

TO THE MEMORY
OF ALBERT POLMAN

(1902-1959)



Albert Polman, Professor of Anthropogenetics in the University of Groningen and President-Director of the Division of Public Health of the Netherlands Organization for applied science (T.N.O.) died after a long illness on April 25, 1959. Much too early.

Born August 27, 1902 in the village of Ruinerwold (prov. Drenthe) he studied medicine in the University of Groningen (1920-1927), took here his degree of physician, became general practitioner in the village of Hoogkerk (near Groningen, where now a street is named after him), took his degree of Med. D. December 1938 by a thesis on "Twins, monozygotic and dizygotic" (mostly psychological genetics) and became 1945 Inspector of Public Health in the district Groningen-Drenthe. In 1949 he was a Government delegate at the Second Meeting of the W.H.O. at Rome, worked in that year a few months in Sweden and Denmark. In 1950 he was appointed the first President-Director of the new Division of Public Health in the Netherlands Organization for applied sciences (T.N.O.) at the Hague, and in the same year Professor of Anthropogenetics in the Government University at Groningen.

This twofold field of activity asked for an energy which only very few of us have

at disposal: organizing the whole of Public Health research in the Netherlands, acting as chairman of numerous committees, of working-teams, of boards of scientific institutions, establishing a new institute for anthropogenetics and lecturing in the University of Groningen, this all filled Polmans' diary for every minute available between Monday morning and Saturday evening. Inbetween he found time for a number of publications (mostly in dutch): his doctors thesis on "Twins, monozygotic and dizygotic" (1938) was followed by studies on "Inborn morphological defects as cause of still-birth" (1947), "Causes of death in the Netherlands" (1948), "Anencephaly, spina bifida and hydrocephaly" (1949), "Anthropogenetics and the medical way of thinking" (1951), "Geographical and confessional influences in choosing a wedding-partner" (1951), "Consanguineous marriages in the Netherlands" (1951), "Quantitative sex-ratios at birth and in the first month of life during the period 1901-1950" (1952), "Biology and population-pathology" (1954), "Duration of life and ageing of the population" (1954), "Genetics and eugenics" (1954), "Decrease of intelligence in the human society" (1955), "The importance of twins for the study of inherited qualities" (1955), "The world conference on population problems in Rome 1954" (1955), "Genealogy and heredity" (1955), "The 'climate' for medical scientific research" (1955), "The ageing of a population, more especially as a result of increase of duration of life in man" (1956), "The influence of heredity and environment" (1958), "Inheritance and intelligence" (1958).

In the spring of 1957 a serious illness caused an interruption of his activities; he recovered, but decided to concentrate his energy on his office at the Hague. Two years later, in February 1959, illness again obliged him to discontinue his work and this time for ever; the end came April 25, 1949.

Polman has been a first class scientist, an energetic worker, a warm friend to all of us, who were favoured by his daily companionship. He left an empty room in his office at the Hague, he left an empty room in the Genetical Institute of the University at Groningen, he left an empty place in the hearts of numberless colleagues and friends. A place which cannot be filled.

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The Board of the Dutch Anthropogenetical Society has suffered a great loss by the death of its treasurer, professor Albert Polman, at the age of 56. The society counts more than 400 medical members, but this does not signify that those practitioners are all well grounded in medical genetics. It is only a sign, that genetics

interests them because they feel nowadays that knowledge of basic facts cannot be missed for medical diagnosis and prevention. They therefore want university extension. Real anthropogeneticists are very scarce in our country for lack of university education in that field in former times, and also for this reason is the death of Polman such a loss. Polman was the first professor in Human, and especially in Medical genetics.

His career was as follows: after a successful study at Groningen University he became a family doctor in the country in 1927. In 1938 he obtained his medical doctor's degree on a thesis on *Identical and Fraternal twins, an experimentally-psychological study concerning the hereditary disposition to psychical characteristics*. He was Inspector of Public Health in the 3 northern provinces from 1945-1950, was president of the National Health Organisation from 1950-1959 and received the chair for Anthropogenetics as an extraordinary professor of the Groningen University in 1951. He gave it up since an illness in 1958 and to avoid overburdening he occupied himself only with the Health Organisation.

His chief studies are: *Anencephaly, spina bifida and hydrocephaly, a contribution to our knowledge of the causal genesis of congenital malformations* (1950), and *Consanguineous marriages in the Netherlands* (1951). Under his supervision his scholar Witkop-Oostenrijk wrote an interesting thesis on *A research concerning the influence of endogene factors on the paralytic form of poliomyelitis acuta anterior*. Since the first international genetical congress in Stockholm (1948) which he attended, he was a regular visitor of congresses on public health or genetics. In human genetics he was self-made as all of us, except that he visited Scandinavian Institutes to improve the foundations of his knowledge and to study the organisation of the activities and registration of the data obtained.

He was convinced that human genetics should not be a new specialism of its own, but that it should belong to the basic principals of medical education and so to the inventory of all practitioners and clinicians. In Groningen he introduced an obligatory preliminary examination of medical students. He was a quiet modest man, who did his work with great ardour and accuracy, and was always good-humoured. We appreciated his advices and we lose in him a friend.

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