

## THE HISTORY OF THE FRENCH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

The history of the French Medical Association, now known as the *Confédération des Syndicats Médicaux Français*, covers nearly a century. An account of its vicissitudes and achievements has been given in a recent issue of *La Presse Médicale* (February 8th) by Dr. F. Jayle, whose enterprise and courage have done much to make the *Confédération* what it is to-day. In the course of several visits to England he has studied both the machinery and the spirit of the British Medical Association, learning much about it through his personal contacts with its leaders. As he writes: "The memory of the British Medical Association inspired me, and the idea of a doctors' headquarters was never to fade from my mind." In spite of his many clinical activities as an obstetrician and "Chef de Clinique," Dr. Jayle found time to act as the treasurer of the French Medical Association in 1924; at the same time he was the secretary-general of the "Syndicat des Médecins de la Seine," since then incorporated in the *Confédération*. He also played a leading part in the move of the *Confédération* to its new quarters, of which more anon.

### The Medical Congress of 1845

The beginnings of the present *Confédération* may be said to date from November 1st, 1845, when a medical congress, organized by a permanent commission of fifteen members representing various interests, was held in the *Hôtel de Ville*. Of the members of this congress, 3,400 were doctors, 900 were pharmacists, and 260 were veterinary surgeons. Serres of the *Institut de France* presided and enjoyed the support of de Salvandy, Minister of Public Instruction. Among the resolutions adopted was the creation of a medical college in each *arrondissement* of Paris, to include all the doctors domiciled therein. Each local medical college was to elect every year a medical council, whose functions would consist in maintaining the rights of the medical profession and of its members, as well as professional dignity. This council was to have powers to pronounce: (1) an admonition, (2) a reprimand, (3) a censure, (4) temporary dismissal from the college rolls, and (5) absolute dismissal.

The builders of this new medical constitution fitted into its structure certain principles for which the French medical profession has had to wait many a year. They conceived that Order of Doctors which, similar to the Order of Barristers, should have disciplinary powers over every member of the medical profession. Only a year or two ago definite proposals were made for the creation of such an Order. The congress of 1845 was so representative that all medical activities could be said to be represented, from those of the exalted members of the *Institut de France* to those of the humblest general practitioner. The prospects of the labours of this congress being fruitful seemed excellent. A permanent commission of fifteen members was appointed to ensure the realization of the resolutions voted. Collaboration with the public authorities was established, and matters were proceeding satisfactorily when the revolution of 1848 broke out, and the permanent commission saw all its work undone.

### "Les Syndicats Médicaux"

It was not until 1880 that the ideas of the medical congress of 1845 were revived and the union of doctors in a mutually defensive confederation was again mooted, this time on a less ambitious scale. On March 4th, 1881, the first medical "syndicat" came into being. Its example was soon followed in a dozen other quarters, and on December 24th of the same year a "Commission Générale des Syndicats Médicaux" was created. By the end of 1884 there were as many as seventy-four different "syndicats," none of which had any legal status.

The position now began to be critical. Trade unionism was in the air, and for certain vocations, such as that of medicine, it was a delicate question whether the community would be best served by their inclusion in, or exclusion from, the alleged benefits of a trade union. On March 21st, 1884, Parliament voted the law dealing with trade unions ("Syndicats Professionnels"). The Union des Syndicats Médicaux de France was constituted in November of the same year, but it was doomed to an early death. For in the following month a legal ruling

denied doctors the right to benefit from the law of March, 1884. This ruling was confirmed by the Court of Appeal in 1885. The officers of the law toned down the rigours of these legal decisions by the complacency with which they unofficially tolerated the medical "syndicats," and in due course means were found for regularizing a situation not logically tenable. Thanks to the juridical adroitness of the legal representatives of the medical profession, a clause was inserted in the law of November 30th, 1892, giving doctors the right to benefit from the law of 1884, "to defend their personal interests in relation to all save the State, the



New headquarters in Paris of the *Confédération des Syndicats Médicaux Français*.

Departments, and the Communes."

The legal position, slightly cramped, was now assured, and the medical "syndicats" proceeded to multiply and prosper. From 1892 to 1920 the main problem for the French medical profession was unity and centralization, for there was more than one association of "syndicats." Unity was also threatened when the national health insurance scheme became law in 1925. The situation was obscure for a few years, but, as Dr. Jayle remarks, "common sense is never lost sight of in France," and on December 6th, 1928, the Union des Syndicats Médicaux de France was reconstituted and given the title of *Confédération des Syndicats Médicaux Français*, whose membership in 1935 was more than 19,000.

With its growing membership and activities the *Confédération* has for some years felt its old quarters to be too small, and on December 15th, 1935, the decision was taken to move into new ones. They are situated at the angle formed by Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg with the Rue de Grenelle, the address being 58bis-60, Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg. The building, of which, by the courtesy of Dr. Jayle and the editor of *La Presse Médicale*, we reproduce a photograph, belongs to two different dates, having been constructed by the Duc de Noailles in 1863, and added to in 1880. Its cost—only three million francs—reflects the depreciation in Parisian house property of a certain character since the world crisis. The *Confédération* is therefore to be congratulated on the soundness of its investment and on the dignity of its new headquarters.