

News, Notes and Queries

HISTORIANS' MEDICAL INFORMATION BUREAU

Historians sometimes find themselves, in the course of their work, faced with problems on which they need medical advice; in interpreting for instance, medical symptoms for a biographical study, in understanding the nature of an epidemic, and so on. The advice they need is often specialist advice; and they may have difficulty in knowing where to turn for this. Mr. John Potter, Director of Post Graduate Education at the Oxford University Medical School, has launched a scheme designed to put historians in touch with suitable medical men who have expressed an interest in helping with such problems. In 1973 he asked, through the medical press, for the names of specialists interested in helping historians evaluate medical evidence. The response has been encouraging, and there is now a fairly comprehensive panel of experts ready to offer their services.

The project has the blessing of Oxford University's Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine. But it is not concerned with the history of medicine as such. The aim is rather to help the non-medical historian who encounters medical problems in the course of his research.

Historians who wish to make use of the service should write to the Historians' Medical Information Bureau at Wadham College, Oxford OX1 3PN. They should indicate the nature of the medical problem as concisely as possible. Mr. A. F. Thompson and Mr. C. S. L. Davies will be pleased to give Mr. Potter what help they can in interpreting the needs of historians. But the Bureau is not intended to be an advice-giving body. Its aim is the modest one of establishing contacts between enquirers and appropriate specialists.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Seventh Annual Meeting of the International Society for the History of Behavioral and Social Sciences (CHEIRON) will be held at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, from 5th to 8th June 1975. Papers will deal with aspects of the history of any of the behavioural and social sciences, with related historical or social science methodology, or with the philosophy of history as applied to the study of the history of the behavioural and social sciences. Further information may be obtained from: Dr. M. R. Marshall, Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S.

A SPECIAL RESEARCH PROJECT ON SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL ARABIAN MEDICINE

On 1 November 1972 a special research project was begun at the section of Islamic Studies of the Oriental Institute at the University of Berne, Switzerland. Of interest to scholars in many fields, its title is: "Contributions to the knowledge of sources of medieval Arabian medicine and to the study of its continuance".

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The project was originated by Dr. J. Ch. Bürgel, professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Berne, who has worked extensively on scientific and social aspects of medicine during the Islamic "Middle Ages". The project is supported by the Swiss National Foundation, which had awarded a grant for two years to Mr. Harmut Fährdrich, M.A., Ph.D., from Los Angeles.

The object is the edition of eight Arabic texts from the ninth to the thirteenth century A.D. The emphasis is on writings of an introductory nature, not on discussions of specialized technical questions. The texts deal particularly with the following problems: the value of health; the usefulness of medicine; the doctor's importance and responsibility; the place of medicine within the framework of all sciences; the decay of medicine and the possibilities of its revival.

The original intention was simply to edit the Arabic texts on the basis of one or, if possible, several manuscripts each. However, the translation of at least some of the texts is clearly desirable, and ibn Jumay^C's *Maqāla* . . . (Treatise to Saladin on the revival of medicine) is now translated into English and is ready for printing. It is hoped that translations of ar-Ruhāwī's *Adab aṭ-Ṭibib* (The doctor's erudition) and ibn Hindu's *Miftāḥ aṭ-Ṭibb* (The key to medicine) will soon follow.

INFORMATION REQUIRED

TRADE CATALOGUES

Dr. Audrey B. Davis, Curator, Division of Medical Sciences, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. 20560, U.S.A., is preparing for publication a bibliography of trade catalogues of medical, surgical and dental instrument manufacturers. Dr. Davis would be glad to hear from holders of collections of this material.

MUMFERGO PILLS

Dr. T. D. Whittet, Woburn Lodge, 8 Lyndhurst Drive, Harpenden, Herts., has come across the following entry in the Parish Register of Tadlow, Cambs.: "Goodman Parker reputed an hundred years old was buried on St. Michael's Day 1714." Affidavit—sworn the same day: "It was generally thought he prolonged his life by mumfergo pills". Dr. Whittet would be grateful for any information about mumfergo pills.

NATURAL HISTORY MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES OF THE BRITISH ISLES

A guide to the natural history manuscript resources of the British Isles is being prepared for publication by G. Bridson (Librarian, Linnean Society of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0LQ) and A. P. Harvey (Librarian, Department of Palaeontology, British Museum (Natural History), London SW7 5BD). Libraries, museums, etc., are being surveyed by questionnaire. A problem of this survey is the wide distribution of material as shown by its presence in some unlikely locations, and many individuals will have come into contact with such items. They may also know of undocumented items in public and private collections and might be able to contribute valuable information. The compilers will be grateful for, and readily acknowledge, any such information.