

A TRIBUTE TO THE FIRST FOUR PRESIDENTS OF THE HUNGARIAN SOCIETY FOR MICROBIOLOGY*

ILONA BÉLÁDI

University of Szeged, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Medical Microbiology
Dóm tér 10, H-6720 Szeged, Hungary

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" Knowledge itself is power "
(Francis Bacon)

The Hungarian Society for Microbiology is currently celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation. On this occasion, we remember the first four Presidents of the Society, whose activities led to the Society becoming a thriving community covering all branches of microbiology.

Three of the first four Presidents of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology, András Havas, György Ivánovics and Rezső Manninger, were elected Members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This did not mean only that they were recognized as outstanding microbiologists in Hungary: the support provided by the Academy furnished them with an opportunity to increase the level of research and diagnostic work and education in microbiology, a possibility which was not generally available during the 1950s and 1960s. One of the first four Presidents, Lajos Váczi, was not elected Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, his credits, however, greatly contributed to the relatively rapid development of microbiology during the post-war years in the politically and economically depressed Hungary. President Lajos Váczi was involved in the organization of the microbial laboratory work in the country after the Second World War. His unquestionable merit in the education of young microbiologists is proved by the fact that, at present, three of his disciples occupy the chairs at the Departments of Microbiology at three of the four Medical Universities in Hungary.

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The first President of the Society was András Havas, from 1950 to 1954. **András Havas** (1891–1954) was born in Debrecen. He obtained his medical diploma at the University of Kolozsvár. After the First World War he emigrated first to Austria and then to the Soviet Union because of the political situation. From 1927 to 1946, he worked at the Central Research Institute for Tuberculosis in Moscow, where he was awarded his C.Sc. for studies on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* in 1938.

He returned to Hungary in 1946 and joined the staff of the National Institute of Hygiene in Budapest. He became chairman of the Department of Tuberculosis and his main interest then turned to the organization of BCG vaccination in Hungary. From 1949 until his death, he was Director of the National Institute of Hygiene. In this position he continued his activities relating to BCG vaccination. His intention was to introduce the BCG vaccination of neonates in Hungary. He spared no efforts to create the personal and objective conditions for diagnostic and experimental work in his Institute. He was an openhearted person with deep social concerns. He was elected a Corresponding Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1949. He was an active member of the Medical Section of the Academy and a member of many societies dealing with medicine and public health. The Hungarian Society for Microbiology was created on his initiation and he was keen to found the *Acta Microbiologica* edited by the Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences where Hungarian microbiologists would have the possibility to publish their results. Different state awards acknowledged his outstanding activities in public health.

György Ivánovics was President of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology from 1954 to 1958 and then again from 1967 to 1975. **György Ivánovics** (1904–1980) was born in Budapest. He received his medical training at Péter Pázmány University in Budapest and was awarded his medical diploma in 1928. He was appointed chairman of the Institute of Microbiology at the Medical University of Szeged in 1940, and he remained in that position until 1974. He spent several longer periods abroad. He was the first biotechnologist in Hungary to introduce tissue culture work in his Institute, in the early 1950s.

With his chemist colleague Győző Bruckner, he discovered that the antiphagocytic capsule of *Bacillus anthracis* is composed of poly-D-glutamic acid. He made many basic observations concerning megacin, the bacteriocin of *B. megaterium*. His major interest was and remained until his retirement the lysogenicity of *B. megaterium*. He was elected a Corresponding Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1945. He created the "Ivánovics school" in microbiology in Hungary: of his close students or colleagues, two became Members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, four professors in microbiology, and two chief doctors in laboratories at hospitals in Hungary. He was a member of many Hungarian and foreign scientific

societies. He was one of the founders of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology. He authored or co-authored more than 200 publications, most of which appeared in internationally recognized journals. He received a number of honors, among them the Kossuth Prize twice (1948 and 1952). His influence was pervasive. Because of his energetic and unflagging devotion to the advancement of microbiological research in Hungary, he was greatly respected and admired by his disciples and colleagues. Those who trained, worked and served with him warmly remember his unrelaxing enthusiasm for research work and his great appetite for life.

Rezső Manning was President of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology from 1958 to 1967. **Rezső Manning** (1890–1970) was born and attended school in Sopron. He then studied at the Veterinary College in Budapest, where he graduated in 1912. He next took up a position on the staff of the Institute of Epidemiology at the Veterinary College, chaired by the internationally recognized Professor Ferenc Hutyra. For more than 50 years, Dr. Manning was working in this Institute, and from 1927 until 1963 he served as chairman there. In 1927 he was elected a Corresponding Member, and in 1935 a Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

He devoted his whole life to Hungarian veterinary medicine. He was keen to develop veterinary practice, education and science to the European level. He was the first veterinary doctor to serve as Vice-President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. By virtue of his extraordinary professional knowledge and very human personality, he was President of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology for 10 years. Everybody liked him and he may be stated to have had not even one enemy. He retired from the Institute of Epidemiology in 1963. He was an honorary member of many foreign Academies and Honoris Causa doctor of many foreign Veterinary Universities and Colleges. He received a number of honors among them the Kossuth Prize twice. He published 272 papers and was author or co-author of 26 books dealing with veterinary medical problems. His textbook (F. Hutyra, J. Marek und R. Manning: *Spezielle Pathologie und Therapie der Haustiere*, Gustav Fischer Verlag, Jena, 1938) was internationally recognized and translated into English, Italian, Russian, Polish and Chinese. He had a charming personality and charisma. He will be remembered as a person whom everybody liked, and no one was respected and admired with greater consistency than he was.

Lajos Váczi was President of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology from 1975 until 1983. **Lajos Váczi** (1917–2000) was born in Komádi. He graduated from the Medical University of Debrecen in 1942, "Sub auspiciis gubernatoris". He worked in the Institute of Hygiene at the Medical University of Debrecen until 1944. From 1945 to 1958 he was in Budapest, first as head of the Professional Teaching Department at the Ministry of Health. From 1951 he became a member of the

Department of Bacteriology at the National Institute of Hygiene, and between 1956 and 1958 he was head of this Department. In 1958 he was appointed chairman professor at the Institute of Microbiology of the Medical University of Debrecen. He received his D.Sc. from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1968. He was author or co-author of 206 scientific papers. His textbook was an interesting experiment for the introduction of "organ-specific microbiology" into medical education. He was one of the founders of the Hungarian Society for Microbiology. He was an honorary member of many foreign universities and international societies. He initiated the professional career of several young talented microbiologists. It is due to him that research in virology started in the Institute of Microbiology in Debrecen. The topics of study were human herpes viruses and, for the first time in Hungary, tumor-causing viruses. His disciples continue to work with human herpesviruses and papillomaviruses and their activities are internationally recognized.