

News, Notes and Queries

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MEDICAL PAPERS IN THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

DR. DOUGLAS GUTHRIE, Curator of the Library and Museum of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, has contributed to the 1958 issue of the Society's *Year Book* a paper on 'Medical and Literary Contributions to the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1783 to 1900', which emphasizes the extraordinary versatility that characterized so many of the medical men of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge had been founded at Edinburgh by Alexander Monro, *primus*, in 1731, and a second society—the Philosophical Society—was established in 1739. All members of the Philosophical Society became original Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh on its foundation in 1783. The Royal Society consisted originally of two classes, Physical and Literary, which met separately. The literary interest was quite marked in the early years, but after a time the Society became predominantly, but never exclusively, scientific.

The Edinburgh Society, like its London counterpart, owed much to the medical graduates who constituted a very high proportion of its membership, and papers of medical or quasi-medical interest occupy a prominent place in its *Transactions*. Several of the early papers contributed by medical men dealt, however, with subjects far removed from medicine. Thus the first volume of the *Transactions* contained Dr. John Hutton's classical paper on a 'Theory of the Earth', and we find Professor James Gregory, of powder fame, writing on 'The Theory of the Moods of Verbs'. To offset these theoretical and seemingly 'dry' subjects we have Dr. John Grieve's paper entitled 'An Account of making a Wine, called by the Tartars *Koumiss*' and one on 'The Distillation of Ardent Spirits from Carrots' by Dr. Hunter of York. Dr. Guthrie refers to a number of papers of direct medical, anatomical or physiological interest by such famous men as William Pulteney Alison, Sir Charles Bell, Alexander Monro, *secundus*, John Davy, John Goodsir, J. Hughes Bennett, Sir Robert Christison, J. Matthews Duncan, Sir James Young Simpson, Sir Thomas Fraser and Lord Lister. Many of these contributions are still regarded as classics in their particular fields. The

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literary papers, of which Dr. Guthrie also gives a brief account, show how widespread were the activities of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the earlier days of its existence. Purely 'scientific' papers are not dealt with, but Dr. Guthrie concludes his interesting survey by observing that 'a perusal of early volumes of the *Transactions* will repay any modern scientist, if only because of the clear and readable style in which the matter is presented'.

W. J. B.

THE WÜRZBURG POLYCLINIC

THE part played by historiography in the building up of tradition is well exemplified in the growing literature on the history of individual hospitals and medical schools. The latest to come to our notice is a well-documented and comprehensive history of the University Polyclinic at Würzburg.* The tradition of medical teaching in Würzburg is traced back, through Van Swieten in Vienna, to his master Boerhaave and the Leyden school, and its development in the nineteenth century is shown in the biographies of the leading medical men who were associated with it. The history of the hospital buildings is also given in detail with photographs and plans, and it is good to see that the delightful eighteenth-century pharmacy of the Juliusspital (illustrated on p. 4) is preserved so carefully today. The fine new hospital which was opened in 1954, of which there are many views, both internal and external, is likely to make British doctors envious.

F. N. L. POYNTER

AGOSTINO BASSI (1773-1856)

AGOSTINO BASSI (1773-1856) is remembered as a pioneer in bacteriology and the founder of medical mycology for his discovery that a disease of silkworms was caused by an invading plant parasite. When the centenary of his death was commemorated in 1956 one of the permanent results of the occasion was a sumptuously produced and illustrated volume entitled *Documenti Bassiani*. This was edited by Luigi Belloni and published for the 57th congress of the Italian Society of Internal Medicine by the Ciba Company in Italy. Among the admirable illustrations are two portraits of Bassi in full colour, facsimiles of letters and pages from MSS. as well as reproductions of the beautiful plates with which Bassi illustrated his original paper on silkworm disease. The quality of the production, like that of other recent Italian publications, is outstanding.

F. N. L. P.

THE TRENT LIBRARY

THE Rare Book Room is becoming a prized historical sanctuary in the medical libraries of America. In April 1956 I had the privilege of attending the moving and impressive ceremony which attended the opening of the Trent Library in the Medical School of Duke University at Durham, North Carolina. This extraordinary collection of 40,000 volumes, which included a first edition of Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* and other

* Die Würzburger Medizinische Universitäts-Poliklinik, 1807-1957. By H. Franke, E. Schröder and J. Schröder. Stuttgart, G. Thieme Verlag, 1957, pp. x, 123, 31 illus. 8vo. 15 DM.