Editorial

Thomas Bevill Peacock’s Library

In 1959 the Medical Staff of the London Chest Hospital, our sister hospital in the East End of London, deposited on permanent loan at the Institute Library at Brompton the surviving portion of Peacock’s Library. Peacock was the moving spirit behind the foundation of the London Chest Hospital, which had evolved from a small dispensary opened in 1848. The Collection consists of 154 works (in 203 volumes), 78 reprints and pamphlets (bound in 8 volumes), and 107 bound volumes of journals. Peacock preserved and cared for his books, as can be seen from the fine state and binding of most of them, but I know of no evidence to show that he was a bibliophile or collector of books for their own sake, rather than as objects of practical utility.

The main interest of the Collection (apart from its intrinsic value) lies in the fact that one can trace a connection between almost every item in it and Peacock himself. Some date from his student period in the 1830’s, or earlier, while others are representative of the works which appeared during his active professional life, when, although he became more and more interested in pathology, and particularly in congenital malformations of the heart, he was never a specialist in the modern sense. Peacock has lately been the subject of an editorial in the JAMA, and Ian Porter has examined his life and work.

Peacock owned copies of such cardiac classics as the works of Senac, Corvisart, Burns, Bertin, and Bouillaud, while his section on general medicine contained editions of Celsus, Sydenham, Cullen, Graves, Bennett, and Bristowe, as well as some of the encyclopedic dictionaries popular in his day. The section on pathology includes editions of Morgagni, Baillie, Andral, Hope, and Cruveilhier. Space only permits me to mention some of the works concerned with congenital malformations of the heart. I have omitted, as far as possible, those books mentioned by D. Evan Bedford in an earlier paper in this journal, although many of them are to be found in Peacock’s collection. The earliest separate work on malformation of the heart in the Collection is John Farre’s little monograph of 46 pages, published in 1814, and who, in the words of S. Behrman, “anticipated Fallot by seventy-four years in his observation that the most common cyanotic congenital heart disease is a malformation which has now come to be known as ‘Tetralogy of Fallot’.” Peacock himself had of course observed this condition in 1846, forty-two years before Fallot, and by 1880 had seen three more cases, and collected references to more than 60 published reports. Another book is a fine copy of Elie Gintrac’s Observations et Recherches sur la Cyanose ou Maladie Bleue, Paris, 1824, whose doctoral thesis in 1814 had been devoted to the same subject. Gintrac spent 10 years in collecting 53 observations.
from the literature. This took up the first part of his monograph—while the second part consisted of his description of the natural history of the condition. Peacock's interest in malformations of the heart naturally predated the publication of his magnum opus; for by the time the first edition appeared in 1858 he had shown several cases before the famous Pathological Society of London, with which he had been associated from the earliest days.

The Collection contains several bound volumes of reprints and pamphlets, and although one may as a librarian sometimes regret this once popular method of binding them, rather than keeping them separate, one realizes that this is the only reason why many of them have survived. A Dr. Buckminster Brown of Boston sent Peacock a reprint of his address before the Suffolk District Medical Society, December 30, 1854, on “Ectopia cordis, or Cardiac Displacement,” from the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, inscribed “with the respects of the author.” Two entire issues of this journal are to be found in this volume. The first: dated November 5, 1863, has a paper “Interventricular Opening in a Man of robust Health; . . .” by Thomas H. Gage. This particular patient was also written up in a later issue dated April 13, 1865, as “Congenital Interventricular Opening in the Heart in an Adult of Robust Health; or Rupture of the Septum Two Months before Death?” by J.B.S. Jackson. Another link with the United States is the presence of five volumes of the Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (1875-81). Peacock was elected an Associate in 1873, a great honor as only twenty could be foreigners. In a reprint of a paper by Thomas Barlow, from the Transactions of the Pathological Society of London, vol. 27, 1875-76, entitled “Congenital heart disease; two cases,” we read in connection with his first case: “Some cases of the descending aorta arising from the pulmonary artery, that is, from the fifth left arch, are recorded by Dr. Peacock, but the origin of the ascending aorta to the right of and posterior to the pulmonary artery, has not I believe been noticed before.”

Another reprint—of a paper by Robert Elliot, from the Journal of Anatomy and Physiology, vol. 11, 1877, titled “Case of Unipulmonary Tricoelian Heart”—states, “The peculiarity of J. C.'s case was that transposition of the great vessels; smallness of the aorta, and large size of the pulmonary artery; total absence of ventricular septum—coexisted with all but total freedom from pericardial adhesion; equally healthy and efficient lungs; the attainment of the age of 19 years and 8 months; and great amiability and humour.” This is accompanied by a separate pamphlet containing some rather fine photographs of this specimen. Typical of this volume of pamphlets is Gustav Dorsch's “Die Herzmuskelentzündung als Ursache angeborener Herzhyanose. Inaugural-Abhandlung der Medicinischen Facultät zu Erlangen,” 1855. Another scarce item is a paper from Holland by a Dr. D. H. Van Leeuwen titled “Over de Diagnose van Aangeboren Vernauwening en Sluiting der Aorta,” from the Nederl Lancet, 2de Serie, 5de Jaargang, No. 2 (1859?), and illustrative of the wide interest in the subject in Peacock's day. One wonders how many copies of some of these reprints from periodicals have survived, even in the rich collections of Great Britain and the United States.

Two other papers found in the Collection are A. Wrany's “Der Ductus arteriosus Botalli in seinen physiologischen und pathologischen Verhältnissen,” from the Oesterr Jahrb f Pädiatrik, vol. 1, 1871, and the article, “Coeur (anomalies),” by O. Larcher, contributed to the Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Sciences Médicales, edited by Amédée Dechambre, and published in 100 volumes from 1864-89.

On a sad note—the final item in another volume of reprints lettered “Malformations” is the “Annual Report of the Conservator to the Museum Committee of the Royal College of Surgeons of England” for 1877. This refers to a most important gift of 176 specimens, “mostly, but . . . by no means exclusively, illustrating diseases and malformations of the heart . . . presented by Dr. T. B. Peacock.”

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The Honorary Medal of the College was given to Peacock in appreciation of this gift. Alas, the specimens vanished along with many others in the bombing of the College during the Second World War (Personal communication from Miss Jessie Dobson). The London Chest Hospital Museum also contained some of Peacock’s specimens, but this too was a casualty of the War.

One of Peacock’s biographers, N. Flaxman, has calculated that Peacock, during his entire career, over a period of 35 years, exhibited a total of 158 specimens before the Pathological Society of London. Most of these were written up and published, either in the Transactions of the Society or elsewhere. Fortunately, most of Peacock’s writings, including the two editions of his famous book, are to be found in the Collection that bears his name, and which serves to remind us of the skill and art of this industrious Victorian physician.


References

British Tradition—Restated

Comprehensive Medicine

It is difficult to define the quality which characterises the city or community physician, for it is shared by all good doctors. It is an attitude of mind in which curiosity is heavily laced with compassion; which always remembers that medicine is the servant of the patient; which, in bringing advances in knowledge to the bedside, pays attention to the quality as well as the quantity of life; which is prepared, under certain circumstances, not to investigate, not to treat, but to take responsibility which is all too easy to shelve in 1967. This kind of attitude is not amenable to measurement and can only be taught by precept; for these two reasons it may be underweighted in our training programme, though it will flourish in proportion to the degree to which students are exposed to community problems in close cooperation with public health departments of boroughs and colleagues at so-called “nonteaching” hospitals. Much attention is paid nowadays to study in depth, but it is just as important to encourage a breadth of approach.—John F. Stokes: A British View of the American Scene. The Pharos of Alpha Omega Alpha 30: 91, 1967.