MANCHESTER MEDICAL SOCIETY CENTENARY

BY

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Manchester has been, is, and will be celebrating centenary anniversaries of important societies in the conception of all of which the medical profession had been more or less active. Last year the Statistical Society, the first of its kind in England, reached its hundred years of existence. One of its first four founders was Dr. James Phillips Kay, afterwards Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth (1804-77), a baronetcy being awarded for his national services to education. Presidents of the society were Dr. John Robertson (1844-7), Dr. Daniel Noble (1859-61), and Dr. James Niven (1905-7). I had the honour of giving the society an account of "A Medical Statistician of a Century and a Half Ago" (Dr. Thomas Percival) during its historical celebrations. This year the Manchester Medical Society became a centenarian on October 1st; and next year the Manchester Athenaeum—practically a similar institution, but for the commercial man in the street—reaches a similar age. In a *History of the Manchester Medical Society* it is suggested that the idea of both our own society and of the Athenaeum was conceived, and preliminary steps for their formation taken, by one man—John Walker—a surgeon of the town. As much as is known of Walker is recorded in the *History* of the society which has been prepared for the centenary. Before 1834 there was no medical library available for general reference, and no society confined to members of the profession at which medical questions could be ventilated.

FROM 1782 TO 1834

The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society was conceived and really brought into being in 1782 by Dr. Thomas Percival of medical ethics fame, with the forceful assistance of Thomas Henry, F.R.S., apothecary to the Manchester Infirmary—that is, a general practitioner of the day—and the Rev. Thomas Barnes, Unitarian minister of the town. This society was mainly run by the profession for thirty or more years, half of the offices—presidents, treasurers, secretaries—being filled by our forebears. In its early days the doctors read papers before it, but they were mainly of general interest, and any member of the society could attend its meetings. The only method in which professional matters could then be discussed seemed to be by the public press, in pamphlets, and even in octavo volumes of considerable size. Our forefathers of the day were no milk-and-water controversialists; ink was no use to them—gall apparently flowed more naturally from their quill pens. The most important controversy of those times was over the justifiability of the Caesarean section operation, which Dr. John Hull defended against the scathing comments of William Simmons, backed up by Dr. John Ferriar. Then Charles White drew down the sneers of Ferriar upon his method of describing the anatomical distribution of the swelling in phlegmasia alba dolens puerperarum. All in public too, and no doubt spicy material for the general readers.

A HUNDRED YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENT

In spite of the evident need for one, there was no attempt to found a purely medical society until 1833, when a meeting was held and a decision made to canvass the practitioners of the district on the question. Two energetic young persons—John Walker and Joseph Peel Catlow—undertook this, and the result was the foundation next year of a society with the object of providing a library and reading room and place for meetings for discussing medical topics. Dr. John Hull, then the doyen of the profession, was elected first president.

The history of the society, with its ups and downs, hard work by some members, indifference by others, financial struggles, is probably that of other societies: but one outstanding feature was the acquisition of a very extensive and valuable library through the efforts of

Thomas Windsor, an ophthalmic surgeon of distinction in his day. For fifteen years he bought many thousands of second-hand books from home and abroad. Among them were some dozen incunabula, many examples of fine printing from the leading Continental presses, anatomical plates, biographical dictionaries, sets of periodicals—indeed, anything that might be of value for reference or research. So much was spent on these books that the committee got restive, and the end was Windsor's withdrawal from his library activities and transference of his help to Dr. Billings's library of the United States Surgeon-General at Washington.

The actual hundred years of achievement was reached on October 1st, on which date an exhibition of books, portraits, curios, and other objects bearing on the medical history of the town was opened in the new Central Library of the city, where it will remain for general inspection until October 20th. The president of the society for the year, Dr. E. Bosdin Leech, gave an address on October 3rd, the first Wednesday in the month, on which ordinary meetings of the society have invariably been held from October 1st, 1834. His subject was "Some Picturesque Episodes of Manchester Medical History." Before the address Dr. Leech presented, for the honorary membership of the society, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, Chancellor of the University, Sir Walter Moberly, Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Walter Cobbett, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Manchester Royal Infirmary, Percy Winstanley Hull, grandson of Dr. John Hull, the society's first president, Dr. J. M. Bligh, President of the Liverpool Medical Institution, and Professor J. A. Nixon of Bristol, who is to address the society next month on "Licence to Practise and Liberty to Teach Medicine in the English Provinces." A dinner followed on the same evening, at which many distinguished visitors were present. On Sunday, October 7th, there was a special service in the Cathedral, the preacher being the Right Reverend Cecil Wilson, Bishop of Middleton.

THE COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is in the large hall of the new Central Library of the city, recently opened by the King, which has been designed for such a purpose. The display, mostly of objects illustrating the medical history of the town, is well worthy of the honour of being the first of its kind to appear in such a striking place. It is being visited daily, with great interest, by hundreds of the general public, for whom it was chiefly intended. The exhibits are disposed in handsome erect metal and glass cases, while for the larger articles and books horizontal cases are used. Of books there are samples of medical publications of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from the most famous Continental presses, some in Greek characters. More modern books illustrate the writings of local doctors who have promoted the knowledge of medicine. Most of these exhibits are made more interesting by a portrait of the author displayed by the side of his book. Two cases contain books and pamphlets dealing with the vaccination controversy before 1816, and copies from burial registers of the town churches showing the ravages of small-pox, especially among children, of the period. One very interesting exhibit is a series of illustrations and portraits showing the growth of the Manchester Royal Infirmary from its foundation in 1752, and a group of its original large gallipots and poison bottles, the latter like large stone ginger-beer bottles of last century. Among other objects which attract attention is a carbolic acid spray, given by Lister to the late Mr. Edward Lund. The progress of the public health of the town is well illustrated by graphs, especially made for the purpose, with singular clarity of exposition.

A final note of personal interest is that the president for the centenary year is nephew of the late Dr. Daniel John Leech, professor of materia medica and therapeutics in the University of Manchester, who filled the same office in the jubilee of the society fifty years ago. Dr. D. J. Leech was keenly interested in the nitrite group, and was instrumental in having that very useful preparation liquor ethyl nitritus recognized in the official *Pharmacopoeia*, though it is no longer there.