

OBITUARY

Feodor Lynen, 1911-1979

FEODOR LYNEN died in Munich on 6 August 1979, of complications following surgery to repair an aneurysm in his aorta. It was quite typical of the man that, while in hospital preparing for surgery, he arranged that former colleagues and friends attending the Acta Endocrinologica Congress in Munich last June should receive, personally, messages of regret that he would be unable to meet them. With his death, we have lost a great biochemist, and many, the world over, have lost a good friend.

Fitz Lynen was a Bavarian, and proud of it. He was born in Munich in 1911; he went to school and university there and then he worked there. So great was his fame, he must have had many attractive offers from other centres of learning, but his love for Bavaria kept him in Munich. He travelled widely, however, and made innumerable lasting friendships wherever he went.

At an early stage in his career, he came under the influence of the great German chemist, Heinrich Wieland. This training and the chemical skills which he developed, and encouraged in his laboratory associates, are clearly seen in all his work. He graduated PhD in 1937, became Dozent in 1942, Professor of Biochemistry in 1953, and shortly afterwards became Director of the Max-Planck Institute for Cell Chemistry. Later, he was to become Vice-President of the Max-Planck Society, President of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and President of the International Union of Biophysics. At the time of his death, he was President of the International Union of Biochemistry.

Lynen's researches aimed to elucidate the chemical details of metabolic processes, and the mechanisms of their regulation. His first brilliant observation came in 1951, when he reported in *Angewandte Chemie* that acetyl-coenzyme A is "active acetate". This was something of a surprise, since at the time it was popularly believed that "active acetate" would prove to be a phosphate. However, Lynen's keen chemical insight led him to appreciate that sulphhydryl groups are acidic and that thio esters would behave like anhydrides and thus as acetylating agents.

Considering the range of topics covered by Lynen's publications, one cannot fail to be impressed by his achievements. The Pasteur effect, acetic acid degradation in yeast, the isoprene unit, biotin and the fixation of CO₂, cythohaemin, the biosynthesis of cysteine, terpenes, cholesterol and fatty acids and many



others, were dealt with in papers making giant strides in the advancement of knowledge.

In recognition of this magnificent work, Lynen was honoured by universities in Europe, America and Asia. In 1964, he was awarded a Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, jointly with Konrad Bloch.

Despite the honours heaped upon him Lynen remained an approachable, jovial, friendly man. Students loved him, as was abundantly evident from their contributions to his 65th birthday party, an affair which was very Bavarian and far from solemn and dignified. Working in Lynen's Laboratory was an unforgettable experience. At times, he could be a strict disciplinarian, expecting long hours of work and the meeting of deadlines, but this was always tempered by good humour and no one worked harder than Fitz. One could not fail to be enthusiastic when he was about. Difficulties were made to be overcome, and quickly. Vast quantities of mitochondria appeared overnight, a press for breaking yeast cells was made in a day or two. It was unthinkable to leave the Laboratory before Fitz had completed his round. Then, as the slightest excuse, or none at all, everyone, Fitz included, would finish the day in some popular "Local", drinking beer and eating sausages. Of course, work started as usual at eight the next morning.

In 1937, Lynen married Eva Wieland, and they had five children. Frau Lynen was greatly concerned about the welfare of those who worked with her husband, and visitors to the laboratory were welcomed with charming and generous hospitality at the Lynen home in Starnberg. Much of the

conversation would be about music and skiing. The number of times Fitz had broken a leg at the latter activity was legend.

We remember Fitz Lynen the brilliant scientist, and find it difficult to forget the jovial, limping figure, with the mischievous grin, attiring himself in his office curtains to lead the biochemists at some Faschingsparty.

J. K. Grant

L. J. Wills

LONGEVITY is not unusual in geologists, but it is rare in any branch of science to record the passing of one who continued to produce highly original and outstanding work well into his nineties, whose publications span more than seventy years, some of the later ones being among the most valuable.

Leonard Johnston Wills, Sc.D., Emeritus Professor of Birmingham University, who died on 12 December 1979, shortly before his 96th birthday, graduated with a double first at King's College, Cambridge. He was awarded the Harkness Scholarship and Walsingham Medal and a Fellowship at King's College. After four years with the Geological Survey, mapping in the Llangollen area of North Wales, he took in 1913 a Senior Lectureship at Birmingham University, and succeeded to the Chair of Geology in 1932, continuing there until his retirement in 1949.

Wills' first paper (1907) described the discovery of fossils in the generally barren Keuper rocks of the Birmingham area. This led him in later years to an interest in the fauna of other continental formations, and to extensive studies of fossil scorpions and eurypterids for which he developed ingenious original methods of dissection, revealing detailed anatomical details including the respiratory and reproductive organs.

His concern with the Trias lay also in environmental aspects — a continuing thread in his work — and in the vexed problems of stratigraphic correlation which led to one of his final papers (1976) which described the Trias of the West Midlands in terms of sedimentary rhythmic units. The volume of new information in this work justified its publication by the I.G.S., but the rhythmic units are mostly of local extent. The regional problems are now being resolved by the new science of palynology.