

## Society Reports

academic study and closer co-operation between existing national bodies and societies. The Council is composed of the President, Professor Marcel Florkin, of Liège; the Secretary-General, Dr. Noël Poynter, of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library in London; the Treasurer, Dr. Jean Théodoridès, of Paris; and three Vice-Presidents: Professor P. Huard, of Rennes; Professor C. D. O'Malley, of the University of California (Los Angeles); and Professor J. Steudel, of Bonn. Membership is strictly limited, by election only, to 50 Fellows (*Membres Effectifs*) including members of council, and 50 Associates (*Membres Correspondants*). The list of Fellows has now been completed and includes the world's leading medical historians; 23 Associates have already been elected.

The Academy is to have its own journal, which is entitled *CLIO MEDICA: Acta Academiae Internationalis Historiae Medicinae*, and its own monograph series, *Analecta Historiae Medicinae*. Both will be published by The Pergamon Press of Oxford. The first formal meeting of the Academy will be held on 6–7 September, 1964, at the University of Basle, with a Symposium on 'Materia Medica in the XVIth Century', the proceedings of which will be published in full. The first of many useful projects which the Academy hopes to undertake is a World Survey of Resources and Facilities for Research in the History of Medicine. It is hoped that universities and societies will co-operate in making this survey as comprehensive as possible.

## Book Reviews

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*The Salernitan Questions. An Introduction to the History of Medieval and Renaissance Problem Literature*, by BRIAN LAWN, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, pp. xiv + 240, frontis., 63s.

A clever question is half the knowledge. Sir Francis Bacon's adage (*prudens interrogatio est quasi dimidium scientiae*) seems to epitomize much of the didactic practice of the Middle Ages and to some extent of the Renaissance. Perhaps it was more the ingenuity of the master in answering the question than the acumen of the pupil in posing it that made this form of didactic literature so popular. For it was said of Urso of Calabria—one of the great 'question-masters' of Salerno at the close of the twelfth century—that 'never had any question stood up to his ingenium unanswered' (*Cuius ab ingenio nulla indecisa recedit, Quaestio . . .*).

At all events a large *corpus* of Questions and Answers has survived to which we owe much of our knowledge of ancient tradition in natural science and medicine. Although many specimens of this *corpus* are still unpublished, others have been well known for a long time. Yet neither the literary history nor the contents of the latter have so far been assessed and elucidated properly. The book under notice provides for the first time authoritative guidance through the tangle of uncertain and often contradictory data and dates and, what is much more, a complete history of this literature as a whole from its origins in antiquity to its unexpected ramifications in the pre-Renaissance period. Of the ancient sources—the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*, Seneca's *Natural Questions*, the *Hermetic Corpus* and Macrobius—in other words exponents of neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism—stand out as the great landmarks. In the discussion of Salerno which forms the mediaeval centre of problem literature with its prose and poetical versions of *Questions* much light is thrown on the life,

sources and originality of Adelard of Bath who completed his *Questiones Naturales* in c. A.D. 1107. The story of his fabulous journey to the East, his 'Arab learning' and the dialogue with his 'nephew' would appear to be a fiction not incompatible with the customs of the time. Like the early Salernitan masters Adelard has not drawn upon Arabic sources (as commonly believed) and gives his own opinions where he differs from antiquity and Salerno. Here Urso of Calabria (d. 1225) was the author of much of the material found in the prose version of the *Salernitan Questions*. The answers provided by the Masters of the *Hippocratic Community* have a practical and common-sense ring and also are more informative with regard to ancient pre- and post-Galenic tradition than the ponderous and philosophical wisdom of Adelard. The metrical *Questiones Physicales* belong to the end of the twelfth (or possibly early thirteenth) century, since Aristotle's work *On Animals* (translated by Michael Scot, 1217–20) had no influence on them. Nor are the medical questions in any way influenced by the Arabic authors, such as Avicenna, Rhazes and Albucasis, none of whom was available at Salerno before the end of the twelfth century. At Chartres, Paris and in England the influence of the Salernitan lore is perceptible, notably in such men as William of Conches, Alexander Neckam (*De Natura Rerum*, 1197–1204) and the authors of the *Encyclopaedias*. In spite of their long manuscript tradition and ubiquitous influence the Salernitan Questions were never printed as such and with their correct attribution, although the Salernitan *Regimen Sanitatis* was printed at least thirty times up to 1500. However, a large series of the *Physical Questions* of Salerno was incorporated into the *Speculator Consiliorum Enigmaticus Microcosmi Protheati*, a broadside, published perhaps c. 1501 at Nürnberg, by the elusive Dietrich Ulsen, an intimate friend of the famous humanist Conrad Celtis (1459–1508). A native of Friesland, he received his early education in the famous school at Zwolle under the aegis of the *Devotio moderna*, inspired as it was by the mysticism of Ruysbroek and Gerhard Groote. Ulsen is chiefly remembered today by two of the earliest treatises on syphilis, one in prose and one in verse—the latter, the *Vaticinium in epidemicam scabiem*, the earliest definitely dated work on syphilis to appear in print (1496) bearing a woodcut attributed to Dürer and antedating by thirty-four years the more famous poem of Fracastor with which it has in common an astrological interpretation of the disease and perhaps other occasional features. Through a felicitous chain of manuscript discoveries Lawn has been able to confirm the authorship of Ulsen for the *Speculator* (suspected by him before) and also to find that not all of this broadside was Ulsen's work, but that it included the first version in print of a part of the Salernitan *Questiones physicales*. The work is a strange mixture, not only in textual composition. Ulsen's introduction is marked out by

pedantic neo-classicisms, unusual medieval words, and strangely forced similes . . . traces of that German mysticism which he affected . . . the oft-repeated refrain against moral laxity and degeneration, both typical of pre-Reformation humanism in Germany and symptomatic of the prevailing spiritual unrest. . . . Considering the work as a whole, it would be hard to find a more perfect illustration of the continuity of thought between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and of the gradual merging of the one into the other.

Lawn's assessment of this rare work appears to be fully borne out by its mystical frontispiece—perhaps its most interesting feature—with its Dantesque imagery, reminiscent of Ulsen's contemporary and compatriot Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1516) at Hertogenbosch (where Ulsen died) and inspired—so it seems—by gnostic-alchemical dualism and the idea of redemption. Looking at the *Questions* themselves (as given with translation and critical commentaries) we find here the lore of sympathy and

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antipathy in the Cosmos—familiar from the ancients down to the *Occult Philosophy* of Agrippa of Nettesheym and so many other Renaissance writers:

What virtue is hidden in the diamond [should be: steel. Rev.] so that it loosens iron? And, whilst your rash mood persists, tell me, O Philosophers, what magnetic power holds iron fast? How does jet attract a straw, and the stone hematite staunch the exuded blood? Why does black peony free the top of the head from the falling sickness? How does spodium strengthen the liver. . . .

Also more general topics:

What was the appearance in the beginning, when all things were confused and lay hid in a formless sphere . . . which Plato called a wood (*silva*) and this later age terms hyle—its barbarity having been refined and those who before were unlettered adopting culture? Whence come about such stable bounds in the four elements, when, with bold front, they hold together the opposing causes of things? What is the hidden nature of things?

These few glimpses must suffice into a work of rare scholarship, that opens up a multitude of new sources and elucidates as many old ones—a work that cannot be simply read, but calls for careful study by all those concerned with the continuity of ancient tradition through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and thereby up to our own age. It is the result of a labour of love which must have taken many years, if not decades, to accomplish and cost the author gallons of 'midnight oil'. It is the work of a scholar who combines tremendous erudition and aptitude in literary criticism with an attachment to his subject which is only found in that *rarissimum*: the collector who is able to use and make available his treasures, and what is even more, finds time and energy to do so on top of the commitments of a general medical practice.

WALTER PAGEL

*The Growth of Medical Thought*, by LESTER S. KING, Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1963, pp. 254, \$5, 41s.

This book provides a fine example of linear medical history. Dr. Lester King has set out to follow the evolution of the thread of medical thought from ancient to modern times, particularly with regard to concepts of pathogenesis. In tracing this thread through the fabric of medical theory he reveals a series of patterns of medical thought which for many of us lie unsuspected in the dust of past ideas. This he achieves in so smooth and easy a style as to conceal from the reader his eminently didactic purpose. For here is a series of essays in historical appreciation born of an intense interest in the intellectual processes of men of any age. Given such interest the thought lying behind the procedures of ancient Greek medicine is as fascinating as that of our own times. And this is the theme of the book.

As a touchstone throughout Dr. Lester King uses the modern concept of scientific method. He emphasizes the necessity of a structural pattern of knowledge as opposed to that of mere isolated facts in the rise from ignorance to science. The facts must be structured 'like beads on a string' as he puts it. And he shows us how often both the beads and the string have been completely renewed in the long trek from religious to scientific theory in medicine.

The first movement of this journey was made by the Hippocratic School with those limited inductions from case-histories which came to generalization in the *Prognostics* and *Aphorisms*. Like many historians before him, including Charles Singer, Dr. King grapples courageously with the interpretation of the word 'techne', emerging with the