Richard John Bing (1909-2010)

The “man for all seasons” passes to the Elysian fields of Science

Richard John Bing, one of the most eminent figures of Cardiology of the 20th century, father of cardiac metabolism and a pioneer of cardiac catheterization, classical music composer and author, who has been called a "Renaissance man" and "a man for all seasons," died on Monday, 8th November 2010, at his home in La Cañada Flintridge outside Los Angeles. He had celebrated his 101st birthday almost month earlier and had been suffering from heart failure.

Richard John Bing was born in Nuremberg, Bavaria on 12th October, 1909. Between 1929 and 1934, he attended Medicine initially at the University of Berlin, Munich and Vienna. The raise of Nazis and Adolf Hitler forced him to flee Germany to Bern, Switzerland, where he was employed as investigator in de Quervain’s laboratory studying thrombus formation. In 1935, he received the second MD from the University of Bern and, afterwards, joined the Carlsberg Biological Institute in Copenhagen where he worked between 1935 and 1936 under the direction of Albert Fischer (1891-1956), who was student of the famous vascular surgeon Alexis Carrel (1873-1944). During the 4th International Conference of Experimental Cytology which took place in Copenhagen on August 1936, Bing will meet with Carell and the famous American aviator and inventor Charles Linbergh (1902-1974); Bing will help Carell and Linbergh to present a device for extra-pulmonary circulation specially designed for heart transplant operations. From 1936 to 1937, he was a fellow at the Rockefeller Institute in New York. Bing, then, served a year as surgical intern at Presbyterian Hospital in New York, where he continued his work on organs blood perfusion, his co-operation with Allen Whipple led him to the University of Columbia, whereas he met the love of his life, Mary Whipple. John and Mary got married in 1938 and lasted till 1990, when Mary died of coronary heart disease. The same year, 1938, Bing published his first paper at Science entitled: “The perfusion of whole organs in the Lindbergh Apparatus with fluids containing hemocyanin as respiratory pigment”, an examination of the possibility that hemocyanin, an oxygen-binding pigment found in horseshoe crabs and squid, could help meet the oxygen needs of isolated heart. During his stay at Columbia, Richard will continue his work on the vasopressin peptides and the path-physiology of renal hypertension and of renal failure following crush injury. The entry of the US into World War II led Bing to enroll for medical license as an assistant resident at the John Hopkins School of Medicine; he served as a Lieutenant Colonel in the chemical warfare corps in Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland and then in Germany. During an employment at John Hopkins, Bing in 1947 will collaborate with the famous surgeon Alfred Blalock (1899-1964) and the famous paediatric cardiologist Helen Taussig (1898-1986) and describe the Taussig-