

MEDICINE

Paprika Prize

In Stockholm last week a committee of Swedish doctors was deciding whether to give the 1937 Nobel Prize (\$40,000) for Medicine to: 1) Biochemist Albert Szent-Györgyi of the Hungarian University of Szeged who discovered that a certain acid (ascorbic) in the adrenal glands of healthy men and animals had the same beneficial effect as Vitamin C contained in oranges



LAUREATE SZENT-GYÖRGYI

. . . found his vitamin in his dish.

and lemons; 2) Biochemist Walter Norman Haworth of Birmingham (England) University, who analyzed the chemical structures of Vitamin C and the ascorbic acid which Professor Szent-Györgyi isolated; or 3) Biochemist Paul Karrer of the University of Zürich, Switzerland, who made Vitamin C artificially.

While the world of scholars waited, the Nobel Prize committee took a quick last look at the accomplishments of Albert Szent-Györgyi. Amiable son of a once wealthy Hungarian, son-in-law of a one-time Hungarian postmaster general, as thoroughly Hungarian as *paprika*, his Wartime Hungarian army medical officer started, after the Armistice, to learn what happens to food in the human body. He was particularly interested in the progress of carbohydrates (starches and sugars). These enter the mouth, change into a variety of transient substances, nourish every cell in the body, leave the body in the breath as simple carbon dioxide (CO_2) gas and water (H_2O) vapor.

In his studies Dr. Szent-Györgyi found that the adrenal glands secrete a substance called ascorbic acid, which he subsequently discovered to be the same thing as Vitamin C. To further these studies, Dr. Szent-Györgyi needed large quantities of ascorbic acid, and his pursuit of it took him to a half-dozen European universities and the Mayo

Clinic at Rochester, Minn. where Dr. Edward Calvin Kendall, isolator of thyroid hormone and analyzer of adrenal cortex hormone, provided him with a big stock of adrenals fresh from South St. Paul stockyards. He still was not able to get enough to permit all the experiments he wanted to do on the acid's medical effects, and in despair Dr. Szent-Györgyi went back to his native Hungary where one day, instead of eating a dish which Mrs. Szent-Györgyi had heavily spiced with paprika, he made a chemical analysis of that sweet pepper. In his own backyard this far-traveling researcher found that paprika was the best source of Vitamin C on earth.

Dr. Szent-Györgyi later found, along with Vitamin C in fruit juices and adrenals, a "permeability factor" which he calls Vitamin P, not present in synthesized C. Vitamin P keeps the walls of body cells in good condition. Without both, a person develops pyorrhea and scurvy. He bleeds easily, may be subject to certain virus and bacterial diseases. With an ample supply of these vitamins, he can overcome such ailments. Although Hungarian pepper is the most abundant source of these vitamins, this condiment is little known in the U. S. Most convenient source of the vitamins thus remain the citrus fruits, especially lemons and oranges.

Taking all these useful studies of Dr. Szent-Györgyi into consideration, especially the studies on the fundamental process of oxidation (combustion) in the human body, general studies of carbohydrate transformation which he still pursues, the Nobel Prize Committee of tense doctors in Stockholm last week selected him for the 1937 medicine award. A few minutes after signing the certificate of award, Chairman Hans Christian Jacobaeus of that committee collapsed and died of heart failure. Dr. Szent-Györgyi will soon go to Vanderbilt University to deliver a lecture on oxidation.

In Szeged, Dr. Szent-Györgyi, learning of his laureateship, exclaimed in heavily accented English: "Of course, I am very thankful. I do not know what I am going to do with the money. But up to now I have put every nickel I possess into my work." Then he took one of his long, lonely walks.