables and laboratory accommodation during the war in order to make greatly increased supplies of serum for the Expeditionary Forces was for him an expression of his desire to be of use to the country. He was especially interested in antitetanic serum, and published several papers on its value and in exposition of his belief that it should be used more actively as a therapeutic agent. He was always ready to give help and the benefit of his experience to visitors from other serum institutes and to those starting to make medicinal serums in various parts of the Empire. His kindly advice, and hints warning beginners against avoidable difficulties, must have proved of great value to many who sought his assistance.

Dr. and Mrs. MacConkey delighted to entertain visitors from all over the world and to display his remarkably successful garden, in which he spent so much of his leisure. After 1926, when he retired from his post at Elstree, he lived at Blindley Heath in Surrey, and continued to gratify his love for the culture of flowers, especially roses.

J. A. A.

There recently died in a Dublin hospital Daniel Crowley, formerly a student of Queen's College, Cork, who graduated M.D. in 1888 at the old Queen's University. Until quite lately he carried on a large practice in the town of Loughrea and the surrounding part of County Galway, and was much esteemed. He recently resigned the coronership of the County Galway (Southern Division), and at that time he was probably the last survivor of those who had been elected to the office by vote of all the electors on the parliamentary franchise of the county; it speaks much for the charm of his personality and character that he should have been elected by popular vote in a county where clannishness was such a dominant factor. Dr. Crowley is greatly regretted by his colleagues, who could always rely on his helpful kindness and consideration. They offer their sympathy to his widow and son, Albert Crowley, who is also a member of the medical profession.

J. M.

The following well-known foreign medical men have recently died: Dr. JEAN DUMONT, secretary of the *Presse Médicale*, aged 63; Professor AXEL HOLST, the eminent bacteriologist and hygienist of Oslo, aged 71; and Dr. J. WAGENHAUSER, formerly professor of otology at Tübingen, aged 81.