

Texts and Documents

A UNIQUE COPY OF GEORGE ARMSTRONG'S PRINTED PROPOSALS FOR ESTABLISHING THE DISPENSARY FOR SICK CHILDREN, LONDON, 1769

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THE most recent and most comprehensive account of the life and work of George Armstrong, the eighteenth-century pioneer in the medical care of sick children, is contained in a book by the late Dr. W. J. Maloney, entitled *George and John Armstrong of Castleton: Two Eighteenth-century Medical Pioneers* (Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone, 1954). In the introduction to that work I explained the circumstances which led to its posthumous publication and emphasized the painstaking researches carried out by Dr. Maloney in assembling his facts. On page 57 of his book there is the statement, '“Early in the year 1769 printed proposals for administering advice and medicines gratis to the children of the poor were given to a few friends to circulate among their acquaintance”'. Of these initial proposals, no copy has been found.'

The search for a copy of these proposals went on for many years, and at the time of publication of Dr. Maloney's book it seemed unlikely that any of the few copies printed had survived. Quite recently, while several large parcels of eighteenth-century ephemera in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library were being sorted and examined, a complete copy of the original proposals was discovered. It is a folio measuring 33 cm. by 21 cm., with text on three numbered pages. It was apparently folded across twice when issued and the legend is printed across one of the folds on the last (unnumbered) page. The folding has left its scars and the document is considerably damp-stained, but, as the photographs show, it is perfectly legible. Under the legend on the last page has been written in pencil, 'Very rare, by John Armstrong the poet and Protector of Public Dispensaries'. John Armstrong may indeed have helped his brother George to draft these proposals, but, as Maloney showed, the whole idea of the dispensary and the responsibility for carrying it into effect was a natural product of George's experience and practice. They are dated from George Armstrong's home at

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Hampstead in February 1769. The dispensary was opened at No. 7 Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Monday, 24 April 1769. The speed with which the proposals were carried out says much both for the response of the public and for the determination of its founder. Not only was this the beginning of the dispensary movement, but also, as Still wrote in his *History of Paediatrics* (p. 416), 'the most important step ever taken in this country towards the care of sick children', and it is good to know that a document so intimately connected with that historic event has at last been found, and is in the safe keeping of the Wellcome Library.

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY OXFORD LICENCE TO PRACTISE MEDICINE

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FROM their earliest commencements the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have issued licences and degrees in medicine under Statutes which, with minor alterations, remained in force until the nineteenth century. So far as London was concerned, an Act of 3 Henry VIII, c.11, passed in 1511 was directed towards the control of the practice of medicine and surgery and directed that, except for the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, all other practitioners must be licensed, after examination, by the Bishop of London. Later, when the Royal College of Physicians was founded they were empowered to license physicians, but the Bishop of London continued to be a licensing body until 1725. Many of those who applied to the Bishop of London had been in practice elsewhere, some were in possession of degrees from foreign universities, but a number received their licence on most slender certification.

In Oxford the Statutes laid down a long theoretical course for their medical graduates, for they had to graduate in Arts before going on to Medicine. Under the *Statuta Antiqua* the course for a Bachelor of Arts lasted for three years with a further three years' study before he received his Master of Arts degree. After obtaining his M.A. the candidate could then proceed to study medicine, and it was possible for him to obtain his degree of Bachelor of Medicine three years later, but if he wished to take his Doctorate a total period of study of fourteen years was required. The necessity for having the M.A. was not infrequently waived.