

## *Society Reports*

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### CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY HISTORY OF MEDICINE SOCIETY

AT a meeting held on Tuesday, 27 November 1956 at 8.30 p.m., with the President, Dr. Lawrence Martin in the chair, Dr. Reuben Levy, M.A., PH.D., Professor of Persian in the University of Cambridge, read a paper on 'Avicenna'. Professor Levy first visited Avicenna's tomb at Hamadhan in 1919 at the suggestion of Sir William Osler. In 1954 he attended the millenary celebrations there and saw the impressive monument to Avicenna, erected by the Iranian Government.

Professor Levy gave a scholarly but lively account of Avicenna's career, based largely on the autobiography dictated by Avicenna to his friend and pupil, al-Juzjani. The speaker's familiarity with the history and literature of the Arabic-speaking world enabled him to breathe life into the story of this great philosopher, who took all knowledge for his province. He spoke also about the doctrine of the four humours, a knowledge of which is so vital to an understanding of medieval medicine. Here again his knowledge of the Moslem peoples enabled him to bring to life for his audience this seemingly empirical and sterile doctrine, which even today plays its part in the traditional medical teaching of some countries. 'How is your noble mixture?' is still a conventional inquiry about a friend's health.

Dr. R. Williamson proposed a vote of thanks. [Professor Levy's paper will be published in an early issue of *Medical History*.]

At a meeting held on Tuesday, 22 January 1957, Dr. D. H. Clark read a paper on 'The Early Days of Fulbourn Hospital'. Before the nineteenth century the wealthy insane were cared for, indifferently, in private mental homes, and the poor in the workhouses; if they were violent and unmanageable they were transferred to the gaols and bedlams. The increase in population, and the growth of large towns which accompanied industrialization, accentuated the problem and forced it on the attention of the social reformers of the period. The Asylums Act of 1845 provoked no immediate response in Cambridgeshire, but in 1848 the Justices at Quarter Sessions agreed to set up a pauper asylum. The land was purchased and an architect commissioned, but enthusiasm was not great enough to overcome the difficulties encountered. The Act of 1853 under which the erection of asylums was made compulsory stimulated the justices to further action,

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and the foundation-stone was laid in 1856. The detailed account of the ceremony in the local press illustrates the contemporary attitude towards the insane and the confident expectation of a very high rate of cure. The hospital was opened in 1858, and patients previously boarded out in metropolitan asylums were transferred. Some difficulty was at first experienced in filling the 250 beds, and an advertisement in *The Times* offered to accept patients at fourteen shillings weekly. Very soon, however, overcrowding became the problem it has since remained, and the number of patients has steadily increased. Bryan and Lawrence, the first superintendents, were liberal in their outlook and enlightened in their treatment, but the earlier hopeful enthusiasm was not maintained and the decline which started under George Mackenzie Bacon (appointed 1868) reached its nadir under E. Coulton Rogers (appointed 1883).

The changing membership of the Board of Visitors and its relationship to the Commissioners in Lunacy and the superintendent during the early years of the hospital reflect the changes in public administration and the evolution of the lay attitude towards the insane.

Dr. Williamson thanked Dr. Clark for his instructive and entertaining paper.

The following further meetings have been arranged for 1957:

Tuesday, 12 February. Dr. A. Hughes: 'The History of the Microscope, and its Introduction into Medical Teaching.'

Tuesday, 5 March. Prof. H. A. Harris: 'The Nervous System.'

Tuesday, 7 May. Dr. D. H. M. Woollam: 'Elizabethan Concepts of the Brain and their Origins.'

All meetings will be held at 8.30 p.m. in the Lecture Theatre of the Department of Radiotherapeutics, Tennis Court Road.

## THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

(Norsk Medisinsk-Historisk Forening)

THE Norwegian Society for the History of Medicine held its second meeting on Tuesday, 15 November 1956, in the conference room of the newly established antiquarian bookshop of one of the larger publishers in Oslo.