Ernest Gutmann
OBITUARY

ERNEST GUTMANN
(1910–1977)

All those who knew Professor Ernest Gutmann, his personality, scientific drive and enthusiasm for research, were sadly grieved to learn that he died on 6th August 1977 during his vacation abroad. His energy and vitality at the age of 67 seemed to be guarantees that he would be able to continue in his research work for many more years.

Born at Ústí nad Labem in Bohemia on 16th July 1910, he graduated from the Medical Faculty in Prague in 1936. He began his scientific career during the Second World War when he worked under Professor J. Z. Young on problems of peripheral nerve regeneration and of muscle reinnervation. On his return to Czechoslovakia in 1945 he first volunteered as a physician in the hospital of Teresin concentration camp for liberated prisoners, then worked in neuropathology and later entered the Central Institute of Biology of the newly-founded Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. As head of the Physiology Department he helped to gather a group of young postgraduate students to carry out basic research in neuromuscular physiology. He continued with his research and at the same time acted as advisor to more than 20 Ph. D. students. When the Institute of Physiology was founded in 1953, Gutmann headed the department which specialized in physiology and pathophysiology of the neuromuscular system.

Systematic studies of denervation, reflex and disuse muscle atrophies led Ernest Gutmann to postulate the existence of slow, non-impulse, metabolic interactions in cell-to-cell relations, i.e. neurotrophic mechanisms. He was one of the first to demonstrate, with his collaborators, the significance of short and long peripheral nerve stumps for the onset of denervation in changes in muscle. His enthusiasm for research and his interest in the general biological implications of his findings led to
an extensive research program which included cross-innervation studies, muscle fibre typology, muscle transplantation and regeneration, and studies of hormonal factors in muscle function and metabolism. No less important were the developmental and gerontological aspects. Gutmann did not hesitate in the face of experimental difficulties and obstacles. He was able to fire the imagination of entomologists, immunologists, geneticists and others in order to tackle basic problems by novel approaches. He also made major contributions to the understanding of mechanisms involved in muscle hypertrophy, changes occurring in muscle after ischaemia and during hibernation.

Early in his career he realized the importance of international collaboration, especially between socialist countries. The now traditional series of symposia first held at Osieczna (Poland) in 1957 between the Polish, Soviet and Czechoslovak Academies of Sciences (represented by Professor Konorski, Professor Asratyan and Professor Gutmann) encouraged scientists from these countries to meet and to coordinate experimental collaboration on problems in neurophysiology. The exchange of scientific information, personal contacts and experimental cooperation laid the foundation of a more extensive program which is at present in progress, namely the Intermozg.

After the recent death of Professor Jerzy Konorski, an international figure in the field of higher nervous activity, we grieve again for the loss of a prominent, humane and irreplacable neurophysiologist — Ernest Gutmann.

Pavel Hník, Prague