

Report on the Second International Pharmacological Meeting, Prague

August 20-23, 1963

The Second International Pharmacological Meeting, organized by the Section on Pharmacology of the International Union of Physiological Sciences (SEPHAR), held its second session in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in collaboration with the Charles University, Prague, from August 20-23, 1963. It will be recalled that the first meeting was held in Stockholm, Sweden, in August, 1961. The Prague Meeting was held under the distinguished patronage of the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Mr Antonin Novatny and several government dignitaries such as the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Health, Minister of Education and Culture, President of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Rector of the Charles University, President of the Czechoslovak Medical Society, and the Mayor of the City of Prague actively participated. The honorary chairmen were: Professor Carl F. Schmidt, President, SEPHAR, IUPS, and Professor B. Uvnas, President of the First International Pharmacological Meeting, Stockholm, 1961. The chairman of the Prague Meeting was Professor Helena Raskova, Professor of Pharmacology, Charles University and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

The number of active participants was about 1900 and local and Sessional associate members numbered about another 600 persons from 51 different countries. The programme of the Meeting included 990 scientific papers and short communications, scientific films and demonstrations, etc, which were held in 17 Lecture Halls in adjoining buildings of the University and other associated technical institutions. Eleven Symposia and semi-private Round-Table discussions were arranged on subjects such as (1) Pharmacology of Conditioning, Learning and Retention; (2) Biochemical and Neurophysiological Correlation of Centrally Acting Drugs; (3) Cholinergic and Adrenergic Transmission; (4) Drugs and Enzymes; (5) Cardiac Functions; (6) Smooth Muscle Pharmacology; (7) Pharmacology of Oriental Plants; (8) Evaluation of New Drugs in Man; (9) Recent Advances in the Pharmacology of Toxins; (10) Oxytocin, Vasopressin and their Structural Analogues; and (11) and (12) Respiratory Pharmacology Sessions, I and II. Considerable enthusiasm was evinced by the delegates and other visitors in these Symposia where time-limit, allotted for presentation of papers and discussion thereon,

was strictly followed. Among the notable participants at the Meeting were two Noble Prize winners; Professor C. Heymans and Professor D. Bovet. A large contingent of American, British and Continental pharmacologists were present. From India, only three persons (Dr. B. Mukerji, Dr. R. B. Arora and Dr. B. K. Bhattacharya) attended. Dr. Mukerji served as a member of the International Organizing Committee and also as Co-chairman of the "Symposium on the Pharmacology of Oriental Plants". Doctors Arora, Bhattacharya and Mukerji served also as Chairmen of Sessional Meetings on "Pharmacology of Heart Fibrillation", "Tissue Extracts and Compounds of Natural Origin" and "Tuberculostatic and Antiparasital Drugs" respectively.

The opening Ceremony of the Pharmacology Meeting was a memorable function in one of the finest and richly decorated halls of Eighteenth Century Prague (renovated after the Second World War), known as the Smetana Hall (Namesti Republiky). Immediately after the Inaugural function which lasted for an hour (9 : 00 a. m.-10 : 00 a. m.), a Plenary Scientific Session was held in the same place, where five distinguished pharmacologists presented their special studies in the form of short reviews indicating the highlights of their specific contributions in the respective fields : (a) Professor J. H. Burn, Oxford the Sympathetic Postganglionic Fiber; (b) Professor C. Heymans, Ghent-Chemoreflexes in Physiology and Pharmacology ; (c) Professor H. Kumagai, Tokyo - Role of Presynaptic Membrane in the Physiology and Pharmacology of Neuromuscular Transmission; (d) Professor C. I. Schmidt, U. S. A.-Ephedrine after Forty years ; (e) Professor E. E. Zakusov, Moscow-Pharmacology of Coronary Circulation. From Tuesday afternoon (August 20), Scientific Sessions and Symposia were held simultaneously in different Lecture Halls for which very satisfactory arrangements were made by the Local organizers at Prague. Recordings on the tape were made of the various "discussions" which will be finally edited and printed. Speakers were permitted to take the floor only after they submitted their full manuscripts to the local sectional secretaries. In this way, it is expected that the proceedings of the Prague Pharmacological Meeting will be published within six months from September, 1963 when print-ready manuscripts will be submitted by the organizers to the Pergamon Press, Oxford, who have undertaken the publication of the proceedings of the Prague Meeting as they did with the proceedings of the First Stockholm Meeting of 1961.

It is difficult in a short report of this kind to outline all the important areas of modern pharmacology covered at this very important gathering of pharmacologists. Suffice it to say that the intellectual feast was superb and created an impression that the subject is really making a bid for international recognition as one of the fast growing scientific disciplines of the late

Twentieth Century, along with Biochemistry and Biophysics. The impact of Pharmacology is now being felt in many areas of medical and non-medical teaching, in industries, in agriculture, animal husbandry, pharmacy, technology, biology, antibiotics, chemotherapy, and in many other fields. The newer developments in Neuropharmacology and Neuropsychopharmacology are opening up new fields of borderline scientific disciplines with promise of further future growth in these relative fields. The area of reproductive physiology and anti fertility drugs in population control is another challenging area of work with good promise of a breakthrough in the near future. The many studies reported on toxicology and drug metabolism augur well for the future of "Biochemical Pharmacology" which is emerging as a virile branch of traditional pharmacology of the late Nineteenth Century and the earlier Twentieth Century. Cellular Pharmacology, as distinguished from Systemic and Organ Pharmacology of the past generation, is another significant development of present day pharmacology and this holds future promise of further therapeutic achievement in the elaboration of anti-viral and anti-neoplastic drugs. The understanding of the action of drugs, in a far better way than was possible even ten years ago, makes modern pharmacology a very close and near relative of Enzymology and Cellular Biochemistry. The importance of "Human Pharmacology" was particularly well pinpointed at the Prague Meeting and two interesting seminars and group discussions were held outlining the methodology of new drug evaluation in man, even though satisfactory screening procedures might have been meticulously followed in several species of laboratory experimental animals. Emphasis was laid by several prominent pharmacology professors on the need for fuller appreciation of the fact that pharmacology is primarily a medical discipline and must not get divorced from the "clinical" approach, though much of the inspiration in modern pharmacology is being drawn from its sister disciplines of physiology and biochemistry. In the appraisal of toxicity of new medications, it is considered essential now to have data not only on healthy human patients but also on pregnant women to avoid teratogenic complications of the type reported in recent years from the use of Thalidomide.

In addition to the rich and informative "Scientific Sessions" and "Symposia" organized for the delegates, the Prague Local Committee of the Pharmacology Congress did not forget the social and cultural aspect of such a large international gathering. On the first day of the Congress (Monday, 20th of August), an informal Beer Party was held at the ancient Brewery of Flek, founded in the Fifteenth Century. In the old world atmosphere of wooden beams and rafters and decorated high ceilings dimly lit with colored lanterns, an opportunity was given to the delegates from various nations to

understand each other and to exchange ideas and views on a number of subjects, not necessarily academic and of pharmacological importance. A spirit of comradeship and fellow feeling was created in this gathering which will go a long way in promoting better international understanding through "Science", not easily attainable through 'politics'. On Tuesday afternoon, a sight-seeing tour of all Congress delegates in and around the beautiful city of Prague was arranged. The delegates enjoyed the verdant scenery and the neatly poised houses against the hills and on the banks of the crystal clear, flowing waters of the 'Votava' river on both sides of which the city of Prague is located. An ancient bridge with statues poised on both sides of the railings and a decorative archway entrance reminded one of the days of the Roman Catholic Knights-in-arms, who must have crossed this bridge on many occasions in the colourful and chivalrous days when Prague served as the central European gateway for eastern European nations proceeding to the Holy Wars in Palestine. On Tuesday evening (23rd of August) a *free Concert* was offered to all participants and those fond of classical music had a real feeling of satisfaction at the high standard of music provided and the way the conductor displayed his baton movements. The closing "grand finale" of the Meeting was a *Reception* given to all the Congress delegates by the distinguished patrons of the Prague Congress including the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, at the ancient Prague castle on the top of the hill, now occupied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and used only on very special occasions to entertain representatives of international diplomatic services. This was a memorable experience to the writer and must have been so to many other visitors. In the midst of glittering chandeliers and original paintings by master European painters in life-size canvases of the past royalty, one feels himself suddenly transported to a different world of the Fourteenth-Fifteenth Century feudal-capitalistic society. Apart from the above, several excursions, visits, etc. were also arranged for associate members and wives of active delegates to Czech famous castles, Karluv Tyn, Krivoklat, Prague Castle, Liddice, Terezin, etc. For children of Congress participants, there were teenagers, programs and a special nursery run by the wives of members of the Social Organizing Committee of the Congress. Scientific films and demonstrations were also arranged, in which Professor Arora's film entitled "Ectopic Ventricular Rhythm, etc., in the Pig" was also screened. An official stamp and envelopes were issued with the pharmacological theme also on this occasion.

It will not be appropriate to close this short account of the Second International Pharmacological Meeting at Prague without mentioning the Academic Degree Award Ceremony at the Charles University of three top-rank-

ing pharmacologists-Professor Anichkov of Leningrad, U. S. S. R., Professor Bovet of Rome, Italy, and Professor Carl Schmidt of Philadelphia, U. S. A. Incidentally, the Charles University in Prague is considered the oldest University in Europe, having been founded in the early Fifteenth Century, antedating even the Universities of Padua in Italy and Upsala in Sweden. Two Professor Helena Raskova, Chief of the Pharmacology Department of the University of Prague and a member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, goes the credit of organizing a Scientific Congress for pharmacologists which was equally well planned as the First Pharmacological Congress at Stockholm and was satisfying in every way to the participants, both academically and from the cultural point of view. The next International Pharmacological Meeting has now been decided to be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1966 and it is to be hoped that further pharmacological advances will be reported at this meeting, and India would be able to send stronger contingent of pharmacologists to this meeting to report on many new findings from the ancient treasures of Indian materia medica and Indian plant products. The Indian drug, Rauwolfia, has already found a place in international medicine and therapeutics and the near future may yet reveal several others as a result of more systematic and intensive studies in this field by Indian and overseas scientists.

B. Mukerji

