

## OBITUARY

### José M. M. Fernández

I saw him for the last time a little more than a year ago in Geneva when he came to visit the World Health Organization. On that occasion we discussed the future of the International Leprosy Association, the agenda for the meeting of the Expert Committee on Leprosy of the World Health Organization scheduled for 1965 in Geneva, the WHO Leprosy BCG Trial in Burma, and other types of research that might provide a quicker solution for the leprosy problem. For three days Dr. Martinez, WHO medical officer, and I had the pleasure of his company, as well as that of his wife. When we took leave of each other, I never imagined that within a few days I would receive the news that he was gravely ill and that later I would learn that I would never see him again. Once more, plans and ideals were brought to nought by human fragility.

I knew Dr. Fernández for about thirty years. Over the years my admiration for the leprologist and dermatologist, and for his personal qualities, increased with our friendship.

Born in Tucuman, Argentina, September 4, 1902, Dr. Fernández took his high school course in the Colegio Nacional No. 1 in Rosario. He studied medicine in the Rosario Medical School of the Universidad Nacional del Litoral. After becoming Doctor of Medicine in April 1928, he started work in the Service of Dermatology of Professor E. P. Fidanza. Stimulated by Prof. Fidanza, he and Dr. S. Schujman had permission to use two old wards of the Carrasco Hospital to intern leprosy patients. This was the beginning of the now world famous school of leprology of Carrasco.

In 1932 a fellowship from the Patronato de Leprosos made it possible for him to visit the most important centers of leprosy control and research, including the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital at Carville in the United States; the Kalihi Hospital and leprosy colony on Molokai in Hawaii; the Culion Sanitarium, the San Lazaro Hospital in Manila, and the Eversley Childs Sanitarium and Cebu Skin Dispensary in Cebu in the Philippines; the Zensei Byoin near Tokyo and Aisei-en in Nagashima in Japan; the Sungei Buloh Leprosarium in the Malay States; the School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta in India; and several sanatoria, dispensaries and preventoria in São Paulo, Brazil.

In 1936 he was made Associate Professor of Dermatology, in Rosario. In 1938 he received another one-year fellowship to study skin pathology with Professor Civatte in Paris, and the pathology of leprosy with Professor Portugal in Rio de Janeiro and Professor

Büngeler in São Paulo. He had also a special research fellowship from the U.S. Public Health Service in 1952, and spent a year in Boston, undertaking research on bacteriology and inoculation of *M. leprae* with Dr. J. H. Hanks.

During his career, he devoted himself to different branches of leprology: clinical aspects, classification, therapy, and control of the disease, and especially the lepromin test and the immuno-allergic correlation between tuberculosis and leprosy. He put particular effort into investigation of the early lepromin reaction reflecting a state of hypersensitivity to the constituents of *M. leprae*, which, for many years now, has borne his name.

In 1939, after studying the correlation between the lepromin and tuberculin reactions in a group of persons in Paris, Fernández began using BCG vaccine to convert the Mitsuda reaction to positivity. His work raised the hope that such a vaccine might prevent leprosy. He referred to the possibility of developing resistance to *M. leprae* in healthy people by BCG vaccination, and recommended that this be investigated, particularly in contacts, since, if results were confirmed, a valuable preventive agent would become available.

Since then the use of BCG vaccination in the prevention of leprosy has been one of the most important subjects of research in leprology. If the results obtained in the conversion of the lepromin reaction are confirmed by field epidemiologic trials, a substantial change in the methodology of leprosy control will take place, and better results will be achieved in the protection of healthy populations, especially of children at risk of infection. It is hoped that the field trials initiated by Kinnear Brown in Uganda, and now supported by the British Medical Research Council, as well as the trial undertaken by WHO in Burma, may provide an answer on the value of BCG vaccine as an antileprosy agent.

Recognition of his work led to the election of Fernández first as Vice-President in 1958 and, in 1963, as President of the International Leprosy Association. He was an honorary member of many dermatologic and leprologic societies, Associate Editor of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY, and Contributing Editor of several scientific journals.

His activities were carried on with limited resources and only a small number of patients. In 1947 I visited the Hospital Carrasco in Rosario, Argentina, where he had a few dozen patients and a single room for himself and his assistants. With Latin-American optimism and sense of humor, this room was divided into about six small compartments by chalk lines on the floor, one for each physician. Laboratory facilities were also very restricted. In this hospital, Fernández carried out many important investigations, and also trained a group of leprologists. Theirs will be the serious responsibility of maintaining the high level of work and prestige attained under his direction.

Fernández maintained close relations with the World Health Organization. As a consultant he was a member of the Secretariat of the second meeting of the WHO Expert Committee on Leprosy (Geneva 1959) and Vice-Chairman of the Pan American Seminar on Leprosy (Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1963). Plans had been made for him to participate in the third meeting of the WHO Expert Committee on Leprosy held in Geneva from 27 July to 2 August 1965. He had received assistance from the World Health Organization for research on the standardization of lepromin and transmission of *M. leprae* to laboratory animals.

For 25 years, in addition to his other activities, Fernández occupied the Chair of Dermatology at the Medical School of the University at Rosario, Argentina. The teaching of leprology was an important part of his work there.

In speaking of his professional activities, I must pay tribute to Madame Fernández and the support she always gave him.

A man of strong faith, he was a practicing Catholic from early manhood until his death. Kind, gentle, and sensitive, with a sense of humor, he was an idealist and once gave up his post in the medical school in order to support his political views. In the thirty years of our friendship, we had an animated scientific discussion only once; this was in a meeting of the Committee on Immunology at the International Congress of Leprology in Madrid in 1953, concerned with the investigation of BCG and its use in the prevention of leprosy. Our difference of opinion at that time, however, did not shake our friendship, which deepened from year to year.

The death of J. M. M. Fernández represents a great loss to his family, friends, patients and the Argentine, as well as to the sciences of leprology and dermatology.

L. M. BECHELLI

[Editor's Note: Among many tributes to Dr. Fernández, several came to the office of the Editor of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY. Dr. Fernández' successor as President of the International Leprosy Association, Dr. Robert G. Cochrane, wrote an appreciation for the first number of THE JOURNAL to be published after Dr. Fernández' death (July-September 1965), and his predecessor as President, Dr. H. W. Wade, sent his own expression of sympathy, passing along to the Editor, at the same time, a biographical document he had received from Dr. Fernández' wife, Señora Franzini Herrera de Fernández, telling many facts of her husband's life. Madame Fernández communicated also with the Editor directly several times during Dr. Fernández' illness, and after his death. From these sources the Editor has picked out a few items to supplement those to which Dr. Bechelli has drawn attention. Madame Fernández' account of Dr. Fernández' steadfast resistance during the Peron totalitarian regime, was particularly moving. It meant loss of both academic and hospital positions. It is worth noting that with the restoration of democratic practice, in what might well have been a compensatory action, Dr. Fernández was appointed Rector of the Universidad Nacional del Litoral. Madame Fernández wrote at length of his devotion to his obligations as consultant to the WHO and the many trips he made in that capacity, and those he planned for a future that was not to be. That work, as well as leprology in his own country, was close to his heart.]