

News, Notes and Queries

AWARD OF HONORARY M.D. TO DR. F. N. L. POYNTER

On Friday 12 July 1968, the Medical Faculty of the Christian-Albrechts University at Kiel conferred its honorary Doctorate of Medicine on Dr. F. N. L. Poynter in recognition of his work for the advancement of research and study in the History of Medicine, both as Director of the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine and in the international sphere, especially in his capacity as Secretary-General of the International Academy of the History of Medicine. The ceremony was held in the university's splendid new Institute of Legal and Social Medicine, which is said to be one of the finest in Germany, by the courtesy of its Director, Professor Hallerman. Dr. Poynter was introduced by Professor F. Kudlien, Acting Director of the Institute of the History of Medicine at Kiel, and the diploma was presented by the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Schaeuble.

Following the presentation, Dr. Poynter gave his lecture to a large and interested audience on 'Mutual Anglo-German Influences in Medicine'. After acknowledging his own indebtedness to the late Professor Max Neuburger and to Professor Walter Pagel as his own mentors in the History of Medicine, Dr. Poynter traced the influence of some of the most significant ideas and theories which, originating in either England or Germany, were taken up and developed in the other. Of particular local interest were the links shown between the work of Boyle, Wren and Lower at Oxford in the 1650s and the work of two of the first professors in the Christian-Albrechts University, Johann Nicholas Pechlin, who studied respiration, and Johann Daniel Major, who published the reports of his experiments on intravenous medication and blood transfusion in the years 1664–7. More fundamental was the influence of Francis Glisson's idea of 'irritability' upon the work of Haller and its subsequent pervasive effect on the medical systems of the eighteenth century as well as upon the growth of physiology. Göttingen, the German university founded by King George II of England, became a focal point for the interchange of medical and scientific ideas between the two countries and contacts were numerous and close. But the greatest period of German medicine was that which began with Johannes Müller in Berlin in the 1820s and reached to the twentieth century with the work of Paul Ehrlich. The development of the modern English school of physiology, from Sharpey onwards, was profoundly influenced by that of German pioneers and especially by Carl Ludwig. In the papers of one of its leading representatives, the late Sir Edward Sharpey-Schafer, which are now in the Wellcome Library, is an extensive correspondence with his German colleagues, including Ludwig, which includes also letters from Walter Fleming, professor at Kiel who made pioneer studies of protoplasm, the epithelium and connective tissue. Dr. Poynter also referred to the fact that it was another professor at Kiel, Paul Doehle (1855–1928) who published the first plate illustrating antibiotic action in 1889, the very year that Vuillemin in France gave the name 'antibiosis' to the phenomenon. In his conclusion Dr. Poynter stressed that medical and scientific ideas recognized no frontiers and that contacts and collaboration between workers in different countries often provided the stimulus to new discovery and development.