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ALLERGY: A DERMATOLOGIST'S REMINISCENCES AND SPECULATIONS*†‡

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THE very day that I received the great honor of your invitation to deliver the Prosser White Oration I began searching for a suitable topic. For I realized that I must hope that the merits of my theme might hide my own inadequacies and the imperfections of my presentation.

Dr. Corsi, Dr. MacKenna, and Dr. Schneider-Green were kind enough to help me in my selection, and agreed that some remarks on a dermatologist's view of Allergy might prove a happy choice. The subject is a fascinating one, and certainly big enough for me to hide behind.

DEFINITION

What is "allergy"? It has always seemed to me that in order to be employed to its full value, the designation "allergy" must be used in the original sense proposed by von Pirquet when he coined the term in 1906.

It was von Pirquet's explicit purpose to include under allergy all specific acquired alterations in capacity to react which are produced in living organisms by exposure to living or inanimate agents. The quality of specificity here depends upon the circumstance that the exposure to the given agent produces a change which can be made manifest solely when the organism or tissue experiences subsequent exposure to the very same immunologic entity, that is, to the original agent or an "immunologic relative" thereof.

ALLERGY DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN HYPERSENSITIVITY

There is at present a rather widely-held and unfortunately stubborn notion that allergy must needs mean an increased susceptibility or an acquired hypersensitivity. Von Pirquet indicated his full realization that the new term would be unnecessary if it were to describe merely acquired hypersensitivity. Quite on the contrary, von Pirquet and most of the earlier workers, like Schick, recognized the far-reaching and fundamental relationships, though not necessarily

*The Prosser White Oration, delivered before the St. John's Hospital Dermatological Society at the Royal Society of Medicine on July 6, 1949.

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