

Society Reports

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY HISTORY OF MEDICINE SOCIETY

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Dr. H. B. Roderick, *Honorary Vice-President*, elected 1954.

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

Section of the History of Medicine

At a meeting of the Section held on 1 May, 1957, Dr. Bryan Gandevia, of Melbourne, read a paper entitled 'Design and Purpose in Australian Medical History'.

The first aim of Australian medical history must be to provide a framework for the development of a local or national tradition, and considerable progress has been made in this direction; although there are some notable gaps, the lives of Australian medical pioneers, the history of her medical institutions and organizations, and the study of diseases in time are now covered by a reasonably detailed and abundant literature. However, the study of our medical history has, I believe, a greater purpose; appropriately used, it can make a significant contribution to the general history of medicine. In a relatively small but moderately well-documented field, it is possible to survey in accurate detail the introduction of new concepts, techniques and methods into an isolated but vigorous medical community. The history of some diseases, and the influence of a changing social background can perhaps be viewed with greater clarity in the Australian microcosm than in the larger, more complex and, indeed, older European world. Finally, aspects of medical practice which are characteristically or uniquely Australian add a little in their own right to our appreciation of the evolution of medicine as a whole.

The pattern or design of Australian medical history will be reviewed in the light of these considerations. The basic pattern is well-defined:

Society Reports

1. The pre-settlement exploration era.
2. The early colonial era, including the penal era and the period of economic and legislative dependence upon the United Kingdom.
3. The late colonial era, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, coinciding with the achievement of independence, social changes due to the discovery of gold, and, in particular, the dawn of modern scientific medicine.
4. The modern era, which will not be discussed.

Certain features of each of the three phases will be selected to illustrate the propositions outlined above. The subjects will include shipboard hygiene and the government medical service in regard to the first two periods, and, in the fascinating third era, the germ theory, 'Listerism', anæsthesia and relevant examples of the history of certain diseases.

News, Notes and Queries

THE ANATOMY OF ZEIDLERN (1686)

It is curious how little is known of the text-book of anatomy written by Sebastianus Christianus à Zeidlern, and published in Prague in folio in 1686. It was entitled *Somatotomia Anthropologica seu Corporis Humani Fabrica Methodice divisa et controversarum quaestionum discussionibus illustrata*. It was a posthumous publication edited by the author's son, Bernardus Norbertus à Zeidlern, described as a licentiate in surgery and a candidate in medicine. Another edition also in folio was published in Vienna in 1692.¹

The title reveals that the author was a doctor of medicine and of philosophy at the University of Prague and physician to the Emperor and to the King of Bohemia. He was also professor of anatomy and of medicine, and was one of the few reasonably distinguished scientists who worked in Prague during the seventeenth century. He wrote another book entitled *Institutiones Medicinæ* published in Prague in quarto in 1687 and in Vienna in 1692.² Portal states that in it he 'fights on behalf of the Peripatetiques accepting their theory on the elements of the body and on the occult qualities and adding to their bizarre explanations several ridiculous remarks of his own. He would not allow people to lie on their backs because the blood in the vena cava becomes inflamed' (s'enflamme). Details of the book are given by Manget.