

IN MEMORIAM

David C. Rife

1901-1992



I met Professor Rife for the first time in 1956 when he was my doctoral mentor in Human Genetics at Ohio State University. It was a time when the human genome was believed to be composed of 24 pairs of chromosomes and the terms DNA, RNA and the like, were beginning to find their place into the human genetics glossary. The last time I saw him was in 1988, when despite his advanced age, he had travelled half way across the globe to participate and give the opening address at the International Symposium of Dermatoglyphics, which was held in Zagreb in July 1988. It was indeed a great pleasure for him to be once again among his colleagues, discussing one of his favorite subjects, Dermatoglyphics. It was an even greater pleasure for me too, because it was Professor Rife who introduced me to the fascinating world of dermatoglyphics research, which has occupied me, on and off, for the past thirty-eight years. After the Zagreb symposium, we did not see each other again, although we chatted over the telephone numerous times. Dr. Rife was one of the pioneers in human genetics, who managed to make the most out of limited resources. He dealt mostly with characteristics of normative human variability, especially dermatoglyphics, eye colour and handedness, and made a significant contribution to the study of twins.

Professor Rife was born in Cedarville Ohio on 3 January, 1901. He took degrees in Agriculture and in Zoology from Ohio State University, where he later taught Zoology and Genetics (from 1934 to 1957). From 1950 to 1957, he served as Chairman of the then-newly-established Institute of Genetics at Ohio State University. Dr. Rife was not only an excellent professor but also a compassionate human being, who travelled in many parts of the world, helping to improve agricultural yields through genetic practices. Among other postings, he served for three years at the Agricultural School in Sudan (1927-1930). He also served as Senior Fullbright Lecturer at Cairo University in Egypt, and as Fullbright Research Scholar in Kampala, Uganda, and was also posted to other African countries. From 1957-1959, he was a Senior Scholar in Thailand, under the 4-Point Programme, whose objective was the improvement of the biological stock (especially cattle) in that country. From 1960-1962, he served as Deputy Scientific Attache in India, under John Galbraith. In later years, he held positions at the National Institutes of Health and the University of Florida.

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Professor Rife belonged to numerous scientific societies and was awarded a number of Honours. He was a charter member of the American Society of Human Genetics, and served as its Secretary in 1955. He was awarded Honorary life membership by the Egyptian Society of Genetics, and just before his death, was awarded the American Dermatoglyphics Association Award for life-time contributions to the Association and to the field of Dermatoglyphics in general.

Dr. Rife published about 80 scientific publications, and two of the first books on Human Genetics (“Dice of Destiny” in 1955, and “Heredity and Human Nature”). With Professor Rife’s passing we have lost another of the pioneers of Human Genetics, an excellent and companionable individual, and for me, a very good friend and mentor. Professor Rife is survived by his wife Marguerite, of Clewiston, Florida, and his son William, who lives in Washington D.C.

Chris C. Plato