

necessary dietetic regimen'; while P. G., aged 45, had acute dyspepsia and was discharged 'benefited'. A note of caution is sounded however. 'This case threatens to terminate ultimately in dyspeptic phthisis, from mal-assimilation, consequent on the difficulty of maintaining in his own cottage a continued system of dietetic regimen'; an euphemistic description of near-starvation probably.

The Hospital was founded on a financial basis of donations to the total of £177 4s. 6d., and annual subscriptions of £90 16s. The former sum was used for capital items such as beds, furniture, etc., and the latter for the current expenditure. In this latter account the nurse's salary is £22 4s. for the year, the cost of wine, beer and spirits is £21 1s. 6d and housekeeping cost £51 10s. 6d., a tribute to the supervision by the Ladies Committee no doubt. Receipts from patients totalled £38 18s., and 10s. was received from a grateful patient as a donation. A list of gifts includes, apart from such obvious items as sheets, pillowcases, blankets and personal linen, a water butt, a truss (presumably second-hand), a draughtboard and pieces, Bibles and five framed texts. But, alas, the hospital was to last only sixty-five years and this in spite of a bequest of £3,000 in 1925, on which occasion it was decided to admit maternity cases for the first time and to alter the rules accordingly. With the coming of easier transport, rising costs, and staffing difficulties it was inevitable that such a small institution must give way and in 1933 the funds were realized and used to provide District Nurses, until they in turn were supplied by the Local Authority and the funds once more diverted, this time to a common charitable fund for the 'Sick Poor'. It remains merely to find sick poor today for the funds to be used more or less for the original purpose.

H. G. ST. M. REES

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE FOR WILLIAM NISBET'S
AUTHORSHIP OF *A PICTURE OF . . . THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS OF LONDON*, 1817 RETITLED *AUTHENTIC MEMOIRS
. . . OF THE MOST EMINENT PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF
GREAT BRITAIN*, 1818 and 1822

Between S. F. Simmons's pioneer *The Medical Register for the Year 1779* and Messrs. Churchill's series of medical directories commencing with *The London Medical Directory*, 1845, came the anonymous but not the less valuable reference tool *A picture of the present state of the Royal College of Physicians of London; containing memoirs, biographical, critical, and literary, of all the resident members of that learned body, and of the heads of the Medical Boards; with some other distinguished professional characters*, 1817 (London; Sherwood, Neely, and Jones). It was reissued with a cancel title-page and a six-page 'Pharmacopoeia Extemporanea' as a 'second edition, enlarged' in 1818 and again as a third edition in 1822 under the more ambitious title *Authentic memoirs, biographical, critical, and literary, of the most eminent physicians and surgeons of Great Britain* (London; Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, and J. Walker; and Highley and Son). The book opens with a dedication to Henry Addington, Viscount Sidmouth, followed by a preface in which the unknown author analyses critically the place of the College of Physicians in medical affairs, drawing a distinction between the merits of its members as individuals and its constitution and functions as a corporate body which he considered outmoded and indeed obstructive to medical progress. He was especially critical of the exclusion of Edinburgh graduates from the fellowship and the 'Machiavelian policy' of restricting

'Licentiate by oath on their admission, not to innovate on the received order of things'. Next in a brief introduction the author praises biography as 'of all species of writing the most interesting'. Then come 548 pages of medical biographies arranged by College status and seniority ending with 'Medical Boards', 'Ex-Collegiate Physicians' (which incidentally included Edward Jenner) and finally 'Surgeons, &c.'

The author's aim was to draw living pictures and accordingly he 'traces, with fidelity, first the *education or opportunities* of professional improvement of each individual;—2ndly, it marks the steps of his progress or professional career; and, lastly, it appreciates his labors to the community as a literary character, or as zealous in the establishing or conducting institutions calculated for the public benefit'. The book ends with 'The London Medical Directory', a 67-page section describing the medical topography, diseases, hospitals and other charities of the metropolis.

All medical and other library catalogues we have seen which list any of the three editions—and copies become rarer with each as they commonly do when original sheets are reissued in this way—catalogue the book as anonymous with one exception which will be mentioned later; they include the British Museum, Manchester Medical Society, R.C.P. Ed., R.C.P. London, R.C.S. Eng., R.F.P. & S. Glasgow, Royal Society of Medicine, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, National Library of Medicine, U.S.A.

Coincidence led us to the identity of the author and also the manner in which he compiled this volume. While transcribing the MS. Diary of Sir Alexander Morison (1779–1866) M.D. (Ed.), F.R.C.P. (Ed. and Lond.) we came across the following entry for 7 March 1817: 'Returned to Dr. Nisbet's, No. 9 Barton Street, Westminster, some letters and papers left by him at my lodgings last night; he proposes to publish an account of the Physicians &c. in London'.

And on 15 March 1817 Morison recorded:

Wrote to a Dr. Nisbet who has called several times—he proposes to publish an account of the Medical Men in London—'Dr. Morison regrets that he is obliged to be from home tomorrow morning and that Dr. Nisbet has had the trouble of calling repeatedly. When Dr. Nisbet's work is published [it was in fact announced in August of that year] Dr. Morison will be happy to be considered subscriber for a copy of it. With regard to himself he has nothing to communicate; however if Dr. Nisbet in order to complete his List is desirous to have the dates of his Birth &c. these are as follows: Born at Edinburgh 1779, Graduated there 1799, Fellow of the College of Physicians 1801, Licentiate of the London College 1808, Physician to Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold'.

Comparison of this bald statement of facts with the printed version's description of Morison's 'superior endowments and tried experience' shows that the editor unlike his modern counterpart, wielded an expanding pen. Yet if Morison's can be taken as representative, his embellishments suggest he had informed himself about a good many additional circumstances of his subjects' lives. In consequence the book is 'authentic' as it is based on information supplied by the subjects themselves and 'living biography' as it utilizes contemporary sources and general knowledge not necessarily available to posthumous biographers. This is in fact what gives it its peculiar value today.

The question remains who was 'Dr. Nisbet'? The only possible one of that name was William Nisbet whom the *DNB* describes as a medical writer who flourished 1808, M.D., and fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. *Hirsch* quoting *Dezeimeris*, *Dechambre* and *Callisen* adds that he was born at Edinburgh 1759 and died there 1822: none of these sources list the book mentioned here. *Fasti Academiae*

Mariscallanae, where incidentally his name is spelt 'Nisbett', states he was M.D. Aberdeen 1785 by letters of recommendation of Drs. Dickenson and Keith, M.R.C.S. Edinburgh 1786, and practised in London.

Curiously, confirmation of this attribution came from an entirely unexpected source. In 1925 Sir Archibald Garrod published an article on Alexander Marcet in *Guy's Hospital Reports*, 75, 373–87, in which he quoted from *A picture*, etc., and appended to the reference the following note: 'Published anonymously, but attributed to Nisbet.' As there was no indication that Garrod had done any historical research on the authorship of the book and as the text itself gives no hint—thus making it practically impossible to penetrate the author's anonymity other than by a chance find in a contemporary record such as Morison's *Diary*—we reasoned that he must have obtained his information from an Oxford source where he was then Regius Professor. Our search was quickly rewarded since in Kidd's *Catalogue of the Works in Medicine and Natural History contained in the Radcliffe Library*, 1835 (Oxford; for the University) the book is catalogued by author under 'Nesbit' [*sic*]. Dr. L. W. Hanson, Keeper of Printed Books, Bodleian Library, kindly informed us that in the Manuscript Accession Lists the book appears under 1817/18 as 'Nisbet, *Biography of the College of Physicians*', but because the compiler of the Modern Card Catalogue of the Radcliffe Science Library could find no sources for this attribution *A picture*, etc. is currently catalogued as anonymous.

From the evidence here brought to light Nisbet's authorship can now be generally acknowledged.

RICHARD HUNTER AND IDA MACALPINE

Book Reviews

A History of Chemistry. J. R. PARTINGTON. (4 vols.) London: Macmillan & Co., 1961. Vol. II, pp. 795, 38 text illus. £5 5s.

IT must be said at once that the work under review opens up a new epoch in the writing of the History of Chemistry. The last two great landmarks in this field were the works by Hermann Kopp (4 vols., 1843–7) and Paul Hoefer (2 vols., 1842–3; 2nd ed., 1866–9). Each of these is a classic in its own right, offering a delightful text for reading, studying and the tracing of sources. These illuminate the development of Chemistry and indeed our knowledge of matter and the natural philosophy that forms its background. Apart from these old and some more recent supplementary works on the history of alchemy there has been nothing to meet the demands of the scholarly and serious student. Nor has there been any competent collection, sifting and discussion of the extensive literature that has accrued since the days of Kopp. This we are now given in the work under review—to the extent of what may well be called a definitive and exhaustive treatment of the subject. There is, however, much more than this. What should we expect from a History of Chemistry? Surely in the first place a competent and critical census of the actual contributions of individual savants which in itself reveals the standard of chemical knowledge at a given time. Obviously only an authority on modern Chemistry equipped with the knowledge, aptitude and understanding of a historian can be equal to the task. In this respect the example of Kopp and Berthelot has been followed—and surpassed—by Partington. This