

Anatomical Congress, Bonn

(September 1947)

Impressions and reflections

Entering the British Zone of Germany from Holland is a most depressing experience. Holland is cheerful, vigorous, and constructive; Germany is gloomy, lethargic, and destroyed.

Nobody leaving Germany twelve years ago (as I did) could then have foreseen the present utter destruction resulting from Hitler's total war—a war for which Germany had herself made full preparation and indeed committed the first act of aggression.

Twelve years ago the frontier guards were young, strong, and menacing members of the SS. Now only a couple of undernourished elderly men in semimilitary equipment were pretending to watch the border.

The station was completely smashed, and hungry children rushed for food thrown at them from the railway carriages.



University of Bonn, 1947.

After the journey through the ruins of the Ruhr and the churchyards of Cologne, I was relieved to see the hills and mountains of Bonn and its neighbourhood. I soon learned that up to 40% of Bonn too was destroyed, but in spite of this, Bonn was considered to be an "intact" town in comparison with others elsewhere.

The Anatomical Congress¹ met in the Anatomical Institute of Bonn University (Director, Professor STÖHR). About eighty members had arrived from various parts of Germany, but none from the Russian Zone. Thirty communications were listed on the programme, but more than this number were actually given.

The personnel of the Anatomical Institute had made feverish preparations for this Congress, clearing up rubble and improving the condition of the building by putting in new windows and making small repairs. On the whole, the Anatomy laboratory is one of the very few laboratories which are comparatively little damaged. The Physiology and Biochemistry laboratories were burnt out, while the entire clinical school was completely destroyed. Much of the equipment had been saved in the cellars, but the entering Allied forces either requisitioned what was still of use, or destroyed scientific instruments, in the early days of victory.

The main building of the University, situated in the middle of the town, was burned out during the bombing in the last phases of the war. It contained almost all the faculties, apart from the medical and scientific departments. The Rector of the University, Professor H. KONEN, is making the greatest efforts to get repairs done and save what can still be rescued out of the debris. In a personal talk with him I gained the impression that the reconstruction of the University is his last and only interest in life; and that the fate of the University is in very good hands. The history of reassembling the widely scattered bits of the University after the defeat is a most interesting one and will certainly be recorded in the annals of the University. It was amazing to see that, in spite of all the difficulties, something like a university was working again. An example of what had been achieved was the almost magical reconstruction of a pathological department out of rubble amidst the utter destruction of the medical school; thanks to the efforts of the Professor, Dr. W. CEELEN, and the reconstruction of the radiological Department, by Professor JANKER.

To meet the demands of the Congress some microscopes had been borrowed, and for later use a few microtomes were expected, but histological dyes had not yet been obtained.

The scientific communications had three main topics—developmental anatomy, functional anatomy, and neurohistology. Functional anatomy has always been well represented in Germany, and the journal "Morphologisches Jahrbuch" before the war was full of interesting papers in this field. Professor BENNINGHOFF who has moved from Kiel to Marburg, presented, with TIMMER, an interesting paper on the structure of long bones, and PAUWELS (Aachen) read a detailed and elaborate paper on the architecture of the substantia spongiosa, which was most instructive.

In the field of Neurohistology, STÖHR and his school attracted special attention. In the last ten years they have opened up quite a new and promising field of research, the *pathology* of the sympathetic system. In this most difficult field it is not surprising that STÖHR with his excellent staining technique and his experience of the normal histology of the autonomic system, has made very interesting observations. H. BAUER, well-known for his work on glia, showed excellent silver preparations of the visual cortex, and also a film on the histology of this cortical area. H. SPATZ and his colleagues from Dillenburg gave very interesting papers on the hypothalamus, and BACHMANN of Göttingen made a contribution on the cytology of this region.

One can only hope that the German neurohistologists will continue their observations into the experimental field. But, owing to lack of equipment and feeding stuffs for animals, any experimental work is at present quite impossible.

From the social point of view, the meeting was very successful. As the Anatomical Society had not been given permission by the C.C.G. to be reconstituted, it was only an informal meeting of German anatomists, and had nothing of the tense atmosphere and the social difference between "Professor" and "Assistant" which has often been characteristic of German official gatherings. The spirit of mutual respect and helpfulness was very gratifying. As the quality of lectures and observations was excellent, I asked many of the directors of the laboratories when these results had been achieved, and heard to my surprise that a fair number of scientific observations had been made during the war. However, they pointed out to me that the present communications

¹ Responsible for the organization and the invitations were Professor VERR, Anatomy, Cologne University, and Professor STÖHR.

were only the outcome of past research, and that owing to lack of equipment and buildings, etc., no serious work had been done during the last three years. It was not uncommon to meet a German professor without an Institute, or a professor who was unable to tell whether his University itself would continue.

On the other hand, new universities have been established, such as the one in Mainz in the French Zone. From information I heard about this new University, it appears that the French Military Government made strenuous efforts to provide all the scientific equipment necessary for teaching and research, and that the intellectual and cultural level was reputed to be exceptionally high. Unfortunately, however, the food situation in the French Zone provided even less calories than in any other zone.

In talks with many of the younger representatives at the Congress (Assistants and Privatdozenten), I gained the impression that disgust for the past Nazi régime is very great, and that they are most eager to be allowed a share in international affairs and in scientific developments also. I outlined in a previous report (Exper. 3, 382 [1947]) that it is in the common European interest to admit German scientists again to international meetings. But no immediate general progress in international thought can be expected from Germany until the greater part of the people are again living above starvation level.

From the various clinical professors I heard of the appalling increase of tuberculosis amongst students; and the food served to them during lunch in one of their university feeding centres was of the most inferior quality, as well as being insufficient in quantity. I can only warn the supporters of those organizations which do a lot to help as regards welfare, etc., not to expect to find an early revival of the international spirit and outlook among the Germans as a result of their efforts. All the help so far provided by various international bodies is too small in comparison with the size of their task. I do not wish to belittle these efforts—on the contrary no praise can be too high for these truly humanitarian workers—but I want to try to prevent their becoming embittered and cynical like many of my Dutch and Norwegian friends who have told me that the children they fed and helped after the first world war were the invaders of their countries in the second world war.

There is no doubt that this work of feeding and caring for the bodily welfare of a defeated people is of the utmost importance, and it is only after a reasonable standard of living has been achieved that any set of moral values can be inculcated into such people.

If welfare workers can realize the vital importance of both these aspects in rebuilding the lives of a defeated people, there need be no sense of embitterment or frustration if they do not see the results of their work at once.

If the German problem is not solved on a European scale, no temporary relief will prevent the emergence of new national elements among students seeking revenge and national recovery even more violently than twenty years ago.

Why should this be so? not because the German mind is fundamentally more evil than that of other nations, but because Hitler's total war has brought upon Germany total misery, which can only be alleviated by a combined European and American effort of great magnitude.

An immediate and practical step which can be taken is the exchange of teachers and students, which is very important. Such an exchange has already been made between Oxford and Bonn. Oxford students took part

in an International Summer School in Bonn and have invited German students to come to this country. Books and journals are most urgently needed, and subscribers who no longer want their copies of such journals should forward them to a German university, where they will be most gratefully received.

International bodies meeting in the near future should seriously consider whether they should admit German scientists to their meetings. Germans cannot be permanently excluded, and the longer the period of exclusion, the greater will be the resentment, and the more difficult will be international understanding. A definite ruling on this problem should soon be made by those responsible for international meetings, and I would like to suggest to German societies, such as the former Anatomical Society, that they have their part to play too. I think that they should exclude members (as the former German Professor of Anatomy of Strasburg), who committed definite war crimes during the German occupation of France. I am sure that such a gesture and public dissociation from criminal members on the part of the German societies would facilitate reconciliation with the other nations.

In a recent talk with Professor M. KLEIN of the French University of Strasburg, I gained the impression that even university teachers who (like him) have suffered severely from the Nazi occupation (Buchenwald and Auschwitz) are not hostile towards German scientists as such, but are of course eager to see signs of discrimination coming from the Germans themselves, such as I have already suggested.

This article may possibly be considered to be too biased towards the German people; but only those who have seen conditions inside Germany for themselves will realize the magnitude of the task of rebuilding Germany so that it may eventually take its place in the European scene. This task is one which calls for international action on a humanitarian basis beyond the limits of national considerations.

On the other hand, the collaboration of Germany is essential to the success of any such scheme; but the Germans must not allow their common misery to blind them to the fact that crimes have been committed in their name, and that the time has now come to dissociate themselves from those responsible for these crimes, so that a new start may be made in the solving of their problems.

All those Germans who still claim to be unaware of such crimes and who might call the War Crimes Tribunal of Nuremberg "enemy propaganda" are asked to read E. WIECHERT's¹ personal description of his stay in Buchenwald, "The Forest of the Dead": the most factual account written so far by one of the best German writers.

P. GLEES

¹ Published by V. GOLLANCZ (London, 1947).

XIII^e Congrès international de zoologie

Paris 1948

Le XIII^e Congrès international de zoologie se tiendra à Paris en 1948, du mercredi 21 juillet au mardi 27 juillet.

Il sera présidé par M. CAULLERY, membre de l'Institut, président du comité permanent des Congrès de zoologie.

La correspondance doit être adressée au secrétaire général, M. FISCHER-PIETTE, professeur au Muséum, 55, rue de Buffon, Paris-V^e, ou pour ce qui concerne les sections aux présidents de ces différentes sections.