Editorial

Herrman Blumgart: An Appreciation

This is about Herrman Blumgart whom I have known and held in highest regard for more than forty years. We first met in London, England, in 1923, as graduates and research fellows in medicine. I picked two winners in that year, Papyrus, who won the Derby, and Herrman.

The complete story of the career of Dr. Herrman L. Blumgart would make a most interesting and inspiring one for medical students. A mild-mannered, soft-speaking, friendly, attractive young man, he impressed me greatly at our first meeting because he seemed to know exactly what he wanted to do in life, especially in the field of medicine. He had decided upon an academic career in internal medicine, with specialization in cardiovascular disease, and he had a definite plan how to prepare himself for it. His curriculum vitae and bibliography attest to the highly satisfactory fulfillment of his plan.

I have known few men who could engage simultaneously and effectively in so many activities. Investigator, clinician, teacher, member of many medical societies, traveler, lecturer, and editor-in-chief of an important journal—outstanding in all these categories—that has been the life of Herrman Blumgart. He has been the recipient of many honors, including The Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, for military service, and the Gold Heart Award of the American Heart Association.

Geographic separation kept us from close personal association in the United States, but our friendship continued through more than four decades. I began my first five-year period of service on the Editorial Board of Circulation in 1955, under the first editor-in-chief, Dr. Thomas M. McMillan. Dr. Blumgart inherited me in 1956, when he assumed the senior editorship, and I served under him for many years in this capacity. It is in this association that I got to know him best, because I became even more aware of his outstanding ability and his extraordinary capacity for work. From his associates and his assistants I learned about the inspirational quality of his teaching, as well as his great ability as a clinician and administrator, and from his writings I recognized the high quality of his research, both clinical and experimental.

Herrman Blumgart's success as editor-in-chief of Circulation was obvious from the outset. I greatly enjoyed and profited from my association with him in this work, and I am certain that all the associate editors would say the same. Although he flattered me generously, by stating how much my opinion of the worthiness of a manuscript meant to him, he did not hesitate to exercise his own capable, critical judgment in the final decision.
to accept or reject, and the uniformly excellent quality of the publications during the past decade attest to the accuracy of his judgment.

It is a great comfort to his many friends and associates that, although the termination of arbitrary periods of service has necessitated his retirement from several important positions, he will continue to be actively engaged in other endeavors, particularly as Special Consultant to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Harvard University.

Sir John Parkinson on Specialism and Research

As a cardiologist, my personal attitude towards further specialization can be simply stated. Each individual should be allowed to make his own choice, as he did when he chose the profession itself. Naturally he will seek and consider advice from his teachers though he is no longer at school. He may misjudge his own ability or the scope for his particular endeavour, but he has a right to choose the road he will take. A wise man—and that could mean a young man—should recognize his limitations, but he must follow his bent. The public is aware that cardiovascular disease is predominant in human mortality. Medicine has always been influenced by public opinion, and patients will surely claim the services not only of general cardiologists but also of special cardiologists who have exceptional experience in one variety of circulatory disease. . . .

. . . But must every ambitious graduate be forced by custom or authority to prosecute research in order to obtain a university post or to succeed as a practising cardiologist? Research ability used to be regarded as a rare gift, something of a phenomenon. . . . That is not the attitude today, though one must admit that it is largely the expansion of organized research that has transformed medical practice. My question concerns the universality of the capacity for research; and I almost believe that the true investigator, great or small, is born not made. That famous literary physician, Sir Thomas Browne, wrote: "Every man is not a proper Champion for Truth, nor fit to take up the Gauntlet in the cause of Verity." Here is a matter of policy and procedure in our profession which will have to be decided. In my view we encourage good men, inapt at original research, to sacrifice their time and energy upon it when they should be perfecting themselves as bedside physicians.—SIR JOHN PARKINSON: Circulation 11: 677, 1955.
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