

obituary

Charles Enrique Dent, Professor of Human Metabolism at University College Hospital Medical School (UCHMS), died on September 19, 1976. He was born in Spain in 1911 of a Spanish mother and English father but received his schooling in Bedford and Wimbledon College, London. He started work at 16 as a bank clerk and studied chemistry at evening classes. He won a scholarship to Imperial College, London, and in 1931 graduated with a first class honours degree in chemistry. He spent a further two years there making a study of copper phthalocyanin for his Ph.D. thesis and then worked for three years in the dyestuffs division of ICI in Manchester; many of the blue dyes in use today have their origins in his work at that time.

In 1937, at the age of 26, Dent started his medical education at University College, London, only to have it interrupted two years later by the outbreak of war. As a Territorial he was among the first who went to France with the British Expeditionary Force and was engaged in military intelligence. He was besieged in Arras, mentioned in dispatches and evacuated from Dunkirk. After a short spell back at medical studies he was called by the War Office to undertake counterespionage work in Bermuda; by applying his chemical knowledge to detect messages secreted in mail passing between the United States and Europe, he helped to uncover an important spy ring.

At 33, Dent at last had the chance to qualify MB, BS and he became the last house physician to the celebrated cardiologist and clinical scientist Sir Thomas Lewis. Soon after, he passed the Membership examination of the Royal College of Physicians and was appointed an assistant to the Medical Unit of UCHMS under Professor (later Sir Harold) Himsworth. He was promptly seconded to a Medical Research Council team which went to Belsen concentration camp to study the value of protein hydrolysates in the treatment of severe starvation. Subsequently he began his studies of amino acid disorders, making use of the technique of paper chromatography which had only just been described by Martin and Synge. He improved the technique and his paper on the behaviour of some 60 amino acids and other ninhydrin-reactants on phenol/collidine filter paper chromatograms, which was published in the *Biochemical Journal* in 1948, rightly became a classic reference because it

represented the culmination of a vast amount of meticulous work. He then proceeded to apply this tool to the study of various inborn errors of metabolism, helping to elucidate the precise defect in known amino acid disorders and discovering previously unrecognised syndromes. He contributed greatly to knowledge of renal tubular disorders and of mental defects caused by metabolic errors. In less than 10 years he became a world authority on this group of disorders, sparking off a new interest in them.

The study of renal disorders led on to an interest in metabolic bone disease and impressed by what he learnt when he visited Fuller Allbright's department at the Massachusetts General Hospital while holding a Rockefeller Fellowship in 1946-47, he resolved to persuade UCH to build him a metabolic ward. This finally materialised in 1951 and from then on his research interests progressively shifted towards the study of calcium and phosphate metabolism. He systematically studied hyperparathyroidism, osteomalacia and the actions of Vitamin D, but he also acquired an unrivalled experience of rare bone diseases as patients and skeletal radiographs were referred to him from far and wide. He obtained the MD(Lond.) in 1949, became Reader in Medicine at UCHMS in 1951 and was elected Professor of Human Metabolism in 1956.

Despite Dent's insistence on a scientific approach to medicine, he remained essentially a clinician and his ward became a Mecca for doctors from all over the world. Many honours came his way, including honorary MD's from Louvain and Uppsala Universities, Fellowship of the Royal Society, the Gairdner Foundation Award and, in the 1976 New Year Honours, the CBE. In spite of his fame he remained modest, approachable, and greatly concerned for the welfare of his patients. He also put much time and effort into the teaching of medical students and for many years he was Staff President of the Student Union. He was very hard-working and his enquiring and original mind, tremendous enthusiasm and readiness to share ideas made him a stimulating colleague and an inspiring teacher. He contributed 166 scientific papers to the medical literature, many shared with the small research team he directed.

In spite of Dent's prodigious medical achievement he had the capacity to enjoy many other things. He was a keen squash player, made wine from

his own vines, reared trout, played the flute, and enjoyed entertaining in a relaxed and happy home. He was fluent in Spanish but was also able to lecture in French, Italian and Russian. His final illness emphasised his great stature for though aware of its relentless progress he remained cheerful and hard-working, sustained by his strong religious faith. He is survived by his wife, son and five daughters.

F. V. Flynn

Dr W. F. Bewley, CBE, DSc, VMH, died on December 11, 1976. In his death, agricultural research has lost one of the few remaining scientists who were concerned with the expansion of research facilities in the early 1900s which laid the foundation for the present Agricultural Research Service. Following the scheme initiated in 1911 by the then Board of Agriculture and funded by the Development Commission, Fleming Bewley joined the staff of the Rothamsted Experimental Station in 1912 as assistant bacteriologist to Dr H. B. Hutchinson in the James Mason Laboratory. In 1919 he was appointed mycologist at the Experimental and Research Station, Cheshunt, which had been established in 1914 and had close connections with Rothamsted. He was promoted to Director in 1921, a position he held for 34 years until the Station closed in 1955. With the formation of the Glasshouse Crops Research Institute in 1953 he became its first Director and was responsible for the initial development of the Littlehampton site, for the assimilation of the work of the Mushroom Research Association and for the transfer of the staff and facilities from Cheshunt to Littlehampton in 1955. Following his retirement in 1956 he took a keen interest in local government and was Chairman of the Worthington Rural District Council.

Early in his career he established his authority as a plant pathologist. His book *Diseases of Glasshouse Plants*, first published in 1923 was for many years a work of reference. He applied his mycological knowledge to the cultivation of edible fungi and his book *The Cultivation of Mushrooms* ran to three editions. In 1939 he had almost completed a comprehensive handbook *Commercial Glasshouse Crops* but publication was delayed to 1950 by the war. Though it became quickly outdated by rapid technological development in the 1950s it remains as a