

MD REMEMBERS: A Noted Clinician's Centennial

■ This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Emanuel Libman, the astute and versatile clinician who gained an international reputation for the original studies of subacute bacterial endocarditis and his blood culture techniques. A keen diagnostician, pathologist, bacteriologist and a stimulating teacher, he played a major role in the development of scientific research at New York's Mt. Sinai Hospital and was the guiding spirit of that institution's school of cardiologists. On the principle that "the physician, even when he becomes the teacher, still remains the student," he initiated programs in continuing education.

Early Years. The son of a picture framer, Emanuel Libman was born in New York City on August 22, 1872. He attended public school and City College, received his M.D. from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1894 and interned at Mt. Sinai. In 1896, planning to specialize in pediatrics, he studied in Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Munich and Graz.

Toward the end of his *Wanderjahr* Libman stopped at Theodor Escherich's laboratory to learn about infantile diarrhea, one of the serious pediatric problems of that period. Escherich put him to work preparing cultures, taught him basic bacteriologic methods and within a few weeks the pupil had discovered *Streptococcus enteritis* which was often referred to as *Streptococcus Libman*.

On his return to New York in 1897 he was appointed assistant and later associate pathologist at Mt. Sinai. While the hospital was located at 67th and Lexington Avenue, a few blocks from Dr. Libman's home, he spent late hours in the laboratory and published studies of meningococcal, streptococcal, paracolon infections, Weil's disease, the Widal reaction and his blood culture methods. Details of all his cases were stored in his encyclopedic memory as well as in files in closets and the basement of his house.

When Mt. Sinai moved to its present site at 100th Street and Fifth Avenue in 1904, Dr. Libman

was instrumental in obtaining a gift* for a laboratory building in which he established a department of bacteriology, serology and pathologic anatomy. He received \$900 a year from the hospital, paid a secretary from his own pocket and earned his living in private practice. Meticulous accuracy was demanded of the young physicians who worked as unsalaried assistants in his department and anyone who left a used towel in the laboratory or forgot to extinguish a Bunsen burner was guilty of a serious crime.

While he was a strict taskmaster, Dr. Libman was an inspiring and helpful instructor. When young physicians were preparing to study abroad he not only gave them introductions to medical centers but the names, personal descriptions, interests and idiosyncracies of outstanding professors to visit.

The observations in blood cultures in subacute bacterial endocarditis were first reported by Dr. Libman at Johns Hopkins in 1906 and two years later he published a paper on the etiology of the disease. Mt. Sinai's distinguished service professor Dr. George Baehr recalls that as a young assistant he was called to bring a culture medium to the hotel room of Dr. Libman's patient Gustav Mahler. When a positive culture established the diagnosis of subacute bacterial endocarditis, which was then incurable, the famous composer left New York to spend his last days in Vienna.

At the American Medical Association in 1912 Dr. Libman's exhibit of various types of endocarditis won the gold medal, and the following year he went to an international conference in London with three trunks containing some 30 specimens of diseased hearts. On numerous trips he lectured in French, German or English in Europe and in Hebrew at the university in Jerusalem.

Most of Dr. Libman's research was on heart disease but his interest in angina led to studies of pain in other parts of the body and the sensitivity of different individuals

*From Adolf Lewisohn.

to pain. He also investigated intestinal lymphosarcoma, Gaucher's splenomegaly, and with Dr. Benjamin Sacks described verrucous endocarditis complicated by systemic lupus erythematosus.

In 1925 Dr. Libman became consulting physician at Mt. Sinai and in 1931 as organizer of the Academy of Medicine's graduate fortnight he presented a complete exhibit of the anatomy, physiology and pathology of the cardiovascular system. The broad range of his scientific interests was reflected in



the articles by students, colleagues and admirers in three volumes published on his 60th birthday. Among the contributors were physicist Albert Einstein, bacteriologist William H. Welch of Johns Hopkins, surgeon William Mayo, medical historian Fielding Garrison, Nobel laureates Alexis Carrel and George H. Minot.

To honor some of his medical heroes, Dr. Libman raised funds to establish lectureships named for his teacher Dr. Edward Janeway and his friend William Welch at Mt. Sinai, for Sir Humphry Rolleston at the Royal College of Physicians and for Hidego Noguchi at Johns Hopkins.

Dr. Libman was a tireless worker, a famous raconteur with a great sense of humor, a devotee of music, literature and medical history. During his later years he suffered from vascular disease which affected his eyes and after an undiagnosed illness he died at Mt. Sinai Hospital on June 28, 1946.