

Alfred Froehlich: 1871-1953

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ON March 22, 1953, Dr. Alfred Froehlich died in Cincinnati, Ohio, in his eighty-second year, after a short illness. His death ended a most distinguished career of medical research and teaching which had won recognition in the entire medical world. Alfred Froehlich was born in Vienna, Austria, on August 15, 1871. He received an excellent general and medical education in that city and was graduated from the Medical School of the University of Vienna in 1895. He then joined the medical department of Professor Nothnagel and the institute of experimental pathology of Professor Samuel Basch. His clinical studies bore fruit very soon. In 1901 Froehlich described "A case of tumor of the hypophysis cerebri without acromegaly." He emphasized in this publication for the first time that trophic disturbances such as obesity and infantilism may be associated with pituitary tumors, an observation that became an important stimulus to endocrine research. This report made the author's name widely known and the combined symptoms of obesity and infantilism were called "Froehlich's syndrome."

Froehlich, a celebrity at the age of 30, remained throughout his long life an untiring student and investigator of medical and other biological phenomena. In 1901 he went to Liverpool, England, where he worked under the guidance of Sir Charles Sherrington. There he met Harvey Cushing with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship. Froehlich became increasingly interested in the physiology and pharmacology of the nervous system. In 1904 he joined N. J. Langley in Cambridge, England, where his investigations of the autonomous nervous system began. After 1905 Froehlich was a permanent member of the department of pharmacology of the University of Vienna, which was at first under the direction of Hans Horst Meyer and later under that of E. P. Pick. There he worked continuously for 34 years and the results of his studies are recorded in about 200 medical publications. Only a few of his outstanding contributions can be mentioned here. His investigations were concerned with the potentiation of adrenaline effects of cocaine (with Otto Loewi); with the effect of pituitrin upon the autonomous nervous system; with changes of the excitability of the vegetative nervous system by calcium deprivation; with nicotine intoxication; with muscle physiology and pharmacology; with the pharmacological effects of purines, and with many other

subjects. Froehlich was also greatly interested in lower forms of life and gave part of his time to studies in comparative physiology. Some of his work was done in the marine laboratories of Naples, Italy; Helgoland, Germany; and Woods Hole, Massachusetts, where he made valuable contributions to invertebrate physiology. He was a founder and for many years the secretary-general of the Biological Society of Vienna.

Alfred Froehlich's interests were not limited to the sciences. He loved music, was an accomplished pianist, and actually studied harmony with the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. He was well acquainted with the literature of many countries and with many of the leading writers of his time. In 1908 he met Rudyard Kipling in Switzerland and until World War I, these men, so diverse in outlook and temperament, maintained a lively correspondence and kept their annual rendezvous at their Swiss meeting place. Froehlich had an unusual interest in all kinds of people; he was a brilliant and stimulating conversationalist and by his understanding of science and the arts he befriended many of his outstanding contemporaries.

Dr. Froehlich's rise in the academic world was rapid. A lecturer at the University of Vienna in experimental pathology, pharmacology, and toxicology since 1905, he was appointed extraordinary professor in 1912. From 1919 to 1939 he was a full professor of pharmacology and toxicology. In 1939, after the invasion of Austria by Hitler's Germany, Dr. Froehlich came to the United States where he joined the May Institute of Medical Research of the Jewish Hospital of Cincinnati. There he was associated with I. Arthur Mirsky and later with Sol Sherry, the directors of the institute. He continued his experimental studies of the central nervous system, investigated the susceptibility to convulsions in relation to age, the pharmacology of heat narcosis, and the influence of theophylline on the absorption of salts from the gastrointestinal tract. Assisted by his wife Ilse, he was able to work and to record his observations to the last. As in former years, he maintained his interest in world events and in his immediate environment, acquired many new friends, and corresponded with his colleagues of the past. His extraordinary abilities and his radiant personality will be remembered by all who were fortunate enough to know him as a friend, a colleague, or a teacher.

