

## PROF. ERNST HANHART

14 March 1891 - 5 September 1973



*Prof. Hanhart lecturing at the Mendel Institute - Rome: 25 November 1957.*

### *In Memoriam*

After a long and painful illness, on the morning of the 5th of September of 1973, Professor Ernst Hanhart passed on, in the serene atmosphere of his property in Ascona, and surrounded with his wife's love and devotion. He was aged 82.

Ernst Hanhart was born on 14 March 1891. He studied in Zurich, and partly in Heidelberg and Munich, and took his medical degree in 1916. After doing some general practice in Germany and working as a country doctor in the canton of Argovie, in 1912 he entered as an assistant in the Zurich general hospital, where he soon developed a particular interest in human heredity and became a specialist for diseases such as schizophrenia, oligophrenia, mongolism, deaf-mutism, Friedrich's disease, and diabetes. The definition of a new type of dwarfism with recessive inheritance, made him famous, and was the object of his thesis to qualify as a university lecturer in 1925. Eventually, in 1942, he became a full professor at the University of Zurich, even if there wasn't yet a chair of human genetics.

In the early forties, he joined a group of colleagues, among who were Franceschetti, Matthey, Hadorn, Schlaginhaufen, and others, in order to found a Swiss Genetics Society, with the aim to encourage scientific genetic research, not deformed by political considerations nor pressures.

He was one of the first to start a population genetic study on the inhabitants of Swiss isolates, that eventually led him, in an article written in memory of Mendel on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the discovery of the laws of heredity, to quote no less than 31 genetic diseases, studied according to their mode of inheritance and their geographic distribution.

He wrote about 150 works, all richly documented and characterized by a great caution in their conclusions. His chapters on mutations in man and the inborn errors of metabolism, contained in Just's *Handbuch der Erbbiologie*, although published in 1940, are still up to date.

He was often called in different parts of the world to give conferences which he constantly enriched by adding the results of his new personal research. In 1947 he had the great honor of presenting the « Galton lecture » in London. In 1949 he was invited as a visiting professor to the University of Boston, where he was able to carry on with his research on diabetes.

In 1945, an attempt on his life left him physically handicapped and obliged him to retire from his academic work and to settle in his small and quite property in Ascona. But, even so, he continued his scientific work, published various articles and books, and attended scientific conventions.

He joined the Advisory Board of *Acta Geneticae Medicae et Gemellologiae* since its foundation in 1952, and always gave his so precious advice, support, and cooperation, for over twenty years. And he was a good friend to the Mendel Institute, at the opening of which he came, in 1953, and where he came back a number of times, such as in 1957, when he lectured on the etiology of Down's syndrome, and in 1961, on the occasion of the Second International Congress of Human Genetics.

All those who met him on these and other occasions were highly impressed by his untamable energy, the originality and profoundness of his scientific mind, his unfailing optimism and good spirit.

Professor Ernst Hanhart leaves with all of us the example of a great master, both in science and life.