

E D I T O R I A L
LABORATORY OF ENTOMOLOGY, FIFTY YEARS OF ACTIVITY

1937 - 1987

It may be said, without the slightest doubt, that the decade of the thirties is a period of the highest significance for the study of the endemic diseases in Brazil. The country in general, and the territory of S. Paulo State in particular, found itself involved in a struggle with malaria and yellow fever epidemics and with a high level of other endemic diseases carried by arthropods. After a further half-century the situation has become, in a general sense, very similar. The invasion of the Brazilian territory by vector species originating in other regions, and the worsening of endemic diseases previously considered as being under control, constitute an over-all picture which recalls the situation of the thirties. But however that may be, at that time one witnessed the growth of interest in studies of insect vectors of diseases, concentrating on the aspects which are basic and peculiar to our environment and up to that time either little known or totally unknown.

The beneficial influence of the presence of Nelson Davis and Raymond Shannon made itself felt in the increase of more intensive studies. As from the initial years of the decade, in the then Institute of Hygiene, the present-day School of Public Health of the University of S. Paulo, systematic entomological research owed its development to the leading action of John Lane and Paulo C.A. Antunes, and to the participation of others such as Augusto L. Ayroza Galvão, Renato R. Correia, José de O. Coutinho and Nelson L. Cerqueira. The first studies date from this period, and bear the stamp of the Rural Hygiene and Parasitology section. From then onwards entomological studies figured ever more largely and their individuality was definitively established on June 16, 1937, when the Entomological Collection was started. The opening text of its first registering book stands as the birth certificate of the Laboratory of Entomology, at the present time a part of the Department of Epidemiology.

During its fifty years of uninterrupted activity various specialists have worked in it, considerable human resources have been trained and scientific production has never ceased to grow. As well as the publication of numerous original articles, comprehensive themes have formed the objectives of monographs and treatises. One may mention, in chronological order, the monographs published on sabetins mosquitoes, of the neotropical culicidae fauna, of the culicoides sandflies of the same region, and the treatise on medical entomology.

The Laboratory of Entomology took an active part, on various occasions, in public health campaigns for control of endemic diseases. Remarkable, in the thirties and forties, were the fight against yellow fever and for the eradication of African anopheles in the Northeast of Brazil. In the fifties and sixties it took the leading part in the training development of the human resources for the malaria eradication campaign, and in the seventies it cooperated efficiently with state service for the control and elimination of the trypanosomiasis transmission by triatominae bergs in the S. Paulo State.

Its pioneering spirit was, and is still, remarkable and evident in various basic studies on epidemiological aspects of insect-borne diseases of our environment, as also in the recognition and identification of vector insects. Over-all these years it is to its credit to have contributed significantly to such fundamental knowledge as: the transmission of sylvan yellow fever, the identification of the regional aspects of malaria transmission, the epidemiological picture of residual cutaneous leishmaniasis, the existence of annual generation in triatominae life-cycle, the hidden or developing domiciliation of culicidae. There may be added the taxonomic studies which reach a high level of production at the present time.

Nowadays the Laboratory of Entomology presents various fields of activity. It possesses a taxonomy laboratory annexed to the Entomological Collection. The culicidology field has a laboratory for determination and breeding and another of serology for the purpose of the identification of blood ingested and which has an associated animals rearing section. This field of studies also possesses a field-station in the town of Pariquera-Açú, with a supporting laboratory, where field observations on the culicidae domiciliation are carried out. Another field is that of hemipterology with a laboratory for biological studies, as well as a field-station in the Araraquara town where there is an insect rearing laboratory for the maintenance and development of triatominae colonies, and where field observation on the ecology of these vectors is carried out. A third area is represented by a laboratory for the identification and study of phlebotominae sandflies.

As it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary the Laboratory of Entomology of the School of Public Health has many motives for feeling satisfied with the considerable scientific heritage which it has produced for the country. However, this feeling of fulfilment does not arise so much from the way that has already been traversed as from that which still awaits it certainly longer and even more productive.

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