MEDICAL HISTORY

My Father's B.M.J.

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Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis (John Owen of Plas Ddu, Caernarvonshire, 1560-1622).*British Medical Journal*, 1970, 1, 106-107

At breakfast-time on Saturdays my father was completely absorbed in the *B.M.J.*; my mother and I dared not disturb him. One day I hid it as soon as it dropped from the letter-box. He was very annoyed and naturally blamed the post. When I gave it to him he was greatly relieved. Such was his faith in the *B.M.J.* I have since wondered what it was that I had temporarily deprived him of. I cannot of course remember the date of my childish prank, but assuming that I was 7 it must have been in 1895. I therefore studied volume 2 of that year, then under the editorship of Ernest Hart assisted by Dawson Williams.

The year 1895 came within a stirring period. Schaefer was explaining the mysteries of the pituitary and thus initiating the profession into the concept of internal secretion. Doctors were becoming alive to the dangers of water-borne and milk-borne infection, especially of typhoid, and only five years earlier von Behring had introduced the antitoxin treatment of diphtheria.

General Content and Authors

The volume is largely taken up with the Annual Meeting. All the sections are reported at length, the section of laryngology alone occupying 19 pages. The section of physiology was shared between physiologists and physicians; the president, Sir David Ferrier, pleading, as many have done since, for closer co-operation. Similarly the section of anatomy is shared between anatomists and surgeons. B.M.A. branch meetings and medical societies are fully reported, and prominence is given to news from overseas. It is significant that more information comes from St. Petersburg than from New York.

With few exceptions the articles are monographs. They are uncumbered by references, for the simple reason that they are expressions of opinion and experience and do not constitute any advance on earlier accounts. The mystique of multiple authorship, with its comprehensive allusions to other work and formidable "bibliography", which is now usually the rule had not been invented. Structural chemical formulas appear only once, and charts, tables, and diagrams are few. X-ray pictures are of course absent, since their discovery was not made until November of that year and was not made public until the following year.

Professional Matters

The relation between the profession and the Government being tenuous there was little scope for disputes. Nevertheless, complaints about the "sweating" of doctors by the clubs and complaints against the Government about the insecurity of

tenure of medical officers of health were tremors presaging the earthquakes that were shortly to follow and were illustrations of the truth that, however much the public love and admire us individually, when it comes to paying us collectively the value they set on our services is rather different.

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thus combining the digestive action of malt extract with the stimulating and nutritive properties of cocoa and meat juice.

HYPODERMIC SYRINGE.
MESSRS. ALLEN AND HANBURY have submitted to us a new hypodermic syringe which seems to present certain distinct advantages. It consists of a graduated glass barrel with plunger, also made of glass, accurately fitted into it. The piston being of glass does not get out of order, even if not in regular use, as those made with packing of leather or asbestos are apt to do, especially in hot and dry climates. The needles are readily detachable, and the whole instrument is easily sterilised by boiling. Inside the metal mount is a

collar of asbestos, which prevents any leakage of fluid from the tip. The syringe should be filled and emptied with water a few times to moisten the asbestos collar, and to fill up any little space between the surfaces of the glass. The syringes are made in 10-minim and 30-minim sizes; also of the capacity of 5 c.cm. and 10 c.cm. for the injection of diphtheria, tetanus, or any other antitoxin. Altogether the syringe is one of the best and most convenient that we have yet seen.

"ANTI-STOOP."
MESSRS. ARNOLD AND SONS are the agents for the Carson Anti-stoop, for preventing or curing stooping habits. It consists of two steel arms connected at the back by a cross-piece, and passing up the back of the wearer to within about 3 or 4 inches of the neck, where they branch out on either side and come over the shoulders. At the extremity of the arms are attached padded blocks which, it is stated, press gently and uniformly upon the shoulders, gradually forcing them into their proper position. The excoeriation and abrasion of the

skin caused by the pressure and friction of straps passing under the arm are said to be entirely avoided. Owing to the elasticity of the steel it will give way to any sudden movement of the wearer, instead of breaking or cutting into the flesh. It is claimed that it can be put on and adjusted by the wearer alone, there being no straps or bands to buckle at the back.

INFLUENZA IN LONDON.—It is reassuring to learn that the deaths from influenza in London last week were 11, against 15 and 11 in the two preceding weeks; 1 death occurred in West London, 2 in North London, 2 in East London, and 6 in South London, including 3 in Deptford. It is satisfactory also to know that the deaths from diseases of the respiratory organs in London (285) showed a considerable further decline from the numbers recorded in recent weeks, and were as many as 146 below the average.

REPORTS
ON
THE NURSING AND ADMINISTRATION
OF IRISH WORKHOUSES
AND INFIRMARIES.
SPECIAL COMMISSION OF THE "BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL."

X.—BALLYSHANNON WORKHOUSE INFIRMARY.
OUR visit to this house was the first cheerful experience since the beginning of our commission in Ireland; it was a revelation of the possibilities of an Irish workhouse under humane and enlightened management. The town is beautifully situated on the Erne; the falls, up which we saw the salmon leaping, are near the fine bridge which, spanning the river, connects the two halves of the town. The workhouse stands on the southern side, on a hill overlooking town and river. Dr. Condon introduced us to the Mother Superior, whose keen enthusiasm in the cause of the poor forgotten workhouse inmates was indeed refreshing. We were conducted first to

THE FEVER HOSPITAL,
which stands apart on the other side of the road from the rest of the house. Structurally it differs in no respect from other buildings of the same class: it has two storeys, with two small wards on each side of the middle staircase on the ground floor, holding four beds each; on the top story there is but one long ward on either side of the landing. The nurse's rooms are built out behind at right angles to the block, this annex containing also the kitchen and laundry. The whole building was quite clean and ready for possible patients. The ground floor wards are flagged, which always seems to us unsuitable for sick wards; the stones strike cold to the feet of the attendants, and make the wards more difficult to heat. Straw ticks on iron bedsteads are used in this division. The nurse is trained, and she has paupers for the service of the building, but they do not act as nurses. There are no baths in the block, nor waterclosets; commodes are not kept in the wards, the vessels being emptied outside as they are used. The walls are smooth, whitewashed, locker tables stand between the beds, and we noticed armchairs. Spacious grass courts both to the back and front of the hospital form cheerful recreation grounds for the patients. Crossing the road we returned to the workhouse, of which the whole administration is

ENTRUSTED TO THE NURS.
the head of the community acting as matron, and working with the master, so that the infirm wards were under her supervision as well as the hospital. The infirm wards were the same in position and structure as in any other house, but their whole aspect was different. The walls were smooth, colour washed, and decorated with pictures; the floor was clean, the patients were washed, armchairs took the place of benches. Both men and women

LOOKED LIKE HUMAN BEINGS.
Each bed had its separate towel, and at the foot a little bag with soap and brush and comb. We informed the Superior that we had been told that the old people objected to be washed; was it so? "We found," she said, "a little difficulty at first, and the men were rather shy, but by the exercise of a little tact and consideration the objection was overcome, and now they prefer being clean; we have also got rid of the vermin to a great extent." We were told by some of the few visitors who penetrated into the house in the old days that it was necessary for a woman to take care that her skirts should not touch floor or beds if she would avoid carrying away with her lively evidence of her venturousness.

IRON BEDSTEADS
are used in this division, and also in the able-bodied quarters, and in the boys' and girls' dormitories. This is the first house we have seen in which these inmates did not sleep on the floor. The old people were mostly out of doors, in the

In the matter of obituaries the *Journal* was rather snobbish. Only occasionally does it record the deaths of the rank and file, but it spreads itself effusively over the deaths of the distinguished, foreign as well as British. Advertisements for vacancies, which now fill about 20 pages, occupied less than a column, the number being between 10 and 20 (voluntary hospital beds in England and Wales then numbered only 18,000). Most advertisers insisted on a "double qualification," by which they meant qualification in medicine and surgery. In some cases the post of house-surgeon was combined with that of secretary or dispenser.

Concern was expressed for the health of doctors, who were especially liable to arteriosclerosis and degenerative diseases due to overwork and irregular meals. Suicide, we are told, was four times as common as in other professions.

Transport

The experiments which were being conducted, chiefly in France, on mechanical road-transport encouraged doctors to hope for deliverance from the "expense" of the horse and trap. For their information an engineer gave his views on the competitive prospects of steam, electricity, and oil, and came down in favour of oil. At a less visionary level readers were assured by two eminent gynaecologists that riding the new safety bicycle did no harm to women, and a correspondent solemnly discussed the relative suitability of the bicycle and the tricycle for middle-aged and elderly doctors. At a much later date Sir Clifford Allbutt, Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge, when in his eighties was knocked off his tricycle. When he had been picked up the first thing he did was to feel his pulse. Finding that the rate was not increased he was satisfied.

Workhouses and Workhouse Infirmaries

The Association appointed a Special Commission to investigate conditions in the workhouses and workhouse infirmaries which housed the old and infirm, destitutes, vagrants, lunatics, lying-in women, and children. Each week one of these visitations is described, and nearly all the accounts make the most painful reading. The inmates are described as living "in squalor and misery" and being fed "like animals." Walls and windows were filthy and the floors were often of stone. There was no internal sanitation, the inmates at night using pails and buckets, which were not emptied until the wards were unlocked next morning. Nurses were few, most of the nursing being done by paupers. At one place infants lay in stinking straw. The illustrations depict these unfortunates in the lowest depth of degradation. It can, of course, be said that, especially in Ireland, these people were at least better off than they would have been in their homes, if they had homes, but that is no excuse for the way they were treated. In exposing these deplorable conditions the Association performed a public duty deserving the warmest praise. Judging from recent revelations one wonders if things are much better today.

Annotations

As it does now, the *Journal* touched life at many points. Each week the leading articles were followed by several annotations, many of which were of national interest. The sub-

jects included smoke-abatement, the hygiene of lodging-houses, the practice of "kissing the Book," the pollution of ice, railway and maritime hygiene, the disinfection of cabs, premature burial, cruelty to children, the provision of lavatories in railway carriages, pauper schools, and damp hansom cabs. We are surprised to find among these subjects a discussion on the best type of rifle for the Ashanti War, surprised, that is to say, until we read on and learn that the medical corps was to be armed. Even though nineteen years were to elapse before the outbreak of the first world war concern was being expressed for the safety of Londoners in the event of hostilities.

We find Sir William Gowers presiding at the inaugural meeting of the Society of Medical Phonographers, the aim of which was to encourage the use of shorthand. This was 24 years after Pitman published his code.

The idea that doctors could be given away with a pound of tea may be thought the wildest fantasy, but this is actually what happened or at any rate nearly happened. A Liverpool firm of grocers hit on the idea of giving free medical treatment to all who bought their tea and solicited the co-operation of doctors. Three doctors were tempted to take part but were dissuaded by fierce admonition from the Association.

Difference in Size

The most striking change which the *Journal* has undergone is its *decrease* in size. In the 1895 volume there were 1,745 pages compared with 1,556 in 1965 volume 2. (I exclude from the latter the *Supplement*, which had no counterpart 70 years ago, the *Proceedings of Council* being then only briefly reported.) Moreover, there were more lines to the page, and in contrast to the elegant spacing of modern issues articles were crammed together; one can barely find as much as a half-inch of space between them. I estimate that in 1895 there was between 10 and 20% more reading matter than there is now. Of course many new journals have appeared in the meanwhile, but most of these—radiology, for instance—are concerned with specialties unknown 70 years ago.

It is at first sight surprising that the *Journal* should have contained substantially more reading matter when medicine was static than it does when medicine is revolutionarily dynamic. But we should not forget that medicine has always had an intellectual content which is quite independent of progress. Although they had nothing new to offer, our forefathers could hold absorbing discussions on such age-old subjects as epilepsy and bronchitis. They contented themselves with exchanges of opinion and experience. While we take pride in our modern achievements we should be sobered by the reflection that these could not have occurred unless firmly based on the centuries-old accumulation of wisdom, sterile as this may seem to our sophisticated minds.