

## The platelet in pathophysiological research

### Introductory remarks

The idea of a special review in *EXPERIENTIA* on the platelet in pathophysiology arose from the consideration of how to celebrate two anniversaries, namely the 70th birthday of Professor Alfred Pletscher and the first ten years of the Department of Research of the University Hospital of Basel for which he was one of the most eminent promoters and which he directed during its first decade. The Department, which is located in the Center for Teaching and Research (Zentrum für Lehre und Forschung, ZLF) and brings together the research laboratories of the different university clinics, has become a unique center for basic and applied medical research within the medical faculty.

Since Alfred Pletscher has devoted most of his scientific career to research into neurotransmitters, using the platelet as a model for investigating the mechanisms of transmitter function, we felt it appropriate to organize a meeting on the platelet as a model in neurobiological and cardiovascular research. Distinguished scientists from various countries gathered at the ZLF on March 20/21, 1987, to honor Alfred Pletscher and to review the state of research in this field. In

addition, members from the Department of Research presented some highlights of their own research. The meeting was also a tribute to the centennial of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda with which Alfred Pletscher has been long connected.

Since *EXPERIENTIA* and Alfred Pletscher have been closely associated in the last decade, *EXPERIENTIA* is the journal of choice for the publication of this meeting. The proceedings are grouped into three sections: 1) The Platelet in Cardiovascular Research, introduced by E. F. Lüscher, Bern; 2) The Platelet in Neurobiological Research, introduced by G. A. Born, London, and 3) Current Activities of the Department of Research. In his closing remarks on the perspectives of the platelet in neurotransmitter research, Alfred Pletscher demonstrates that this model is still very attractive for future research.

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### Alfred Pletscher

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Alfred Pletscher completed the seventh decade of his life on 5 March 1987. He did not consider this to be an occasion for contemplation. It was a day like any other, perhaps with a pause for breath, but only with the aim of 'reculer pour mieux sauter'.

Alfred Pletscher has always been able to make rapid decisions and has never been tempted to ponder too extensively over his actions as time was too valuable for him. His intuition and experience rarely let him down.

It may sound strange, but Alfred Pletscher is actually a Rhinelander, although a genuine Swiss one being a citizen of Schleitheim near Schaffhausen on the Rhine. He was born and grew up in Altstätten, in the part of the Rhine valley belonging to the canton of St. Gallen where the river is still young and only dreams of its later importance. Basel, the city on the Rhine, finally became his second home.

Alfred Pletscher has always had a special relationship with nature. It is rational rather than idealistic and it influenced his future as a scientist. He first studied medicine in Zürich, Geneva and Rome between 1935 and 1942. However, he

found the subject matter too narrow, conventional and empirical, and therefore, after qualifying as an MD and spending two years doing clinical work, he turned to chemistry. Paul Karrer, the famous bioorganic chemist and Nobel laureate in Zürich, became his teacher and supervised his Ph.D. thesis.

Thinking and working in chemical terms fulfilled his need for order and synopsis. The studies of simple natural products made the young physician realize the complexity of biomedical questions and the difficulties involved in answering them. He not only wanted to treat patients but, even more, to understand the biochemical patterns behind the disease. From the very first his main guiding principle was to follow the changes brought about by natural or synthetic substances in specific cell and organ models.

In 1948 Alfred Pletscher came to Basel and joined the University Medical Clinic where he found a teacher tailored to his needs – Hans Staub – who was exceptional both as a clinician and clinical pharmacologist. He was given time and money for clinical and experimental investigations, mainly in