

Society Reports

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY HISTORY OF MEDICINE SOCIETY

At a meeting of the Society held on Tuesday, 12 February 1957, Dr. Arthur Hughes read a paper on 'The History of the Microscope and its introduction into Medical Teaching'. After describing the discovery and the early history of the microscope Dr. Hughes showed a remarkable series of drawings of spermatozoa to illustrate the comparative efficiency of microscopes of different periods. Leeuwenhoek's remarkable achievements were not equalled until the development by Schneider of the achromatic microscope which was not commercially available until about 1830. Drawings of spermatozoa published by Prévost and Dumas in 1820 were certainly inferior to those of Leeuwenhoek. Some of the more important technical advances of the nineteenth century, photomicrography (1845), aniline dyes (1861) and oil immersion (1880) culminating in Bradfield's work with the electron microscopy, were briefly mentioned.

Purkinje introduced the microscope into medical teaching in 1822, and its use was greatly extended by Johannes Müller, whose pupils included Virchow. In Britain the Goodsir brothers taught microscopic anatomy in Edinburgh in the 1830's, and the pioneers in London were Bowman and Todd. Acland, a pupil of Goodsir, began to teach microscopy at Oxford in 1845, but his first courses aroused derisive criticism. Microscopy was not taught in Cambridge until some twenty years later.

At a meeting of the Society held in the Department of Radiotherapeutics on Tuesday, 5 March 1957, Professor H. A. Harris spoke on 'The Nervous System'. The wide scope of his title enabled Professor Harris to range freely over the history of the growth of our knowledge of the structure and function of the nervous system during the past three centuries. He chose as his starting point the 'Cerebri Anatome' of Willis (1664), with Christopher Wren's unsurpassed illustrations of the venous drainage of the cord, and concluded with Sherrington's concept of the integrative function of the nervous system. His description of the more important discoveries of the past 150 years was vivid and illuminating, and provided a rapid but coherent survey of the background to modern neurology.