

# Nova et Vetera

## THE B.M.A. AND MEDICAL REFORM

In Mr. E. Muirhead Little's centenary *History of the British Medical Association* there is a chapter on the Association and Medical Reform, a matter which was kept in the forefront of policy from 1837 onwards. "So closely has this subject been interwoven with the life of the Association that it is difficult to treat of it apart from other medical affairs." The first important step was taken in 1839 when the Association presented to Parliament a memorial on the urgent need for reform of medical education and of the status of the practitioner, and praying for the necessary legislation. Contact was made at the House of Commons with the M.P.s Warburton, Hawse, and Thomas Wakley, Editor of the *Lancet*, who were bringing forward Bills for the regulation of medical education and the restriction of unqualified practice. The Bill introduced by Mr. Hawse, M.P. for Lambeth, came up for second reading in March, 1841, but was counted out. In 1845 the Secretary of the Association received instructions to send a copy of the report of its Medical Reform Committee "at once" to Sir James Graham in reference to a Bill he was introducing, but nothing came of this renewed effort. Five years passed, and then Sir George Grey brought forward another abortive Medical Bill.

### A Letter from the Founder

In 1852 Mr. George Hastings, M.P., son of the Founder and Secretary of the Medical Reform Committee, drafted on behalf of the Association a Medical Bill, which, however, shared the fate of all its forerunners. We have received from Dr. D. A. H. Moses, M.C., a copy of a letter now in his possession written by Sir Charles Hastings, evidently referring to that Bill. The letter is as follows:

Worcester  
March 5. 1853.

My dear Mr. Nunneley

From the letter you will have received from my son, you will perceive that the Committee were determined to take their stand on the Bill, and to go boldly to Lord Palmerston who willingly receives us.

Nothing must keep you away, and you must secure as many Members of Parliament as you can to accompany the Deputation to Lord Palmerston.

If you have any means of securing Sir James Graham do so by all means and get him to support the Bill.

We shall meet at my son's Chambers, 4 Paper Buildings, Temple, at ten o'clock in the morning of the 17th: to arrange the preliminaries.

Believe me

My dear Mr. Nunneley

Yours very truly,

CHARLES HASTINGS.

Thomas Nunneley Esq:

Two years later, at the Annual Meeting of the Association held in York, the Medical Reform Committee recommended the reintroduction of this Bill and steps were taken to organize support of the measure in Parliament. It had a first reading in the House of Commons, but went no further. At the Annual Meeting of 1857 in Nottingham Sir Charles Hastings announced that the Right Hon. W. F. Cowper, M.P., was proposing to introduce a Medical Reform Bill in the next session of Parliament. This was the measure which became law on August 2 of the following year as the Medical Act, 1858. Under it the General Medical Council was constituted, and Sir Charles Hastings became one of the four Crown nominees upon that Council, retaining his seat from November 13, 1858, to November 13, 1863.

Thomas Nunneley, F.R.C.S., to whom our Founder's letter is addressed, was mainly known to the profession as a provincial ophthalmologist and to the public as a medical witness in the trials for murder of William Palmer and William Dove; but he was also for six years surgeon to the General Infirmary at Leeds, and had a name for judgment and skill in operating. From its formation in 1832 Nunneley was a most active member of the British Medical Association, and in 1869, the year before his death, he read the Annual Address in Surgery at the Leeds meeting.

### NIELS STENSEN, 1638-86

As a medical student of 23, Niels Stensen, dissecting in the house of Gerardus Blasius (Blaes) at Amsterdam, discovered and graphically described the duct of the parotid gland in the head of a sheep, and, despite jealous efforts on the part of his teacher to take the credit for himself, has survived in the anatomical eponym "Stensen's duct" ever since. Had he accomplished no more, fame would not have passed him by. Studying the structure of muscle with the aid of the microscope, he anticipated much of our modern knowledge. His "motor fibre" has become our "fasciculus," his "most minute fibril" is our "elementary fibre," and his "proper membrane" we now call "connective tissue framework." His conception of the nature of muscular contraction was far in advance of his time. He found the duct of the sublingual gland and elucidated the mechanism of the secretion of tears by the lacrimal glands. A neat and clever dissector, he was mathematically inclined, sober, and practical. In his discourse on the *Anatomy of the Brain* in 1669 he sternly rebukes both Willis and Descartes for their fanciful theories.

Extremely versatile even for a versatile age, Stensen is sometimes described as the father of geology. He was a pioneer, too, in the scientific study of crystals, investigating their growth by accretion and the phenomena of light refraction. In 1666 he was invited by Ferdinand II to become his court physician at Florence. But in the following year occurred a tide in his affairs which completely changed his outlook and revolutionized his career. Converted from the Lutheran to the Catholic faith and later receiving the titular honour of Bishop of Titiopolis in Greece, he lived a life of severe self-denial, gradually undermining his health. Though for a time he taught anatomy in his native town of Copenhagen, the power of conviction and the eagerness for knowledge had deserted him. He died in 1686 at the age of 48 and was buried in Florence. The tercentenary of this restless, noble, sincere, and entirely unselfish character, who possessed a true genius for friendship, was commemorated by the Section of Historical and Cultural Medicine at the New York Academy of Medicine on March 9, 1938, with a comprehensive and authoritative paper by Dr. Anne Tjomsland. Stensen is often known by his Latin name Nicolaus Stenonis, inaccurately Steno.

W. R. B.

John Freke, the 250th anniversary of whose birth occurs this year, was the first curator of the museum and the first ophthalmic surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and in 1736 described myositis ossificans progressiva. A friend of Henry Fielding, he is mentioned twice in *Tom Jones*. He died in 1756. A chandelier, carved by him in oak and heavily gilded, hangs in the Steward's office at St. Bartholomew's.

Under the title of "Some Forgotten Medical Memorials" an anonymous writer in the April issue of the *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* gives short historical notes concerning Sir John Richardson, Sir Alexander Armstrong, Robert McCormick, Frank Toms, W. T. Domville, M. C. Bain, David Walker, George Bass, and Elliott, whose names have been given to various sites.