

## **'LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN'**

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ONE quality which is often said to separate the competent from the great is that indefinable quality which has been seen in many of the great men in history, in religious leaders, in princes and in the leaders and pioneers of our profession. The special quality is one of inspiration. The competent man does a good job, is indispensable to our society, but differs from the great man in that greatness carries with it not only a spark of inspiration which allows a rise to great personal heights, but also the ability to inspire others, to light a spark which will continue to grow until that person, by example and learning, is himself also able to take a place in the same line of endeavour as the Master.

This train of philosophical thinking comes very readily to mind when one seeks to write of Sir Ludwig Guttmann on the occasion of his 80th birthday. Sir Ludwig is indeed an example of one of the great men in the history of medicine who has been, to a very great extent, responsible for the creation of a new specialty, and, much the more important, responsible for a complete change in the fate of those unfortunate enough to sustain an injury or illness which had previously been attended with nothing but pain, misery, hopelessness, and premature death.

As my tribute to Sir Ludwig, I would like to invite him to recall an incident from the past, and to share this incident with our colleagues as an example of that inspiration which has been one of the outstanding qualities of his greatness.

In 1948, a very young orthopaedic registrar saw his first paraplegic patient under tragic conditions. The patient was a young woman in her early thirties who was felt, following diagnostic studies, to have an acute thoracic disc prolapse. Surgery was performed with the young registrar assisting, and when the patient recovered from the anaesthetic, she had a complete mid-dorsal paraplegia. From that point the tragedy only became greater. A suprapubic cystostomy was performed with a large Malecot catheter inserted into the bladder. The nursing care became a nightmare with the patient developing a large sacral pressure sore, and subsequently bilateral trochanteric pressure sores. She had a clinical urinary tract infection, she was septic from her sores, and subsequently became progressively more sick. After some weeks, with the patient getting progressively worse, and with it becoming abundantly obvious that she was receiving totally inadequate care, the attending Orthopaedic Surgeon suggested that perhaps it might be worth while to ask Dr Guttmann to see the patient.

The surgeon called Dr Guttmann who agreed to come and see the patient. A date and time were arranged and the previous evening the surgeon called the registrar and told him of urgent matters which required his presence on the opposite side of London at the time of Dr Guttmann's visit. This left a very apprehensive registrar 'holding the bag', and as Dr Guttmann arrived, the registrar was overwhelmed by the dynamism with which Dr Guttmann strode into the ward and commended an interrogation of the hapless and woefully ignorant young man. Following this interrogation, in which the registrar was reduced to a state of wholly incoherent incompetence, Dr Guttmann snorted and suggested that, as there was no

further value in discussion, he had better see the patient. After greeting the patient and making inquiry of her feelings, his examination was conducted in silence, broken only by requests to the nurses to move the patient for him to make a thorough examination. At the conclusion of the examination, once back in sister's office, Dr Guttman looked at the registrar with a mixture of anger, frustration, and sorrow, and said, 'If I leave this woman here, she will die. I must take her to Stoke Mandeville. Get an ambulance and send her over immediately.'

Time passed, the registrar completed his orthopaedic training, becoming progressively less enthusiastic of technical surgery as time progressed, and progressively more interested in rehabilitation. At the conclusion of his orthopaedic training, he had the opportunity of training in rehabilitation medicine, and as his training in rehabilitation medicine and subsequent practice developed, he became progressively more interested in two subjects, the spine and paralysis. Ten years after the meeting in 1948, the man, now committed in his mind to the specialty of spinal injuries, had the opportunity to work with Dr Guttman at Stoke Mandeville. Within a few weeks, on a ward round one Monday morning, Dr Guttman turned to this newest member of his staff as he was walking to a bed into which a new patient had been admitted, and asked, 'Have you ever seen paraplegia from a mid-thoracic disc?' The answer, completely without search and with instant recall was, 'Yes, Sir. Just once. Mrs H----- B-----.' Dr Guttman's expression was, at first, one of complete puzzlement, then one could see recollection flowing back. He said one word, 'You!', and opened his arms to a warm embrace.

At that moment there came the first appreciation of the degree of impact that Dr Guttman had had on a young man 10 years earlier and of how subsequent events inexorably and inevitably led to that moment at Stoke Mandeville.

From that time it has been my pleasure and privilege to be Sir Ludwig's pupil, to attempt to carry his work and teachings into far distant places and, another 6 years later and 12 000 miles from Stoke Mandeville, Dr Guttman inscribed his portrait 'To my friend and colleague.'

It is my profound belief that the measure of a man is to be found in the way that his life and his work affects other people. In his work, Sir Ludwig has profoundly altered the quality of life and the expectation of life of an uncountable number of people throughout the world. He also had that divine spark of inspiration which enabled him to do so much more than just train young doctors, but also recruit disciples.

I trust that the foregoing will explain my choice of the quotation, 'Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers who begat us'.<sup>1</sup> I do indeed regard Sir Ludwig as my professional Father who begat me into the specialty which he so largely created. It is with a sense of immense gratitude that I recall my earliest acquaintance with Sir Ludwig and this gratitude makes me wish to recreate it for him and to share it with our colleagues. Sir Ludwig has led me to a professional life of great satisfaction and fulfilment, and it is my sincere hope that his celebration of his 80th birthday will be enhanced by this expression of gratitude and affection.

<sup>1</sup> The Apocrypha. *Ecclesiasticus* xlv. 1.