OBITUARY

Antoine Lacassagne

The death is announced of Professor Lacassagne, of Paris, French pioneer in radiology and cancer research. Antoine Lacassagne was born at Villerest (Loire) on August 29, 1884. He came from a medical family, his father having been a military physician and Professor of Legal Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy of the University of Lyon. Doctor of medicine and intern of the hospitals of Lyon, in 1908 Professor Lacassagne entered the Laboratory of Histology to work under the direction of Claudius Regaud. He made the subject of his first scientific work “Histological and Physiological Studies of the Effects Produced on the Ovary by X-irradiation.” In 1909 Dr. Regaud was recalled to Paris by Emile Roux, Director of the Institut Pasteur, to take charge of the recently constructed Laboratory of Radiophysics, Pasteur Laboratory of the Institut du Radium. In 1913 Regaud in turn sent for his pupil, Lacassagne, to install him in the new venture. Mobilized in 1914, Lacassagne then spent 4 years as medical auxiliary at the front, notably in Greece and Romania. He returned to the Institut du Radium in 1919 where he served to the end of his life. He was nominated Assistant Director of the Pasteur Laboratory in 1923. In 1937 Regaud retired and Lacassagne succeeded him as Chef de Service of the Institut Pasteur and Director of the Section of Biology of the Institut du Radium. At the same time he became Director of Research in the Fondation Curie which had been founded in 1921 as a department for the practical application of the work of the Institut du Radium. These positions he held until his retirement in October 1954. In 1941 he was elected Professor of Radiobiology and Cancerology in the Collège de France. Also in that year came his election to the Académie des Sciences. Retirement did not diminish his activity, and he retained a laboratory in the Institut du Radium where R. Latarjet had succeeded him. In 1957, on the death of Justin Godard, he became President of the Ligue Nationale Française contre le Cancer and remained in this post until the time of his death. In 1950 Lacassagne acted as President of the Fifth International Congress held at the Sorbonne under the auspices of the Union Internationale contre le Cancer, the first of the series to be held in France. He was a member of many foreign academies and honorary doctor of numerous universities. He was Commander of the Légion d’Honneur and Grand Officier of the National Order of Merit.

Professor Lacassagne was primarily a pathologist, but his work ranged widely to include experimental radiopathology and endocrine carcinogenesis. He was also a pioneer of the new and developing subject of radiobiology. From the close of the First World War, he collaborated actively with Regaud in that fundamental work which rapidly led to a scheme of treatment of cancer in man, by X-rays, radium, and radioactive isotopes and was foremost in the development of autoradiography. With the physicist, Fernand Holweck, he continued the study of the fundamentals of radiology, especially through the use of microorganisms, and pursued this work further with Wollman. From 1929, with R. Vinzent and others, Lacassagne made a study of the carcinogenic response of infected foci following irradiation. In 1932 came the discovery of the role of estrogens in causing cancer of the breast in male mice, an observation which greatly stimulated endocrine carcinogenesis and was the forerunner of the successful treatment of carcinoma of the prostate with estrogens.

From 1943 he took a leading part, inspired by the work of Otto Schmidt, in attempts to relate the biological activity of the carcinogenic hydrocarbons to the molecular distribution of π electrons with the collaboration of P. and R. Daudel, A. and B. Pullman, N. G. Buu-Hoi, G. Rudali, and F. Zajdela.

Professor Lacassagne was a true savant and humanitarian, whose worldwide influence will be greatly missed.

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Obituary: Antoine Lacassagne
Alexander Haddow


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