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Antoni Rosner (1831–1896)

History regards Antoni Rosner as one of the pioneers of Polish dermatology and this is a fully justified opinion. Overcoming numerous obstacles which would have easily put off many, he is firmly a part of the history of both Cracow and the Cracow Academy. He was born on the 9th of November 1831 in Tarnów, into the family of Dawid and Hessa née Ohrenstein.

Antoni's father was the head of a ward at the Sanguszko Hospital in Gumniska (Tarnów) and dabbled quite successfully in surgery. He had extensive medical experience, willingly helped people of various estates, beliefs and financial status, gaining their respect and appreciation in the process. For his commitment and placing his own life in danger during successive cholera epidemics he was granted honorary citizenship of Tarnów. For many years he sat on the Tarnów town council, later becoming a district councillor. When in 1881 he celebrated 50 years of professional service, a huge event was organised in his honour, with numerous guests. The then bishop of Tarnów Józef Pukalski sent him personal wishes and greetings to mark the event. Antoni was to be heavily influenced by his mother, Hessa, the daughter of the surgeon Jakub Ohrenstein. It was she who ensured that her children received an appropriate education and upbringing from the very first years. Antoni had three brothers. Maksymilian and Ignacy were to become doctors in the future. August chose a military career and was to earn his officer's stripes in

the Austrian army. He fought during the January Uprising in 1863 and died at the hands of Russian soldiers

The parents made sure that their children grew up respecting Jewish traditions as well as being deeply patriotic and having a love of Poland. They were instilled with a need for social service, selflessness and a willingness to sacrifice. These were principles to which future generations of Rosners were to stay true.

Antoni became a pupil of the secondary school in Tarnów after an initial education at home, which he finished in 1847. Even then he was set on studying medicine, but in accordance with the then functioning regulations first he had to study philosophy for two terms. In 1848 he could enter the Medical Faculty of Vienna University. He finished this in 1853 and two years later had gained his Ph.D. He supplemented his education with an MSc in Obstetrics, while in 1861 a second doctorate, this time in surgery.

Antoni Rosner was to study and see practice, gaining his first experience in his chosen profession, at the anatomicopathological school of Karl von Rokitansky, known in the history of medicine under the name of the Younger Viennese School or also the Second Viennese School. Eminently associated with it is, besides the already mentioned Rokitansky, first and foremost the 'father of modern dermatology' – Ferdynand Hebra. Being his assistant he had the possibility to become acquainted with the fundamentals of this then relatively new science on skin diseases, in particular the diagnosis, classification and then popular use of venereological therapy. He was to prepare the significant work for the times *Ergebnisse der Impfung mit syphilitischen Sekreten* jointly with Hebra, which was well received and quickly became one of the fundamental venereological works. For it was venereology that was to be the main subject of clinical interest for the young doctor and hence the decision to take up a position at the clinic of Professor Karl Ludwig Sigmund, a leading specialist of the day in the field, was an obvious one. Having gained considerable practical experience in the clinics and hospitals of Vienna he decided to move to Cracow. Here in April 1862, as the first in the history of the Medical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University, he was to pass his post-doctoral degree (*habilitacja*) in dermatology and venereology on the basis of his thesis *Ueber das Verhältniß der weichen Schankers zur Syphilis* (Kraków 1862), which also had its Polish translation appearing under the title *Stosunek szankra do zarazy syfilitycznej* [The use of chancre on a syphilitic epidemic]. He studied in it the characteristics of the soft syphilitic ulcer known as a chancre and the development of syphilis. The thesis was well received and highly rated, with Rosner himself given the position of university associate professor in Dermatology. With this he found himself within the circle of the so-called Viennese, that is amongst those members of the faculty council who

had studied medicine in the Habsburg capital. And this was an elite band, enough to mention the eminent anatomicopathologist Alfred Biesiadecki or the all-round academic and most excellent internist Józef Dietl.

The start of A. Rosner's work in Cracow was as promising as it was difficult. The opportunity to have classes with the students at the garrison hospital at Wawel, as well as at the syphilitic diseases ward of the Holy Spirit Hospital, was everything to him. He gave lectures thanks to Józef Dietl's kindness in the building of the Jagiellonian University's Clinic of Internal Diseases for, at the time, Rosner did not have his own surgery space! Dermatology, one may say, 'drifted around various corners' and Rosner had the greatest difficulties with the teaching of venereology. Sexually transmitted diseases were considered by many outsiders as 'highly indecent'. Diseased women were branded as 'harlots,' sick men as 'lechers.' Often to be added to the troubles caused by a constant lack of finance was social aversion. It even transpired that Rosner's classes and lectures at the Holy Spirit Hospital were suspended by the Imperial Representative Commission. Only the decisive intervention of the Medical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University resulted in their resumption in the summer of 1863 after a few months of being suspended. Simultaneously, thanks to the efforts of Karl von Rokitansky himself, the authorities in Vienna ordered the Holy Spirit Hospital to be allocated 20 beds for the needs of dermatology in Cracow. And so it was to be only in October 1863 that the clinic started functioning and receiving its first patients. Already 187 patients had been treated during the course of its first year, not counting those dealt with as out-patients. The figure of 124 students who registered for Rosner's lectures clearly shows the high level of his lecturing. This was not, however, to represent the end of hardships. He was plagued by a lack of sufficient funds for the necessary equipment, textbooks, and to pay the salaries of his assistants for the government in Vienna wavered in its official recognition and subsequent registration of the new clinic. Hence its head worked not only without being paid but in addition he was often forced to use his own money to settle the most pressing bills! From 1866 for the next five years – for there was no other way – Aleksander Zarewicz was to help the clinic's head on a totally voluntary basis. He was later to become the head of the skin and venereal diseases ward of the Holy Spirit Hospital and finally a full professor of the Jagiellonian University. Zarewicz was the first of many of A. Rosner's pupils.

Despite the enthusiasm and commitment of young people, including students, such conditions meant that things were hard work; even the simplest and most obvious matter turned out to be problematic and presented all sorts of obstacles. Pressure exerted by the Medical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University resulted in Rosner being nominated a professor in Dermatology in 1867, although it was only to be in the spring of 1871 that the long awaited

Department of Syphilitic and Skin Diseases was opened, and Rosner was to obtain his first post for a full-time assistant and his first annual salary. Despite having many of his own problems he did not turn down the proposal of being the temporary head of the university's Department and Clinic for Internal Diseases, following the death of Karol Gilewski. He was to perform this function until 1875 and, when the Holy Spirit Hospital was closed in 1879, Rosner was given clinical premises which covered 4 wards, as well as a lecture room in the building of the St. Lazarus Hospital. He was to treat, cure and teach in such conditions for the next 15 years and, in recognition of his service, he was appointed a full professor in title in 1887 becoming in fact a full professor in 1894. Then he also managed to conduct renovation and repair work and to rebuild the clinic, open the first real clinical laboratory as well as outpatient facilities. Unfortunately it was not to be for Rosner to fully make use of these conditions as he died of a heart attack on the 25th of August 1896.

Antoni Rosner did not leave behind any significant academic works and this was not because he had neither the talent nor desire to do so but simply because he just did not have the conditions to produce such works. He was to remain totally faithful to medical practice, constantly trying to secure funds to keep the clinic open, educate young doctors and involved in university teaching, to all of which he gave his heart, knowledge and creativity. A valuable document of his medical service are his casuistic works, which were to be found first and foremost in the print of *Przegląd Lekarski* and *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Krakowskiego*. The majority of them deal with venereology, particularly the diagnostics of skin lesions tested in relation to syphilis. Of interest is the presentation of A. Rosner's cooperation with the eminent anatomicopathologist Alfred Biesiadecki, aimed at combining clinical observations with pathomorphological findings. Of particular significance, if one is to sum up and critically evaluate the knowledge of the day, is Rosner's lecture given during the 3rd Symposium of Polish Doctors and devoted to syphilis lesions in the lungs. It was published in full in 1881 by *Przegląd Lekarski*.

The professor was also known for frequently engaging in discussion during the sittings of the Cracow Medical Association, conducting patient demonstrations, describing the most interesting cases and analysing progress in treatment techniques. As August Kwaśnicki, paediatrician, veteran social activist, chairman of the Cracow Medical Association and editor of *Przegląd Lekarski*, wrote about him in his obituary:

There are two types of professor clinician: one as if pressured by the creative spirit spend their life in laboratories working on pushing science forward and it is to knowledge that they owe their further development: the second type being conscious of the great social tasks of the passing moment strictly promote themselves through didactic work,

they enthusiastically and with love educate generations of resourceful, decisive and ingenious practitioners. The first write while the second type mould the minds of those who will surely write. Model examples of the first type were Laennec, Škoda, Hebra; of the second: Trousseau, Oppolzer, Chałubiński. If we were to voice our own personal convictions as to which category of clinician has precedence we would find ourselves in problems in the choice between praising the God-given genius of the former and the service that emanates from the fulfilment of obligations in the case of the latter. The deceased Prof. Rosner belonged to the second category: he wrote little but went hand-in-hand with developments in science, and in particular within his specialism, and combining the talent of a clinician he was the model of a most excellent teacher. (A. Kwaśnicki, *Dr Antoni Rosner*, p. 482)

Antoni Rosner was an expert methodologist and teacher, something fully confirmed in the account of one of his pupils, Ferdynand Obtulowicz. He had served for a time as Assistant at the UJ Clinic of Skin and Venereological Diseases, and was later to specialise in problems connected with hygiene and serve as the Chairman of the Hygienic Society in Lvov. He said of his dead professor: 'Every case he tested systematically, explained methodologically and differentiated from similar sufferings, and he did all this so meaningfully, so convincingly that the most exceptional cases remain forever in one's mind like signposts directing the practitioner in later life.'

Antoni Rosner educated a whole generation of dermatologists and venereologists. Besides the above-mentioned Obtulowicz, one should mention first and foremost Władysław Reiss, Henryk Sokołowski and Aleksander Zarzewicz. It was with just this idea of his young pupils in mind that the first textbooks based on his most excellent lectures came into being: *Wykład chorób wenerycznych* (Kraków 1890) and *Wykłady o chorobach skórnych* (Kraków 1890). They became an important reference point for everyone who intended to devote themselves to dermatology, not to mention students preparing for examinations. For A. Rosner had a gift when it came to conveying his knowledge and experience to others without imposing himself or being forceful. He was an erudite speaker who maintained his youthful optimism despite all forms of opposition. He remained true to the ideals infused in him at home and treated the profession of being a doctor as a calling and a service for others; his lecturing position was an obligation he had to fulfil in relation to the younger generation and was a form of social service. He was described in an obituary placed in the opinion-forming Cracow magazine *Czas*: 'He was animatedly involved, besides his strict profession, in political matters and public affairs, he was interested in absolutely everything which had the good of the city, the people and country at heart. The greatest respect was generated by his character, nobility and righteousness not only in his views but in his acts.'

The Rosner house was well known in the Cracow of the day, with the professor considered not only to be an excellent diagnostician and expert thera-

pist, but as a must at any social gathering. He maintained close and particularly friendly contact with the Czartoryski noble family, living in the Cracow suburb of Wola Justowska, to whom he was the family doctor for a good number of years. He was widely invited out socially and he himself enjoyed entertaining acquaintances and friends.

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