

## **Sarton Medal Lectures**

## LAUDATIO A. EVRARD

*Michel Thiery, Gent*

The board elected Professor Alexander Evrard as recipient of a 1989-90 George Sarton Commemorative Medal because of his personal contribution to the study of the history of neuro-psychiatry and his active participation in the academic teaching of the history of medicine, by which Evrard helped to resurrect a longstanding tradition of the University of Gent, where a compulsory course of the history of medicine was first introduced in 1835. Later, the subject matter became optional and the course was finally dropped altogether around the turn of the century. Many teachers nevertheless attempted to fill up what they considered to be a gap by starting their course with a historical overview of the subject. This tradition too vanished gradually, to the extent that after World War II, only the Professor of Bacteriology used to treat his students to an opening lecture on the epic work of his famous predecessors, the "microbe hunters".

Interest in the teaching of medical history revived in the early 1950s when an Emeritus Professor of the Free University of Brussels, wishing to perpetuate the memory of his son — the late Egyptologist Frans Jonckheere, MD — funded the establishment of a lecture course on this subject in our university. The medical Faculty became the recipient of the Jonckheere Memorial Lectures, which were initiated in 1957 by the head of the Department of Physiology, Professor Jean Van de Velde. After Van de Velde's untimely death, this task was taken over by the famous medical historiographer Professor Léon Elaut who in 1966 was succeeded by the then *chef de clinique* of the Department of Neuro-psychiatry Dr. A. Evrard. Snowed under by other commitments, Evrard resigned from the course in 1970. Because no candidate could be found to succeed him, the course was interrupted until the academic year 1977-78, when Dr. Pharm. Leo Vandewiele — Ph. D. in the history of pharmacy and future laureate of the George Sarton

Memorial Chair (cfr. *Sartoniana* 2 : 11, 1989) — volunteered to resume the lectures. Having himself reached the age of retirement in 1979, Vandewiele proposed a licentiate in history as his successor. Regretfully, however, the Medical Faculty declined this gracious offer on the grounds that medical students should be taught the historical background of their profession-t-be by someone belonging to it. Thus, for the second time, the teaching was interrupted. It was finally rescued thanks to the initiative of the then Dean, Professor A. De Schaepdryver, who since 1981 has each year invited a number of local and foreign speakers to read papers on a wide variety of topics related to the history of medicine. This new formula has proven attractive to students and graduates of other faculties as well. Due to the efforts of the Chief Editor, Professor I. Leusen, the texts of these lectures have been printed in the *Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*, the principal medical journal of Belgium. This has of course promoted the popularity of the project.

Ladies and Gentlemen. My short introduction has given you a glimpse of Professor Evrard's many interests ad activities. Let me proceed now in a more regular fashion. Factually, this will not be difficult for me, because Alex and I have known each other for ages : we did our premedicals together and later our academic careers ran virtually parallel. No, what makes me a little uneasy is that Alex hates eulogy. In point of fact he is a very modest man, utterly reserved and almost shy. To give you one example of his idiosyncrasy about praise : when Evrard was granted the freedom of the State of Texas in 1964 for his personal efforts in the areas of cultural exchange and care of handicapped children, non of his friends and colleagues was informed by Alex about this exceptional honour which had been bestowed on him. When approached recently by a member of the Sarton committee, our "freeman" was startled because, in his mind, there was a gross discrepancy between the honor we wished to pay him and his personal contribution to the history of medicine. For all of these reasons, my representation must be brief and to the point.

Alexander Karel Evrard was born in Ledeberg, a suburb of Gent, on December 15th in 1923. Having completed his classical humanities at the Jesuit college he studied medicine at the University of Gent, where he obtained the MD diploma in 1950. After a short stay at the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Leiden (The Netherlands), Alex returned to his Alma Mater as an assistant to Professor J. De Busscher. Five years later, he was qualified in neuro-psychiatry. Alex made the most of his several stays at Dutch clinics, in particular the department of the famous Professor Carp and the section of child psychiatry directed by Dr. Van Krevelen. In 1953, he defended at the University of Leiden his thesis on the *Patho-psychologic significance of the negativistic attitude* which earned him his second MD diploma. Doctor Evrard then returned to the University of Gent, which he has not left since. Here, he was appointed successively *chef de clinique* of the Department of neuro-psychiatry, deputy of Professor Vander Eecken for clinical demonstrations in child psychology, and lector of psychiatry. Finally, in 1969, he became Associate Professor in the Medical Faculty and shortly after that, full professor.

I shall spare you the list of the subjects taught by our laureate of today. Those interested can read it in the Yearbook of the University of Gent, where it covers an entire page. Suffice to say that the staple of his theoretical lessons is concerned with general and applied psychology and the care of the handicapped. In his out-patient clinic the professor supervises two sections : one for medical psychology, belonging to the Faculty of Medicine, the other a training school for handicapped connected with the Faculty of Psychology and Education.

Evrard has always been fascinated by the historical background of his profession which, at the age of 32 inspired him to write his first book *History of Psychiatry*, which was followed by many papers and countless lectures dealing with a variety of medical-historical subjects related to psychiatry.

But it would wrong our laureate if I did not allude to his printed scientific medical work which is considerable : five books and four-

score articles in national and international journals. As already mentioned, Evrard is also a fêted speaker as he will justifiably prove to his audience today.

Ladies and Gentleman. This must be the end, because I perceive that our colleague is becoming a bit nervous, which for a professional psychiatrist is an ominous sign.

Dear Alex. Do be convinced that the honor bestowed on you today is entirely deserved. And do accept our tribute as a token of thanks for your contribution to medical historiography and your effort to keep alive the teaching of medical history at our university.

