

In Memoriam

PAUL KLEMPERER

1887-1964



Photograph courtesy of William H. Feldman, M.D.

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With the death of Paul Klemperer on March 3, 1964 was lost a pathologist's pathologist, a product and an architect of his environment. Born into an intellectual family in Vienna on August 2, 1887, he was imbued with the serene and philosophic spirit of the twilight years of imperial Vienna. Initially a student of law, he came under the spell of Sigmund Freud, became his disciple and transferred his interests to medicine at the University of Vienna. He became a member of Freud's early circle of psychoanalysts, but his broader concerns directed him toward the role of a family physician. By sheer accident, however, he became a student of Carl Sternberg, whose dynamic approach and compulsive attention to meticulous detail of structure brought into being a young imaginative pathologist. During the years with Sternberg, salient and concise pathologic descriptions came from Klemperer's pen; the influence of the then flourishing Viennese school of pathologic anatomy was discernible. It was at this time that he acquired a lasting admiration for the founder of the school, Karl von Rokitansky, who preached the pursuit of clinico-pathologic correlation and, as well, a seemingly naive utilization of such non-morphologic methods as biochemistry and biophysics in the appreciation of pathologic disorders. In these formative years, thus, the later characteristics of the mature pathologist were nurtured. An appreciation for the minutiae of structure combined with a growing interest in the use of ingenious methodology brought into being the master pathologist of later years. To these were added the natural warmth of the scholar and humanist.

In 1921, he emigrated to the United States. A year at Loyola University in Chicago established a close friendship with Richard Jaffe, a fellow countryman and a kindred soul. In 1923, he moved to greater responsibilities at the New York Postgraduate School of Medicine and Hospital, where he was joined by his student, co-worker and life-long friend, Sadao Otani. In the ensuing period careful attention to microscopic patterns led to the significant understanding of several disease entities. Catarrhal jaundice, now viral hepatitis, was first described as a hepatic parenchymal disease. A classic paper on chronic thrombophlebitis with cavernomatous transformation of the portal vein also appeared. With growing recognition, he assumed the position of Pathologist to The Mount Sinai Hospital in 1926 where he joined an unusual

circle of men full of drive and great talent in virtually all areas of medicine.

Paul Klemperer met the challenge of an environment characterized by burning ambition and urgency. With his gift for professional and spiritual inspiration tempered by saint-like patience and the warmth of love for man, he became the beloved counselor of the staff. His influence in his own institution, in the city of New York, and throughout the nation and the world became legendary. Unusual diagnostic talent and, even more, an ability to recognize and solve problems inapparent to others made him a sought-after consultant to pathologists and clinicians alike. His ability to detect correlations between pathologic phenomena and clinical manifestations made him a master of the clinico-pathologic conference. These exercises, under his affectionate eye, attracted audiences from far and wide.

A desire to apply sophisticated modern techniques in the study of disordered tissue motivated him to establish a laboratory of cell biology. This in no way, however, interfered with a more conventional regard for diseased tissue. Investigations of liver diseases, a great interest in lymphoma, particularly in reticuloendotheliosis, and in the normal and abnormal structure of the spleen highlighted this period. With Otani he described the pathologic features of malignant nephrosclerosis and, with others, a variety of newly recognized diseases of blood vessels, alimentary tract and the hematopoietic system. The culmination of his endeavors was a recognition of the significance of altered "intermediate substances" in systemic connective tissue disease, a new dimension in pathologic physiology. Stimulated by Klinge's work with rheumatic diseases, by Wolbach's dynamic concepts of collagen and by Schade's investigation of metabolic processes in connective tissues, Klemperer developed a new understanding of the intercellular milieu in connective tissue, using as a prototype systemic lupus erythematosus. The concept of "collagen disease" became a profound stimulus to newer approaches in the investigation of altered tissues with an impact transcending the limits of morphology. As referee for a symposium on collagen disease for The American Association of Pathologists and Bacteriologists in 1951 and with a monumental Harvey lecture in 1953 clarifying his views in this area, he brought inspired enthusiasm to a host of young investigators who have carried his views toward a constantly spreading horizon.

His scientific achievements sufficed to make him a great pathologist, but they did little justice to his personal attributes. His was a deep and fatherly interest in his co-workers and in young men all over the world. The large number of Klemperer-trained pathologists have revered him unceasingly into their more mature years. Many clinicians, too, were his

students and have considered the years with him the most formative in their development. As humble and self-effacing as he was, he never hesitated to speak courageously when he felt that human rights were violated. Attesting to his concern with problems of this nature was the effective placement of innumerable European refugee physicians in institutions throughout the country. A profound interest in education and in the importance of the classic humanities has become imbued into the planning of the new medical school at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Undaunted by formal retirement in 1956, Dr. Klemperer embarked on a new career with youthful enthusiasm. Convinced that only with knowledge of the development of ideas was further creative expansion possible, he devoted himself to the study of what he called the history of pathology, but what actually represented a philosophy of pathology. At an age when most would feel entitled to relaxation, he continued to convey his ideas to many audiences the world over and even assembled groups of medical students at his home on Saturday afternoons in order to transmit his unique insights into the past.

Professional activities were curtailed by a myocardial infarct in August, 1963. The damage was greater than had been suspected and fatal cardiac failure eventuated seven months later. Paul Klemperer embodied the virtues and triumphs of both the new and the old world pathology. He was dedicated to medical science as a whole but considered pathology to be the central theme and the role of the pathologist to be that of an orchestral conductor directing the instruments of many artists. He combined humility and wisdom with a pervading devotion to the stimulation and development of young people. Pathologists and all students of medicine and biology share his loss with his close-knit devoted family.

—Hans Popper, M.D.