1925–Annus Mirabilis

B.I. Hoffbrand

Editor – *Postgraduate Medical Journal*

Mention of the year 1925 does not immediately bring to mind stirring events. Seven years after the end of the Great War, and one year before the General Strike, the leader of a proscribed small right-wing German party, one Adolf Hitler, had just come out of Landsberg gaol, having served nine months following the Munich rising. *Mein Kampf* was still only a personal communication. However, a year that saw the 200th anniversary of the founding of Guy's Hospital, the opening by King George V of the British Medical Association's new house in Tavistock Square and, of course, the first issue of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* on 1st October cannot be other than vintage. It is surely only coincidence that the year also started with the densest fog seen in South East England for many years and ended with great floods.

Stanley Baldwin's second Conservative ministry had taken over in November 1924 after the fall of Ramsay MacDonald's first Labour government. Winston Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and presented his first budget in April 1925. Neville Chamberlain was Minister of Health. For both men the hour of destiny was yet to come with, let it be said, volume XIV of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*. The major problem faced by Baldwin's government was related to the poor economic situation and unemployment, a familiar enough scenario 60 years later, although not one to disturb the infant Mrs Margaret Thatcher born just 12 days after the *Journal*. To put history really back in the distant past, 1925 also saw the fourth successive County Cricket Championship win for Yorkshire. For those of the Yorkshire persuasion, these indeed were heady though perhaps rather blasé days. As Madame Tussaud's waxworks burnt down on 18 March 1925, it is apparent that not only do the mighty fall, but on occasions they melt.

The early issues of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* carried review articles and printed lectures as well as news of the programme of courses, lectures and teaching sessions arranged by the Fellowship of Medicine. These latter, as discussed previously (Hoffbrand, 1985), were a pioneering achievement for British postgraduate medicine. The *Lancet's* editorial of 10 October 1925, which we are grateful to be able to reproduce, makes interesting reading in the light of today's plethora of organized postgraduate medical training opportunities (Figure 1). The review articles,

in volume I of the *Journal*, which are recalled by the contributors to this 60th anniversary issue, provided an added dimension to the Fellowship's contribution to postgraduate medicine. Dr Geraint James (page 861) provides biographical snapshots of some of the original contributors to volume I, pillars of the Fellowship of Medicine and of the London medical establishment. Volume I of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* also carried, on page 53, an obituary to Sir John MacAlister, Secretary of the Royal Society of Medicine, and a driving force in the establishment of the Fellowship of Medicine, as well as of the R.S.M. itself, although not himself medically qualified. Amongst the more noteworthy medical deaths of 1925 were those of Sir James McKenzie, a supremely innovative clinical scientist and a founding father of cardiology, and Professor August von Wassermann of Berlin University.

One must confess that it would be possible to write at rather greater length about major original contributions that the *Journal* has not published in any one year than about those within its own pages. However, in 1925 (and for some years thereafter) the *Journal* did not publish original papers and of necessity we must look elsewhere. Perhaps the major discovery reported in 1925 was the observation of the beneficial effect of raw beef and liver in certain anaemias by Robscheyt-Robbins and Whipple. The following year Minot and Murphy published their classical paper on the results of treating pernicious anaemia with raw liver. Whipple, Minot and Murphy shared the 1934 Nobel prize in Medicine which, the records tell us, was not in fact awarded in our Annus Mirabilis. It is interesting to see that the *Medical Annual* for 1927 reports papers for the previous year proposing that pernicious anaemia is related to the salinity of the drinking water and also that it responds well in many cases to intravenous mercurochrome, but of raw liver – not a word. Major advances do not always look that way at the time – but then, raw liver does sound improbable when the outstanding associated abnormality is gastric achlorhydria. Conversely, what appeared at the time as a major description of a new disease by Lederer (1925) proved to be an account of a rag bag heterogeneous collection of haemolytic anaemias (Sir John Dacie, personal communication).

One clinical and pathological description that has

THE LANCET.

LONDON: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1925.

POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION.

IN a foreword to the first number of the *Post-Graduate Medical Journal* Sir WILLIAM HALE-WHITE compares the newly qualified doctor to a mariner setting out on a voyage over changing seas. For a time he is well served by the charts which his teachers have given him, but as he finds that the best of charts provided by others cannot meet the developments or emergencies with which he is confronted, he begins, consciously or unconsciously, to make charts for himself. And as the years pass he finds that he requires help in dealing with the new currents; truer soundings have made old observations obsolete, while fresh waters are opened which were uncharted in his pupillage. To provide opportunities for such revision is to raise the standard of medical work, and to meet this need alone justifies the establishment of post-graduate education in this country. The great mass of medical practice must be carried on by individuals largely upon their own responsibility, and it is a function very appropriately performed by the great London hospitals when they offer to their qualified men fresh inspiration in aims, methods, and ideals.

That such an offer evokes an enthusiastic response is shown by the success of the course of lectures given during last week-end at St. Mary's Hospital; an account of the proceedings will be found in another column, and similar developments in this direction at other centres are inevitable. The constituency to be assisted is ready to the hand, and on one side the material from which to draw the necessary teaching is present in superabundance. But while—if the simile is not being too much laboured—the general mariners may be expected to increase in number, and while the object-lessons are aggregated in miserable wealth in the metropolis, we are apt to forget that the pilots are in a most difficult position. Just as to get an accurate knowledge of special seas, and to train for an extra-master's certificate is not easy, except as the result of long preparation, so special teaching in medicine is not a fortuitous accomplishment. Further, many who possess the necessary qualities and gifts may not be available for their distribution; and the arrangements for the work are in London ill-organised because of the vast size of the metropolis, and, at bottom, because of the absence of a great clinical centre. The sound work of the Fellowship of Medicine can be estimated now that that body is issuing regularly a journal, which will be published monthly under the editorship of Dr. ADOLPHE ABRAHAM. For many years the Fellowship has done its best to remedy the defaults in London for post-graduate education, and has placed at the disposal of graduates a fine assortment of sound teaching, for English teachers are as good and as enthusiastic, given the appropriate milieu, as any European professors. But our great hospitals have a routine for the training of their undergraduate students which assort ill with post-graduate lecturing and demonstration, and all the experience of those who have thought long and worked hard at the subject points to the institution of a great clinical centre. Meantime the

Fellowship of Medicine will continue its useful ministrations. As we are reminded in its new organ, the Minister of Health has appointed a committee, with this reference: To draw up a practicable scheme of post-graduate medical education centred in London. The Committee is strongly constituted and has the situation left by the Athlone Committee in May, 1921, to deal with. The Athlone Committee recommended that a school attached to a hospital centrally situated in London should be devoted solely to post-graduate medical education, a school of the University of London being suggested. A meeting was summoned early in this year by the Fellowship of Medicine, at which free expression of opinion on the existing arrangements for post-graduate teaching was invited, when representatives of the Military and Naval Services expressed satisfaction with the arrangements made for their medical officers; but the conditions in the Services are special, and too much stress must not be laid upon success along this line, gratifying though it is.

A second foreword to the *Post-Graduate Medical Journal* is supplied by Sir BERKELEY MOYNIHAN, who deplores the readiness with which the practitioner—only too naturally—is content to practise on the medicine learned in student days, not realising the joy of dwelling in a land of advancing frontiers. He urges the necessity for practitioners, despite the over busy day to which he pays tribute, to find short periods for reading, as well as leisure to attend meetings of a medical society and the instructions of a post-graduate class, adding with regard to the last the wise comment that discussion and controversy are of the very spirit of scholarship and that comradeship with those who labour transforms competitors into colleagues. The great thing on which all are agreed, then, is that there should be opportunities for practitioners to keep abreast of recent knowledge by contact with those who have the ability and the willingness to teach. And in order to meet this great need of "keeping in touch" the inevitable conclusion is reached that in London, and, indeed, in other large cities, there should be a medical school for post-graduate workers. As far as London is concerned, the cost of providing such a centre, with lecture halls, laboratories, and perhaps a hostel where post-graduates could lodge, has caused the scheme perpetually to be set aside, but it is becoming more and more obvious that only by the foundation of a real post-graduate institute can London take up its right place as the centre of medical teaching not only for the metropolis but for the Empire, attracting also the keenest minds among foreigners. The ideal should be ever present.

Figure 1 Taken from the *Lancet*, 10 October 1925, by kind permission of the Editor.

stood the test of time is that of Nathan Edward Brill who reported three cases of giant follicular lymphoma as a previously unrecognized entity (Brill *et al.*, 1925). Douglas Symmer's paper two years later added confirmatory evidence for what has since become known as Brill-Symmer's disease. Although it is now appreciated that giant follicular lymphoma represents a spectrum of conditions of incurable malignancies of the centrocytes or centroblasts of the lymphoid follicle, Brill's description of his patients as having a new disease of generally good prognosis has proved to be correct and of lasting value (R.L. Souhami, personal communication). By a quirk of fate 1925, unhappily, was also the year in which Brill died at the age of 65.

In operative surgery, 1925 also saw the publication of some pioneering efforts. Sir Henry Souttar, in a paper entitled 'The Surgical Treatment of Mitral Stenosis', claimed a first in his chest wall flap thoracotomy approach to the heart, and in digital dilatation of the mitral valve through the left atrium. It is, perhaps, a pity that his patient clearly had dominant mitral regurgitation but she seems to have been better for the operation at the time Souttar wrote his paper. Sir Geoffrey Jefferson also published a case that appears to have been the first successful embolectomy in Britain, although there was already an encouraging record of success from Scandinavia.

Walter Dandy published an account of the operative procedure he devised for resection of the sensory root of the trigeminal nerve at the pons. Whilst a major advance, it did not have much impact on the treatment of trigeminal neuralgia due to the fact that it took years for neurosurgeons to learn to emulate the surgical skills of Dandy himself (Professor Lindsay Symon – personal communication). Nineteen twenty five was an important year for the parathyroids; Collip isolated parathyroid hormone and showed that it prevents tetany following removal of the parathyroid glands, and raises blood calcium concentration.

Mandl was the first to treat generalized osteitis fibrosa by removal of a parathyroid tumour.

These and other authors in 1925 had far fewer journals to which to submit their papers than have putative authors in 1985. In 1925, from the figures of titles taken by the National Library of Medicine in Washington, the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* was one of only some 2000 medical journals published. The comparable figure for medical journals in the early 1980s is approximately 22,000. Nonetheless, *The Annual Register of World Events* for 1925 records that 'one of the greatest difficulties in biological research is the vast amount of literature that accumulates'; it reported plans in America for the publication of 'Biological Abstracts'.

I ought not to close without recalling Dr (later Sir) Adolphe Abrahams, the first Editor of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*. He was a physician at Westminster Hospital with a major interest in gastroenterology, and is recorded in Munks Roll as having been an admirer of Sir Arthur Hirst. I was interested to see that he also wrote a book on 'Urinary Diseases'. I suspect he did not receive his knighthood for being Editor of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*. This came probably in recognition of his contribution as Consulting Medical Officer to the British Olympic Team for many years and as Dean of Westminster Hospital Medical School at the time of the opening of the new School in Horseferry Road in 1939. The elder brother of the late Harold Abrahams, Olympic Gold Medallist, he wrote about the physiology of training and was himself a keen runner. He is said to have been seen running round Regent's Park well into middle age. Perhaps now that the *Journal* is moving to the Royal College of Physicians in the Park his spirit, if in need of a breather, may take time off to look kindly on what the *Journal* is doing in 1985, and will continue doing, hopefully for many years to come.

References

- BRILL, N.E., BAEHR, G. & ROSENTHAL, N. (1925). Generalized giant follicle hyperplasia of lymph nodes and spleen: a hitherto undescribed type. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, **84**, 668.
- COLLIP, J.B. (1925). The extraction of a parathyroid hormone which will prevent or control parathyroid tetany and which regulates the level of blood calcium. *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, **63**, 395.
- COLLIP, J.B. & LEITCH, D.B. (1925). A case of tetany treated with parathyrin. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, **15**, 59.
- DANDY, W.E. (1925). Section of the sensory root of the trigeminal nerve at the pons. Preliminary report of the operative procedure. *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital*, **36**, 105.
- HOFFBRAND, B.I. (1985). The Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine and the Postgraduate Medical Journal. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, **61**, 1.
- JEFFERSON, G. (1925). Report of a successful case of embolectomy. *British Medical Journal*, **2**, 985.
- LEDERER, M. (1925). A form of acute haemolytic anaemia probably of infectious origin. *American Journal of Medical Science*, **170**, 500.
- MANDL, F. (1925). Therapeutischer Versuch bei Osteitis fibrosa generalisata Mittels Exstirpation eines Epithelkörperchen Tumors. *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*, **38**, 1343.

- MINOT, G.R. & MURPHY, W.P. (1926). Treatment of pernicious anaemia by a special diet. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, **87**, 470.
- ROBSCHIEIT-ROBBINS, F.S. & WHIPPLE, G.H. (1925). Blood regeneration in severe anaemia II. Favourable influence of

- liver, heart and skeletal muscle in diet. *American Journal of Physiology*, **72**, 408.
- SOUTTAR, H.S. (1925). The surgical treatment of mitral stenosis. *British Medical Journal*, **2**, 603.