Introduction to the Series

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Infectious diseases often manifest in a dramatic manner affecting individuals and whole communities. It is not surprising therefore that historically, they were considered to be due to the wrath of gods, evil spirits or black magic. The ideas of the early pioneers were against the prevailing notions of religious leaders and society. Hence some of the early pioneers were persecuted and ran great personal risks while propagating their ideas. These factors made their times and lives colourful and interesting. Factors such as serendipity, acting on chance remarks and lateral thinking led to turning points and landmark discoveries. They described infections, distinguished one from another and surmised about the cause and mode of spread. Concepts in this field were evolved on which depended all later developments such as diagnostic tests, treatment, vaccines and preventive public health measures. This has developed into the practice of infectious diseases as we know it today.

We have chosen some early pioneers for this series in view of their revolutionary ideas. Contemporary research also has special challenges and pioneering scientists. However the drama behind them is less easily understood by all. This compilation is by no means complete and there are many others whose work is equally important. As Rene and Jean Dubos wrote in 1952 “In science, credit goes to the man who convinces the world, not to the man to whom the idea first occurs.”

We do hope that the series will be of interest to the busy physician of today. He will realize that his craft is born out of the efforts of all the early pioneers.

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