

INTERNATIONAL APPRAISAL OF RESEARCH IN TROPICAL
MEDICINE¹

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, 1945, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE

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Members of the American Academy of Tropical Medicine, ladies and guests: I am deeply appreciative of the honor you bestowed upon me through elevation to your presidency in the current year, and wish to express my thanks for the distinction. I found the routine duties of the office to be far from onerous, but realization of my inadequacy to meet fittingly the ephemeral climax of a presidential address has given rise to sleepless nights. I know that on such an occasion as the present, a speaker has his auditors at a disadvantage during this brief exercise of his prerogatives, and I greatly hope that you, sufficiently surfeited by this banquet, will have acquired a complaisant mood, judging my remarks in a spirit of leniency, permitting appreciation of brevity to outweigh its very apparent short-comings.

When the Academy's committee on the award of the Theobald Smith Medal, announced their selection of Dr. Charles M. Wenyon, the distinguished English protozoologist, to be the recipient of this year's award of the Medal, it was anticipated that Dr. Wenyon could receive the presentation in person at this meeting, making the occasion memorable to us by a fitting address. It was with regret that we learned of Dr. Wenyon's inability to be present. Owing to the condition of his health, his physician has forbidden foreign travel. Fortunately the American Ambassador to the Court of Saint James, the Honorable John Winant, has cordially agreed to make the presentation at a meeting of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine to be held at Manson House on December 13th. The Medal and Certificate of award have been transmitted to Mr. Winant through the good offices of the State Department. Should any members of the American Academy of Tropical Medicine or the American Society of Tropical Medicine be in London on this date, it is hoped they will participate through attendance at this meeting.

We are meeting at the close of the most catastrophic period in the history of the human race, a catastrophe caused not by upheavals of nature beyond human control, but the result of forces created and unleashed by human agency. We should be humbly thankful that in this contest, and as the result of indescribable exertions and sacrifices in blood and treasure, victory has been attained in collaboration with our allies.

Most of those present on this occasion are either directly interested in extending the domain of science, or in the application of the newly acquired knowledge. To us scientific research is a matter of vital interest, despite the circumstance that during the past century the radius of human knowledge has been

¹Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Tropical Medicine, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 14, 1945.

extending with a constantly increasing momentum to such distances that scientists can no longer be familiar with all disciplines, but find themselves fully occupied in a small segment of the circumference with little or no acquaintance with their conferees who are working with similar devotion in other segments.

I am sure that most if not all of us engaged in these pursuits, labor with either the avowed or secret hope that our efforts, no matter how humble, may contribute to the well-being of mankind. Admitting this laudable motivation, we should view with inexpressible anguish and shame the degree to which science has contributed to the present desolation of the world, and has been prostituted to the injury of the human race. There is no novelty in this situation, warfare has ever been prompt to exploit science since the bow and arrow supplanted the sling shot, and guns supplanted the crossbow. The extent to which advances in physics and physical chemistry have contributed to this situation, and in a vicious cycle have in turn been stimulated by military competition is appalling, and our colleagues in those fields of science must realize they have assumed responsibilities of a gravity perhaps never before borne by human beings, and have yet to demonstrate their capacity for the very grave task. Obviously in certain aspects of these fields, scientific research has outstripped human capacity to assimilate this knowledge, and has created a Frankenstein which if again unleashed will likely destroy our civilization.

Interested as we are in medicine and related fields, we can view with satisfaction and gratitude the circumstance that in our segments of knowledge, the exigencies of war resulted in progress and extension of knowledge in many limited fields, which promoted the welfare of our forces but contributed materially to the success of our arms without acquiring the stigma of prostitution to the ends of combat. Their continued and widened application will materially contribute to the healing of the deep wounds civilization has received.

The military necessities of the war period stimulated extensive research in tropical medicine and related fields in the United States and allied countries, resulting in numerous and significant discoveries. They also stimulated an unparalleled interest in the subject in the medical profession and among the laity, which is expressed by the noteworthy increases in membership of both the American Society of Tropical Medicine and the National Malaria Society. They required that millions of Americans of the armed services be stationed abroad on tropical assignments for extended periods, so that multitudes, to whom the word tropics formerly only vaguely expressed a region of perpetual summer, now are personally acquainted with both the charms and drawbacks of life in these regions. The charms may induce many to seek permanent employment and residence in the tropics, the drawbacks may result in chronically impaired health for many; and the ailments of veterans of these campaigns will for years offer perplexities to any uninstructed physicians who may be consulted about them. While the return of peace may result in a recession of interest in this subject, it is likely that, for the reasons enumerated, it will actually witness the maintenance of a higher level of interest than prevailed prior to the war. The phenomenal growth of international air travel will further contribute to the sustenance, if not the intensification, of this interest.

The prompt and energetic application of this dearly purchased knowledge will go far to alleviate much of the widespread misery and wretchedness intensified by the war. Effective application requires rapid and extensive diffusion, neither of which in adequate degree can be attained through the ordinary channels of professional and scientific literature. The requisite initial impetus can best be attained by an international reunion of those who have contributed to these advances, with others qualified to disseminate and apply this knowledge. Such an international gathering of scientists will further materially contribute to better international understanding and cooperation, so essential to an enduring peace.

The Council of the Academy, convinced that these aims can best be attained by an International Congress of Tropical Medicine and Malaria, have recommended to the favorable consideration of the academy at the business session, the adoption of a resolution inviting the American Society of Tropical Medicine, the National Malaria Society, the Southern Medical Association, the American Society of Parasitologists, the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Section on Medical Science of the National Research Council, to join with the American Academy of Tropical Medicine, in adopting a resolution petitioning the State Department of the United States government officially to sponsor and invite international participation in such a gathering at as early a date as may be regarded as opportune. The suggested resolution would also direct the president of each organization to appoint a representative of that organization to a general committee, available to assist the State Department in an executive capacity in developing these plans, and in promoting and holding such a congress.

The last international congress in this field was held during 1938 in Amsterdam, under the patronage of the Dutch government. It was well planned, the Dutch hospitality was gracious, wholehearted and flawless, but many of those participating, including your president among their number, were distracted by the ominous reverberations of the Munich conference, and attendance suffered as a consequence. Most of you can recall the effect of the events of 1939 on the Congress of Microbiology held in New York City in that year.

The Amsterdam Congress was the first world congress jointly held in the fields of tropical medicine and malaria, although it was the third of each, their predecessors having been held independently. Since inception the Malaria Congress had maintained a permanent intercongressional committee, and although nothing comparable existed for the Tropical Medicine Congress, the executive committee of the Third Congress of Tropical Medicine was designated to serve as an interim commission until the organization of the Fourth Congress.

As far back as the Second Congress of Tropical Medicine, held in Cairo in 1928, desire was expressed to hold the Fourth Congress in some American country. Following the Second Malaria Congress in Algiers, it was intimated that the malariologists would be receptive to an invitation from the United States for the Third Congress. But at that time many in the United States felt that adequate support could not be secured and the committee developed plans to hold the

Third Malaria Congress in Madrid in 1935. These plans were frustrated by the outbreak of civil disorder in Spain, which lead ultimately to the joint meetings in Amsterdam. The interim committee of the Third Congress was charged with the task of contacting the countries of America to ascertain which would be willing to exercise the privilege of priority with regard to the Fourth Congress.

If this proposal meets with a favorable reception from those organizations to which submitted, it would appear to me highly desirable to preserve the chain of continuity by recognizing the interim committees of the two congresses, expressing to them the desire of the United States to be host to a Fourth Joint Congress of Tropical Medicine and Malaria, and requesting their recognition of the proposed intersociety committee as the executive committee for the Fourth Congress.

It might be found practicable to organize the Congress on the basis of four membership classes, viz

- a) Sustaining memberships, available to commercial organizations;
- b) Official delegates or members, designated by their governments with official credentials;
- c) Unofficial (but professional) members; and
- d) Associate members (non-professional).

This is mentioned not with any desire to suggest to any future executive committee the direction of its labors, but merely to mention at the moment what would appear to be practical *modus operandi*.

Prevailing circumstances perhaps will not have ameliorated sufficiently to make 1946 an opportune year for the meeting, and selection of that year would probably not give sufficient time to lay the ground work and perfect plans in sufficient detail. However considering the labor involved, it is probably not too soon to lay plans for 1947.

In conclusion I wish to express the hope that you will agree to the proposal for the solicitation of the support of related organizations and the State Department to this project, with the conviction that the need is great and the time is propitious.