

CORRESPONDENCE

This department is for the publication of informal communications that are of interest because they are informative and stimulating, and for the discussion of controversial matters.

Polar Concept in Leprosy

TO THE EDITOR:

I should be grateful for the opportunity to supplement, by some personal recollections, your recent review of the history of leprology (this JOURNAL 41:2, 1973) in regard to immunopathology.

Hansen laid a good foundation for the truly biological binary classification of leprosy in 1895, and Jadassohn buttressed it in 1898 by his description of tuberculoid histologic patterns in leprosy, but in 1931 most leprologists were still committed to a largely anatomical classification, as exemplified in the cutaneous-neural system adopted at the Leonard Wood Memorial Congress in that year.

In 1938, F. E. Rabello, Jr. published (in Portuguese) in the ARQUIVOS DE HIGIENE (8:57-76) the positive view that fully developed cases of lepromatous leprosy, on the one hand, and tuberculoid, on the other, stand at opposite poles biologically. Said, he, "there are two exactly opposed forms, which we designate 'polar': the lepromatous, and the tuberculoid." The same concept was developed by him in the same year in an article in the BULLETIN SOCIETE FRANCAISE DE DERMATOLOGIE (9823-9827, 1938). Nevertheless, at the Cairo Congress in that year, the "polar" concept was resisted by Wade and Klingmuller, and rejected by the delegates.

Despite subsequent support of Rabello's proposal by Pardo-Castello and Tiant and by W. Buengeler in 1943, and by Tilden and me in 1944, the Havana Congress convened in 1948 in an atmosphere generally hostile to Rabello's polar concept. The English and Indian leprologists were particularly cool toward it. The chairman of the committee on classification was Vicente Pardo-Castello, and the co-secretaries were Jose M. M. Fernandez of Argentina and the undersigned, of the U.S. They were all proponents

of Rabello's view. The report, as adopted, read in part: "... the classical division of leprosy into two types, 'polar' (Rabello, 1938) in their essential characteristics... be recognized and maintained, and that they be designated lepromatous and tuberculoid..."

Rabello's polar concept is gaining a new dimension due to its ample confirmation in terms of immunopathological connotations. It is then clear to whom belongs the priority for the polar concept, whichever the name used, as "polar system" or "dichotomy."

The Latin-American leprologists Souza Lima, Alayon, and Rabello (1941-1943) had introduced a new group in Latapi's sense (as opposed to type) of cases which they designated *incharacterística*. It was pointed out that the symbol for this group, "I" would have to be "U" if we transliterated the word into English as "uncharacteristic." It was I who proposed at the Havana Congress that we substitute the approximate translation of "indeterminate," to preserve the letter designation. The committee and the Congress accepted this suggestion, along with the "polar" concept as proposed by Rabello.

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[Comment: *We are pleased to have this historical clarification from the memory of Dr. Arnold who was an active participant in the events described; particularly so since the early significant publications of Dr. F. E. Rabello, Jr. are sometimes lost sight of by English language readers since these works were in Portuguese and French. Dr. Rabello's perceptiveness and persistence of conviction clearly played a major role in laying that groundwork of basic understanding on which later advances such as Lowe's elaboration on the immunologic dichotomy which*

led toward a recognition of the many, now recognized variations in the expression of humoral antibody immunity versus cell-mediated immunity in the polar types. It is as an old Chinese saying has it, "An earlier generation blazes a trail on which a later generation follows."—O.K.S.]