

Editorials

Sir Charles Scott Sherrington (1857-1952)

When young Charles Sherrington began his medical studies in 1876, Cajal was yet to propose that the nervous system shares with the rest of the body a cellular architecture. By the time Sherrington died in 1952, the basics of modern neurobiology had already been discovered, in no small measure by Sherrington himself. In that sense, Sherrington is not a historical figure; he is history. Charles Sherrington was born on 27 November 1857 (1). He lost his father while he was still a child. His mother remarried, and his step father was a great scholar who left his imprint on Sherrington. While he did his basic medical studies at St. Thomas' Hospital, London, he worked under Sir Michael Foster, a physiologist; Rudolf Virchow, a pathologist; and Robert Koch, a microbiologist; before settling down as Professor of Physiology at the University of Liverpool in 1895. In 1913 he was invited to join as Waynfleet Professor of Physiology at Oxford, a post for which he had tried unsuccessfully in 1895. He stayed at Oxford till his retirement in 1936.

Sherrington's research covered a very wide field, from the most peripheral interactions between nerve fibres and skeletal muscles to the uppermost levels of the central nervous system. He is best known for coining the term synapse (*synapsis*, junction), for his discovery of reciprocal inhibition, for his description of the stretch reflex and for his study of reflexes in decerebrate cat. His description of the cerebellum as the "head ganglion of the proprioceptive system" has become a cliché in physiology. Along with being an experimentalist *par excellence*, Sherrington was also a great intellectual. He put his work together to weave a scientifically oriented philosophy of the action of nervous system in the form of an immortal classic, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* (2). First published in 1906, the book was reprinted five times by 1920, and again revived in 1947 by the Physiological Society (U.K.). His other classic in physiology is a book on experimental techniques, *Mammalian Physiology : A Course of Practical Exercises* (3). The peak of his achievements in concrete terms was the richly deserved Nobel Prize which he shared with E.D. Adrian in 1932.

Sherrington had a remarkable literary flair which flowered during his later years. In 1925 he published a highly acclaimed collection of poems, in 1940 a collection of his Gifford Lectures, *Man on his Nature*, and in 1946, a volume on the 16th century French physician, Jean Fernel. As a young man, Sherrington was a notable athlete. He had a strong physique, which he exploited to work hard all his life. As a person, he was humble, friendly and generous with giving his time and advice. One of his illustrious American students was John Fulton, who in turn was the mentor of Dr. B. K. Anand who has directly or indirectly trained most of the Indian neurophysiologists. Thus a large number of readers of the IJPP can trace with pride their academic ancestry to Sir Charles Sherrington. On the 60th anniversary of his receiving the Nobel Prize, and the 40th anniversary of his passing away, we feel honoured to pay him this humble tribute.

REFERENCES

1. Biography. Nobel Lectures : Physiology or Medicine. 1922-1941. Amsterdam : Elsevier, 1965 : 290-292.
2. Sherrington C. *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1952 reprint.
3. Sherrington C. *Mammalian Physiology : A course of Practical Exercises*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1919.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prof. B.K. Anand, the doyen of Indian physiologists, and a Founder Member of the Association of Physiologists and Pharmacologists of India (APPI), will be 75 this year. The following series of activities have been planned in his honour this year by his students and admirers.

I. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SLEEP-WAKEFULNESS, 9-11 SEPTEMBER, 1992, NEW DELHI, INDIA.

The Scientific Programme includes Symposia, Updates and Posters on basic and clinical aspects of sleep.

For further details, please contact:

Dr. V. Mohan Kumar, Organizing Secretary, International Conference on Sleep-wakefulness,
Department of Physiology, New Delhi - 110 029, INDIA, Fax No. 91-011-686 2663.

II. INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM : HYPOTHALAMUS - A HOLISTIC VIEW, 17-18 SEPTEMBER 1992.

Venue : All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi - 110 029, INDIA

For further details, please contact :

Prof. Usha Nayar, Organizing Secretary, International Symposium, Hypothalamus: a holistic view,
Department of Physiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi -110 029, India.

III. GOING ABOUT RESEARCH (THE GAR SYMPOSIUM) - 15 NOVEMBER 1992



*Everything you
wanted to know
but
did not know
whom to ask*

RESEARCH

Why
What
How



How to get GRANTS
What is EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN
How to ANALYSE DATA
How to WRITE A PAPER

All this and more will be discussed at

THE GAR SYMPOSIUM

on
15 NOVEMBER 1992

at
ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES

To know more about the symposium please contact :

Prof. R. L. Bijlani
Department of Physiology
All India Institute of Medical Sciences
New Delhi 110 029

Telephone : 661123/Ext 456 or 238

IV. XXXVIII ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PHYSIOLOGISTS AND PHARMACOLOGISTS OF INDIA - DECEMBER 27-29, 1992 AT NEW DELHI.

For further details, please contact :

Dr. B.N. Mallick, Organising Secretary, XXXVIII Annual Conference of APPI,
School of Life Sciences, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi - 110 067.

V. FIFTH ANNUAL WORKSHOP ON ASSESSMENT IN MEDICAL EDUCATION (PHYSIOLOGY) DECEMBER 30-31, 1992 AT NEW DELHI.

For further details please contact :

Dr. B. K. Kapoor, Organising Secretary, 5th Annual Conference on Assessment in Medical Education (Physiology),
Department of Physiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi - 110 029.