

TWO HISTORICAL NOTES  
BY SHERRINGTON

SIR CHARLES SHERRINGTON'S knowledge of medical literature was profound and detailed. As a tribute to his memory at the centenary of his birth, I bring to notice two small writings of his, preserved at the Royal College of Surgeons, which show two aspects of his approach to medical history.

I

Sherrington's old friend and former colleague Sir Charles Ballance was, in 1932, working at the Royal College on problems of nerve suture, when he asked me one day to tell him, as quickly as might be, who first noticed that stimulating the sympathetic affected the pupil. Floundering unsuccessfully in my ignorance in the ocean of the Index Catalogue, I thought of asking Sherrington, whom I knew slightly as a regular reader in the College library. I was quite prepared for a hint that I should do my work for myself. Instead, and *by return of post*, I received the answer printed below. The letter is in his own neat and sturdy hand on both sides of a quarto sheet of writing paper. I omit the last paragraph which deals with the cost of library purchases: 'A number of the periodicals and "handbooks" in German are quite third rate'—and the possibilities of library co-operation in London.

The text of the letter is an indication of the precise record of his own speciality which Sherrington carried in his memory. Sir Charles Ballance was deeply moved by Sherrington's knowledge and his generosity in making it available.

23.vii.32  
9 Chadlington Road,  
Oxford.

Dear Librarian

thank you for letter. As to Sir Charles Ballance's enquiry:—the first observation of effect of stim. of the sympath. on the pupil, viz. dilatation is Biffi, *Annali Universali d. Medicina*, Milano, 1845—you have this in the library. Then there followed A. Waller (C.R. 1851 [—with Budge (Julius) (? of Bonn then), the man about whom Waller had to circulate the printed letter (I gave a copy to the Library) in order to save his (W.'s) own discoveries from being filched]. Long before *dilatation* on *stimulation* (an obs. wh. had to wait for electrical means of stimulation & ∴ for Volta & Faraday) the observat. of pupillar *constriction* after *severance* of cerv. sympath. n. had been made by Pourfour d. Petit, 1712 (*Hist. et Mem. d. l'Academ. d. Sciences Paris*, 1927—also in the library I think). Following on Petit, at long interval, were Cruikshank (*Phil. Trans*) & Dupuy (*Arch. Med. & Chir. Paris*). In John Reid's *Collect. works* you will find, from *Edin. Med. Jnl.* Jan. 1838 & Aug.

### *News, Notes and Queries*

1839, further confirmation, & expansion, of Petit's observat. I think you have that vol. ∴ you wrote you did not require my copy.

Oddly the whole 'cerv. symp.' paral. syndrome was not clinically recognized as such until E. S. Hare, a house surgeon at Stafford Gen. Hospital did so in a paper on a hard tumour in the neck, in 1838. He died that year, & never got the credit, which—as so often—went to a continental surgeon later—Horner (Horner's syndrome). Ferrier described dilat. of pupil on stim. 2nd thorac. spinal root *i.e.* origin of cerv. symp. in monkey, Roy. Soc. Proc. 1883. There is a picture of result in monkey of cutting cerv. symp. in a paper by me, J. of Physiol. vol. XIII. pl. XXI (drawn by Lapidge) 1892 *i.e.* the cerv. symp. syndrome. . . .

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

C. S. Sherrington.

### II

The second paper shows Sherrington's penetrating and sardonic intellect still 'asking the right questions' as he pursued the vagaries of truth and error through the pages of his predecessors in his ninety-third year. The notes are written on the back of a letter dated 16 June 1949, written to him on a quite different topic, which he gave to the library among some autographs of distinguished men.

The heart is the seat of sleep. *Yes.* 1668.

Movement of the heart due to fermentation of the blood. *No.* 1665.

Is the action of the heart after the manner of a muscle. *Yes.* 1688.

Is the blood driven by the sole energy of the heart. *No.* 1688.

Whether man's life is due to the circuit of the blood. *Yes.* 1689.

Is not bleeding from a vein the main & universal remedy for all major illnesses? *No.* 1691.

Is not bleeding from a vein at every period of life the chief and universal remedy for all major illnesses? *Yes.* 1687.

Whether disease deducible from the o of blood. *Yes.* 1693.

The movement of the dura mater due to the heart. *Yes.* 1726.

W. R. LE FANU

## JOSIAH C. TRENT COLLECTION IN THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

*Fifty English Medical Books, 1525–1640* is an annotated catalogue of an exhibition in the Trent Room at Duke School of Medicine Library on the occasion of the Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the American Association of the History of Medicine. Compiled with loving care by Henry Schuman and Martha Alexander, the brochure was designed as a souvenir for those who