

OBITUARY

Stuart G. Spickett

1932-1966

Dr. Stuart Goronwy Spickett, University Lecturer in Genetics, University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Emanuel College, died of cancer on 22 September 1966, at the early age of 34. For financial reasons he entered Sheffield University at the late age of 25, after spending the previous years in industry, as an alpine guide, and in a technical post in a dermatology department of a London hospital, saving money to go to the University. He moved to Professor Thoday's Department of Genetics, Cambridge, three years later, with a first-class honors B.Sc. in Zoology. The subsequent six years, which sadly turned out to be the whole of his postgraduate career, were spent in the Genetics Department at Cambridge. Entering the department with a Medical Research Council scholarship, he took his Ph.D. degree in 1964 and in 1965 became University Lecturer in Genetics and Fellow of Emanuel College.

Undaunted by prolonged illness, and with unbounded enthusiasm and energy, Dr. Spickett made substantial and important contributions to science and particularly to genetics. His breadth of interest and ability enabled him to contribute significantly in a period of only six years to four relatively unrelated fields. In the field of parasitology he studied mites, particularly *Demodex folliculorum*. He carried out important work on the genetics of *Drosophila*, showing that some of the genes affecting a metric character could, contrary to general belief, be shown to have a clear-cut qualitatively different developmental effect. His two particular fields of interest were genetics and endocrinology, and here by brilliantly applying and combining his new ideas and technics he showed the importance of genetic control on hormonal variation among populations of normal mice. His impact in this field is indicated by the fact that the Society for Endocrinology asked him to organize an international symposium in "Endocrine genetics" in Cambridge in March 1966, the proceedings

of which will be published soon under his editorship. Fourthly was his interest in leprosy and in particular the contribution genetics could make to understanding the epidemiology of this disease. At the time of his death he had published 20 papers in these various fields; seven more were in press, and nine were left in preparation, to be completed by the coauthors.

All of us in the field of leprosy are grateful that in such a short research career Dr. Spickett found time to apply his particular skills to an analysis of possible genetic factors in the epidemiology of leprosy. His concern with this field was first stimulated by Dr. R. G. Cochrane. Dr. Spickett's interest in *Demodex folliculorum*, led Dr. Cochrane to indicate, on the basis of the ecology of this particular arthropod ectoparasite how it could be a possible vector of leprosy. With his usual clarity of thought and presentation Spickett wrote a series of papers on genetic factors in leprosy in *Leprosy Review* and a chapter in Cochrane and Davey's "Leprosy in Theory and Practice." These and other publications showed from the data he analyzed that a human genetic factor is involved in the epidemiology of leprosy and provided facts for others to pursue.

Many of us in the field of leprosy benefitted personally from discussions with him when he attended the Ciba Study Group on Leprosy Research in London in 1963 and the Eighth International Congress of Leprology in Rio de Janeiro in 1963. My own first contact with him, which fortunately developed into a lasting friendship, epitomizes his dynamic approach to research. In late 1962, having apparently just seen the preliminary program of the Ciba Meeting, and having noted that our group at the National Institute for Medical Research, London, were interested in experimental leprosy in mice, he telephoned me late one Saturday morning to say that he was coming up on Monday to discuss with me the genetic implications of our findings!—R. J. W. REES