

EULOGY OF MR. E. GAUCHER

Paul Guijt, February 28, 2022.

January 25, 1918, the French professor of medicine Ernest Gaucher died. He is especially remembered for describing Gaucher disease. He notably was a member of the French Academy of Medicine, and was received as an officer in the French Legion of Honor. The Great War was ending that year, a pandemic was raging.

At his funeral a speech was given by Antoine Marfan, the pediatrician that first described Marfan's syndrome.

Now follows my translation of

Marfan, A. "Obsèques de M. E. Gaucher." *Bulletin de l'Académie nationale de médecine*, 1918 :4, 79-82.

Mr. Marfan read the speech he made, on behalf of the Academy, at the funeral of Mr. E. Gaucher.

On behalf of the Academy of Medicine, to which he belonged since 1910, I come to greet the mortal remains of Ernest Gaucher.

It was with painful surprise that we learned that in full intellectual strength, after a short illness, our colleague had just died. Those who, like me, were attached to him by ties tied for a long time, feel a deep sadness.

My memories of Gaucher are very old: they date back more than thirty-five years. In those days, the students who were preparing for the boarding school competition met in groups, and each of these groups placed itself under the voluntary direction of a practicing intern who drew up a work program for them, and, all the weeks, had them explain the questions studied. Gaucher led one of these boarding school conferences and had great success there. It was marvelous to hear him argue the candidate who had just spoken. What clarity he brought to his criticism, what precision, what accuracy, what gifts for showing the essential points of a question! I had the honor of being part of his conference and I cannot estimate too highly what I owe him. However, the qualities that Gaucher showed at the end of his internship, he manifested throughout his career.

Doctor of medicine and head of a medical clinic in 1882, hospital doctor in 1886, he was appointed associate professor in 1892. Although he was mainly trained in general medicine, he asked to fulfill the functions of associate professor of the chair of dermatology. It is because, during his internship at the Saint-Louis hospital, he had devoted himself to the study of this branch of medicine, and his master Hillairet, who had been able to appreciate his rare qualities, had chosen him as collaborator of a *Theoretical and Practical Treatise on Skin Diseases*, which he began to publish in 1881.

From the beginning of his aggregation, Gaucher gave lectures on dermatology in the department of Professor A. Fournier: he attracted a large crowd of students, seduced by the clarity of his teaching. Also, when, in 1902, Fournier retired, Gaucher was well suited to replace him and was he prepared to receive the heavy succession of this Master, whose work appears to us greater as time goes by. During the fifteen years that he occupied this chair, Gaucher retained all his brilliance.

The teaching with which he was charged explains why the greatest number of his works have had as their object dermatology and syphiligraphy. But - and this was one of the reasons for his superiority - our colleague only specialized definitively after having studied general medicine extensively; it owes him very important research.

Among his work in general medicine, mention should be made of the thesis he defended in 1882 on primary epithelioma of the spleen, a condition not yet described. Although he had observed only one case of it, on the first try, he specified its characteristics with such clarity that it has since been designated under the name of

"Gaucher's disease". It is also important to recall his work on auto-intoxication by nitrogenous extractive matter and on the nephritis which may result from it.

These studies on auto-intoxication served him to tackle certain dermatological problems. They led him to consider the arthritic or herpetic diathesis as an auto-intoxication by the waste products of the disassimilation of nitrogenous substances, and to regard the dermatoses attributed to this diathesis, in particular eczema, as autogenic toxidermias. He argued that the sudden disappearance or cure of these can have internal repercussions, thus rejuvenating the old doctrine of diathetic metastases.

He then extended this conception. He admitted that in most constitutional diseases, as well in diathetic auto-intoxication as in exogenous intoxications, such as lead poisoning, or in certain chronic infections, such as syphilis, the nitrogenous disassimilation deviates from its normal type; this deviation is revealed by the lowering of the azituristic coefficient.

Gaucher also did a lot of work on syphilis. I confine myself to mentioning his pathogenetic study on glycosuria and albuminuria which are observed in the secondary phase of this infection, and his work on anemia and jaundice during this same period, disorders which he has shown to be hemolysis is the common cause. Lastly, in recent times, he endeavored to connect with syphilis a number of affections which hitherto seemed independent of it.

As a whole, Gaucher's work appears to us as that of a clinician who relies on chemistry and microscopy data and on experimental facts. His character seems natural when we know that he was the intern of our venerable colleague Mr. Bucquoy and the head of the Potain clinic, that is to say of two doctors who trained several of the contemporary masters of the French clinic, and that he was also the pupil of Charles Robin and Bouchard from whom he acquired a taste for laboratory research.

After this rapid indication of the original research of our colleague, I must add that the preparation of his teaching led him to publish important didactic works, among others a *Treatise on skin diseases*, in two volumes, a popular brochure on the treatment of syphilis, and a *Précis de syphiligraphie* in collaboration with his pupils, all the volumes of which have not yet appeared.

The work left by Gaucher is therefore very considerable. This is not the time to pass a final judgment on it. But we can believe that time will show that it contains solid and durable parts. What we will always find there is the concern for order and clarity and the concern to prune everything that is not essential.

It was one of Gaucher's characteristics that he did not fear discussion. He brought liveliness and sometimes even passion to it; perhaps he happened to let himself be carried away a little too far. But what must be said out loud is that, in the controversy, he was animated only by concern for what he believed to be true and just.

Besides, those who knew him well know that this polemicist was an upright, good, benevolent man; they can also say that nothing was easier than to make him come back from his prejudices.

Confident in his vigor and in his capacity for work, Gaucher had not left the military health service at the age when he could have been removed from the ranks. Also, when the war broke out, he found himself provided with a rank which enabled him to be entrusted with the management of one of the great military hospitals in Paris. He brought to the accomplishment of his new functions, so complex and so delicate, the ardent conscience which he put into everything. Had he assumed too much of his strength? We cannot tell. But he did his duty, all his duty.

He leaves too soon to have seen the dawn of a repairing day; but, at his last hour, he was able to testify that he died at his post, a man of heart and a good Frenchman.

(Applause)