EDITORIAL

Editorial.

INTERNATIONAL NEUROLOGICAL CONGRESS,
BERNE.

At the beginning of September, for the better part of a week, an International Neurological Congress will convene in Berne. The initial move in the matter came from the American Neurological Association, and the response from all the countries of the world in which neurologists and neurological societies are to be found has proved highly gratifying. So much is this the case that it has been decided to hold simultaneous sessions of the Congress in the afternoons in order to provide opportunities for all, or nearly all, the contributors to offer their papers to their confreres. Set discussions, in which numerous prominent neurologists have agreed to take part, will occupy the morning meetings. By common consent the subjects to be dealt with throughout belong strictly to neurology as understood by those who profess it, and neuro-surgical questions will also engage attention.

This is the first conference of its kind to take place since the War. Before that period similar neurological congresses had met on a few occasions, at intervals of several years—one, indeed, had been arranged for 1914. The fact that representative neurologists, whatever the relation of their respective countries to each other during the world conflict, are now meeting again for purposes of mutual edification and instruction must of itself bear promise of future gain to international comity. Nothing so far has been heard, we believe, of resumption of the series of international medical conferences which were a regularly recurring feature of pre-War medical life and which had been conducted with outstanding success, the last having been held in London in 1913. It may be hoped, however, that these will in due course come again into being. Each year, commencing not long after the close of the period of warfare, an interallied neurological congress has met in Paris, at the instigation of the Société de Neurologie, and on the last two or three occasions its title has been altered to the extent of substituting 'international' for 'interallied.' At these, it has been eminently
pleasing to find delegates from formerly opposed belligerent nations taking part amicably in the furtherance of neurological interests and knowledge. Evidently, then, the time was ripe for the step in advance now formally taken, from which nothing but mutual benefit should ensue.

Aside, however, from the purely scientific aspect of international gatherings of this kind, equal if not, indeed, greater significance attaches to the opportunity they furnish of meeting men and women in the flesh whose names only may have been known, whose reputations may have been estimated only by output of work; but actually to see and hear such exponents of neurology is always of peculiar interest and value. It is a curious circumstance that appreciation of an individual’s worth can not infrequently be properly gauged only when he is encountered personally; we all consciously or unconsciously depend for adequate understanding of the merits of scientific attainment to a large extent on what we glean by direct contact with the person concerned. Rightly or wrongly, we often pride ourselves on being able to sum up the value of a man’s contributions better after we have seen him and heard him speak. We take him, or we do not. If we are every now and then reminded that the artist and his work are separate, or separable, that consideration of the one should influence us neither favourably nor unfavourably in respect of the other, it is nevertheless legitimate to believe that his work is but the expression of what the artist has within him and that the two are not in point of fact dissociable. And the remark applies also to the scientific as well as to the world of artistry—perhaps with greater force. The reliability of the data in a scientific study cannot altogether be dissociated from what is learned of the author himself by means such as have been already outlined. To provide these means of intercourse and contact is assuredly one of the best of the raisons d’être for international meetings.

A number of the countries which may be considered to possess the advantages of size and cultural richness have long had recourse to annual conferences of their several neurological societies for the double purpose of pooling knowledge and of fostering the spirit of mutual friendliness and interest. Such conferences have been held by the American Neurological Association without a break for more than half a century, and the Gesellschaft Deutscher Nervenärzte has a record of over twenty years. Since the War, too, similar proceedings have characterised the activities of societies in distant parts, where formerly nothing of the kind was undertaken. Can we
regard the situation in England favourably when its position in the neurological sphere is given a glance? We have no cause for congratulation, be it fully and promptly admitted. The old Neurological Society of Great Britain, whose identity was merged in the Royal Society of Medicine, was in the habit of promoting an occasional provincial conference over one or two days, but for years none of a comparable kind has been held. Although the latter Society covers the whole field of medicine in its numerous sections, this has not prevented the development of distinct associations the prime feature of whose healthy growth is the conducting of annual meetings in different parts of the country. Without more than an allusion to the annual yearly congress of the British Medical Association, we may enumerate as somewhat more applicable to the point at issue those of the Association of Physicians, of British Surgeons, of Neurological Surgeons, of the Ophthalmological Society—and several more might be mentioned. Then why not an Association of British Neurologists? Surely there is room and to spare for the formation of such a group. The alternative would be for an annual meeting of the Neurological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine to take place outside London, but for several reasons which it is not here necessary to specify the former suggestion is clearly preferable. At any rate, England lags behind other nations if she does not possess a neurological body, representative of town and country, whose existence would have as its main justification the promotion of mutual neurological interest by a yearly meeting of a day or two, at which both scientific and social aspects would be borne in mind, and from which we firmly believe an ever renewed incentive to fan the flame of neurological knowledge would spring.
Editorial: INTERNATIONAL NEUROLOGICAL CONGRESS, BERNE.

J Neurol Psychopathol 1931 s1-12: 66-68
doi: 10.1136/jnpn.s1-12.45.66

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