Although this experimental work of 70 years ago is open to criticism there can be no doubt that Picado and Rotter coined the term autoantibody and described serum precipitins in cases of myxoedema. They predicted that immunology would play an important role in the biology of the thyroid gland. After 1939, no more has been heard of them; letters to Saarbrucken University yielded no information. Whatever has happened to them?

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Editor's Note: In 1887, Clodomiro Picado Twight, also known as Clorito Picado, was born in Nicaragua to Costa Rican parents who returned to Costa Rica in 1890. Picado worked in Costa Rica and Europe and published some 115 research papers. In Europe, he obtained diplomas in zoology and botany, and a doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1913. In 1927, he demonstrated the inhibitory action of the *bacillus genus penicillium sp* on the proliferation of the bacteria staphylococcus and streptococcus. Although, the discovery of penicillin has been attributed to Alexander Fleming, Clorito's old laboratory notebooks from 1923 show records of the antibiosis of *penicillium sp*. His greatest internationally recognised achievement was the development of various anti-venom serums. Picado died in 1944. In 2000, Picado's daughter-in-law accepted the Gold Medal awarded posthumously to Picado by the World Intellectual Property Organisation. The Editor is grateful to Estela Dukan of the College Library for her help and advice.

Picado's papers quoted above are described in Thompson's 1941 review as confirmatory (Thompson KW, Antihormones, *Physiol Rev* 1941; **21:**588–631). Thompson does not use the term auto-antibodies and refers to antihormones, and the earliest references he gives is to the work of Collip and Anderson (Collip JB, Anderson EM, The production of serum inhibitory to the thyrotropic hormone *Lancet* 1934; **226:**76). The earliest reference I can find to autoantibodies using electronic data bases is Cavelti (Cavelti PA, Autoantibodies in rheumatic fever *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine* 1945; **60:**379–81). However, Calvelti cites a 1920 paper by GW Wilson (Wilson GW Experiments on the production of specific antisera for infections of unknown cause III. Nephrotoxins: their specificity as demonstrated by the method of selective absorption *J Exp Medicine* 1920; **32:**183).

JS Kelly

WILLIAM HENDERSON (1810–1872) AND HOMEOPATHY IN EDINBURGH

Sir,

I greatly enjoyed Dr Boyd's scholarly review in which he describes the impact of William Henderson's adoption of homeopathy and the consternation this caused in Edinburgh medical circles. When highlighting Henderson's role in establishing that typhus and relapsing were different diseases, Dr Boyd identifies an area where there remains uncertainty as to the first physicians who showed conclusively that the two diseases were distinct from each other and from typhoid fever.

There is little doubt that Henderson was first to differentiate typhus and relapsing fever on clinical grounds: in a paper published in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1844, Henderson demonstrated that these were different diseases basing his conclusions on clinical and epidemiological observations, using the example of Isabella McDonald and her family at 327 Canongate. Between April and July 1843, five members of this family suffered from typhus fever and yet between August and November, these unfortunate people were now seized with epidemic fever. Henderson, aware that an attack of typhus bestowed a prolonged period of immunity, reasoned that the second attack of fever must differ from the first, and using this and other case studies, concluded that there were two diseases, typhus and epidemic fever.

Henderson did not at any time refer to typhoid fever, the credit for clarifying the name of this disorder going to French physicians such as Bretonneau, Louis, Prost, Serres and Petit. There were later contributions from other physicians such as the American, Gerhard, who established that typhoid and typhus fevers were different diseases during an epidemic in Philadelphia. Gerhard studied in Paris, as had the Scotsman, AP Stewart, a Glasgow graduate, who also wrote on the topic of typhoid and typhus. Many questions remain unanswered concerning the history of fevers, issues that cannot be resolved in a few lines – accordingly, a detailed review of the subject is in preparation.

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