

## Obituaries

### **ALBERT DUBOIS 1888–1977**

Albert Dubois died in Brussels on 19 August 1977, at the advanced age of 89. In his time, and in advance of his time, he was an outstanding and forward-looking leprologist. His experience embraced both the presulphone era and subsequent years, and he kept abreast of research in his subject.

Born in Ghent (Belgium) in 1888, Dubois graduated brilliantly in Medicine from Louvain University in 1910 and, having taken a diploma in tropical medicine at Brussels, sailed to the Belgian Congo (now known as Zaire) in 1911. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the many-sided work of the Medical Laboratory in Léopoldville (now Kinshasa), his scientific interests ranging from human trypanosomiasis and amoebiasis to beri-beri and onchocerciasis. He was early brought into contact with leprosy in the riverside hospital, and began his investigations of the diverse clinical manifestations of the disease and their histopathological basis, which were later to occupy so much of his time and interest. He became associated especially with an area of unbelievably high prevalence in the Uele, and enlisted the interest of the Belgian Red Cross and subsequently other Belgian philanthropic organizations in establishing and maintaining a first-class laboratory in Pawa in 1934, which became the centre of a model leprosy control scheme in the surrounding villages. A series of good papers came from Pawa, associated directly or indirectly with Dubois.

In 1928, Dubois was appointed Professor of Tropical Medicine at the School of Tropical Medicine in Parc Duden, Brussels, and thereafter in Antwerp when the School became the Prince Léopold Institute of Tropical Medicine. When the great Professor J. Rodhain retired in 1947, Dubois was appointed Director of the Institute, a position that he brilliantly filled until his own retirement in 1958. In these two roles, he played a great part in the training of successive generations of doctors and other health workers from various countries, most of whom would serve in the Belgian Congo or Zaire. From its publication in 1947, his textbook *Les Maladies des Pays Chauds*, written in collaboration with Louis van den Berghe, achieved a deserved success.

He was a careful and methodical clinician, quiet and unassuming, and showing a meticulous objectivity.

While his medical interests were many and varied—*Histoplasma duboisii* is of course named after him—his first and foremost love was leprosy, its clinical aspects, its pathology and its treatment. Influenced by the excellent German

and Scandinavian workers, he was early convinced of the importance of the nasal mucosa as the site *par excellence* of the exit of leprosy bacilli; he was equally convinced of the role of cellular—as distinct from bacillary—infiltration as the overriding factor in peripheral nerve damage. His inspiring teaching of leprosy is enshrined in the manual entitled *La Lèpre*, which for several decades was the leprosy Bible for doctors and other health workers (particularly the *agents sanitaires*) working in Central Africa.

Many of Dubois' former students, as well as distinguished admirers from Belgium and other countries, had pleasure in presenting to him a *Liber jubilaris* or *Festschrift* on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

The doyen of Belgian leprologists, Dubois maintained his interest in the subject long after most people would have shown signs of senescence. He will be remembered with esteem and affection by his many students, and by friends and colleagues all over the world.

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