OBITUARY

CONRAD BERENS, 1889–1963

Conrad Berens, one of the world's leading ophthalmologists, died suddenly after a long and painful illness in his home on Center Island, Oyster Bay, New York, on March 2, 1963. He was the son of a well-known ophthalmologist of Philadelphia of the same name, and spent most of his adult and professional life in the New York area. A great clinician, author, organizer, and teacher, he played a prominent part in the ophthalmological life of the United States.

Berens graduated in medicine in 1911 from the University of Pennsylvania where he served an internship in Medicine and Surgery for 2 years; in 1913 he became a house-surgeon in ophthalmology at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, with which institution he remained connected throughout his working life. He first became a lecturer in the School of Ophthalmology and Otology of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, then Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology in the New York University Postgraduate Medical School, and finally Advisory Attending Surgeon, Consulting Pathologist, and Consultant
to the Research Department which he originally established in the Infirmary; at the same time he served as a consultant to ten other hospitals in the New York area. The Berens Clinic of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary early became one of the most progressive in the New York area with the popularization of general medical surveys, the application of pre-operative bacteriological tests, the use of sterile gloves in the operating theatre and of sutures for the closure of surgical wounds, and the establishment of the first course in orthoptic training.

Early in his career Berens served as a First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Army in the First World War, and saw service in France with the late Colonel Wilmer. His interest in service matters always remained. He became one of the founders of the Research Laboratories for Aviation, which developed into the School of Aviation Medicine of the U.S. Army, and during the Second World War he served as national civilian consultant to the Air Surgeon and later with the Surgeon-General of the U.S. Air Force.

As an organizer of societies for the betterment of ophthalmology and medicine, Dr. Berens had no equal. Almost single-handed he organized the Association for Research in Ophthalmology and lived to see it develop into one of the largest societies of its kind in the world. With the late Drs. Harry Gradle and Moacryr Alvaro he founded the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology and became its first secretary and second president. He and the late Dr. Daniel B. Kirby established the first successful graduate course in ophthalmology at the New York University Bellevue Medical School. In addition he was managing director of the Ophthalmological Foundation Inc., president of the Snyder Ophthalmic Foundation, Chairman of the Council for Research in Glaucoma and Allied Diseases and of the American Committee on Optics and Visual Physiology, member of the boards of The Seeing Eye, of the New York Association for the Blind, and of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, vice-president of the International Association for the Prevention of Blindness, chairman (1938–43) and then consultant of the American Board of Ophthalmology, and vice-president of the International Council of Ophthalmology (1950–62).

Berens was a prolific writer. The well-known textbook of which he was editor, "The Eye and its Diseases", first published in 1936, republished in 1949 and in Spanish in 1954, was widely used by ophthalmologists throughout the world; it contained important contributions from the United Kingdom and established him as an author of eminence. In addition he wrote innumerable original papers and was the joint author of six other well-known textbooks.

He naturally took a prominent part in the ophthalmological life of the U.S.A. He was president of the Air Service Medical Association (1922), chairman of the Eye Section of the New York Academy of Medicine (1923), vice-president (1927) and president (1949) of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology, secretary (1929–32) of the Pan-American Medical Association, vice-president (1929) and chairman (1945) of the Association for Research in Ophthalmology, chairman of the Eye Section of the Medical Society of the State of New York (1931), president of the New York Ophthalmological Society (1939), chairman of the Section on Ophthalmology of the American Medical Association (1943), president of the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology (1943), president of the Medical Society of the County of New York (1944), and president of the American Ophthalmological Society (1953).

Berens will be remembered by his many friends in all parts of the world as a delightful companion and a great sportsman, an excellent tennis player, swimmer, yachtsman, and golfer.

To his widow who always accompanied him to grace international meetings, and to his three sons, we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

We are indebted to Brittain F. Payne of New York for the information in this obituary notice.