

OBITUARY

DR. YELLAPRAGADA SUBBA ROW

THE American press has paid glowing tributes to the work and achievements of Dr. Yellapragada Subba Row, noted Indian physiologist and Director of Research for the Lederle Laboratories Division of the American Cynamid Company, who died recently at his home in Pearl River, New York, at the age of 52.

"In the death of Dr. Subba Row," says the *New York Times*, "medical research has lost one of its commanding figures". Few laymen, the paper says, knew directly of Dr. Subba Row's work—his contributions to the control of certain types of anæmia, his researches in nutrition and his investigations of drugs—but "many advances in modern medicine stand as monuments to his genius and countless thousands will benefit for years to come from investigations he set in motion and supervised".

Dr. Subba Row, according to the *New York Herald Tribune*, was regarded by many scientists as "one of the most eminent medical minds of the century". He was interested in everything from liver extracts to orchids and his work in the last twenty-five years carried him to "pinnacles reached by few medical investigators".

Born in Madras, Subba Row received his Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Science degrees from the Madras University and then took the degree of Doctor of Tropical Medicine from the University of London. He went to America in 1923 and later became an American citizen.

He was a Harvard University Fellow from 1925 to 1928 and a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow from 1928 to 1930. For a period he was an orderly at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. His work done, he would return to his laboratory where he and other medical students would sit far into the night discussing problems in chemistry and related fields. At Harvard he studied Biochemistry under the late Dr. Otto Folin and eventually took a Ph.D. degree in the subject.

In 1936 Dr. Row became an instructor and in 1938 an Associate Professor of Biological Chemistry at the Harvard Medical School. In 1940 he was appointed Associate Director of Research for the Lederle Laboratories. Two years later he became the Research Director.

Among Dr. Subba Row's important researches were investigations which helped to revolutionise the modern concept of muscular contraction. He evolved new methods of phosphorus determination which helped to lead eventually to the discovery of organic phosphorus compounds in muscle. This discovery has thrown new light on the mechanism of muscular contraction. He also won distinction by isolating certain liver factors which resulted in the development of such products as folic acid, teropterin and other drugs. Further research in the folic acid compound led to the discovery of a number of substances related to it, like Vitamin M, Vitamin BC, Vitamin B-10, B-11 and others. These researches produced a new approach to the treatment of cancer and pernicious anæmia through nutrition.

Dr. Row aided the production of penicillin and streptomycin in large quantities during the war. He and his associates also produced the wonder drug auriomycin used in the treatment of infections which do not respond to penicillin or streptomycin. Another major achievement, one of his last, of Dr. Row was the perfection of a new specific—Hetrazan—for the cure of filariasis, a tropical disease, said to be affecting some 20 crores of people in India, Far East, North and Central Africa.

Always eager to learn, Dr. Row's curiosity was insatiable. Three years ago he decided he would systematically examine the world around him to fit together a few missing pieces in his experience. He learnt to drive an automobile. Then he learnt to ride horse. Then he learned to fly an aeroplane; won his license and made a number of solo flights. Then he became interested in bowling and tried to work out the most efficient methods of scoring strikes on the bowling alley. And in recent months he had focussed his attention on orchids and was trying to devise new ways to make them grow faster.

Dr. Subba Row, says the *New York Times*, was one of those remarkable individuals who, from time to time, becomes seriously worried about his ignorance and tries to do something about it. "Matched against the average person, or indeed the average

member of the medical profession and allied sciences, Dr. Subba Row might well have qualified as a repository of universal knowledge. But that would not have satisfied him. He yearned to know more."

Surviving are his mother, a sister and a brother, all residing in India.

SIR K. RAMUNNI MENON

DIWAN Bahadur Sir K. Ramunni Menon, M.A. (Cantab.), LL.D. (Madras), passed away on 14-1-1949. He was born at Trichur on 14-9-1872. He was educated in the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam and later in the Presidency College, Madras. He went to England for higher studies in Zoology and joined Christs College, Cambridge. When he returned to India, he was appointed to the Madras Educational Department in 1898. He became Professor of Zoology in the same College in 1910 and continued in that capacity till 1927 when he retired. In a College which was noted for discipline in those days Prof. Ramunni Menon's Department held the field. His lectures on the most difficult subjects in Zoology were characterised by lucidity of expression. He loved to see his students do their practical work with cleanliness and accuracy. He was keen on research and for several years interested himself in the study of certain forms of coelenterates. He was cautious to a degree with the result that he was not able to produce that amount of research work that one might have expected. His administrative duties also weighed him down and he could not devote enough time to his research work. He himself felt this and this in a way made him anxious to create conditions for others which would enable them to make substantial contribution to Zoology in South India. This idea took firm possession of him about the year 1927 when he began to think seriously of establishing University research laboratories not only for Zoology but also for Botany and Biochemistry. He planned out the three laboratories and as Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University during 1928-34, he was

able to put through the scheme and had the satisfaction of seeing its completion before he laid down office. It is to his great exertion and forethought that we have these three research laboratories. Zoology in South India owes a great debt of gratitude to him.

The new University buildings were also completed during his term of Vice-Chancellorship. It has been said with justice that this fine pile of buildings has been due to a great extent to the way in which he husbanded the resources of the University before and during the construction of the buildings. He was nominated life-member of the Senate of the Madras University. He was also nominated member of the Madras Legislative Council on two occasions. He represented the Madras University at the Congress of the Universities of the Empire at Edinburgh, in 1931. He was Chairman of the Inter-University Board, 1932-33, and member, Council of State, India, from 1934 till the Council was dissolved.

Sir K. Ramunni Menon was not one of those people who courted lime-light. His field rather lay more particularly in honest unostentatious work. He believed in hard work and expected others to put forth their very best endeavour. He was conservative in his views and believed in the orderly development of society.

After retirement he interested himself in music and the study of Samskrit. He loved his native tongue, Malayalam. He lived a very useful and strenuous life and those who know him well, his students and others, will always remember him with respect and hold him in great esteem.

R. G.