

Society Reports

NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

THE first meeting of 1959 was held on 19 March, when Professor Olav Torgersen, M.D., gave an address on Rudolf Virchow and the rise of cellular pathology. Professor Torgersen, who is himself a pathologist, gave a very interesting account of Virchow's life and of the significance of his work. The many-sided character of Virchow's genius was brought out in the subsequent discussion by Professor Axel Stroem, M.D., Professor E. Schjøtt-Rivers, M.D. and Prosector Bernhard Getz, M.D. These speakers dealt briefly with Virchow's achievements in hygiene, social medicine, bacteriology and anthropology respectively.

To conclude the meeting the Chairman, Professor Axel Stroem, M.D., gave a short account of the life of Norwegian district physicians in the middle of the nineteenth century.

At the next meeting of the society Professor Folke Henschen, M.D., the well known pathologist, will speak about 'Emanuel Swedenborg's Skull'.

BERNHARD GETZ

SECTION OF MEDICAL HISTORY IN THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (Victorian Branch)

A MEETING of the Section held on 8 December 1958, was devoted to a talk by Mrs. R. G. Casey on the life of her father, Sir Charles Snodgrass Ryan, who was born on 20 September 1853, and became one of Melbourne's leading surgeons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mrs. Casey dealt with her father's background and education, the highlights of his career and some sidelights on the medical scene of his day. From her childhood memories Mrs. Casey was able to recall Ryan's life in his residence in Collins Street and his friendship with such men as Hamilton Russell, R. H. Stawell and Felix Meyer. A man of great personal courage, Ryan had served as a young man as a medical officer attached to the Turkish forces in the Russo-Turkish War. In after-life, he was fond of recounting anecdotes of his campaigns, wrote a book, *Under the Red Crescent*, about his experiences with the Turks. He also became Consul-General for Turkey in Melbourne. Before the federation of the Australian States, Ryan was, for a time, Principal Medical Officer to the Victorian Military Forces. From 1903 to 1924 he was Chief Medical Officer to the Victorian Railways. He served on the Honorary Medical Staff and was later consultant-surgeon to both the Melbourne Hospital and the Children's Hospital. At the age of sixty, Ryan served on General Birdwood's staff at Gallipoli opposite his old friends, the Turks, still wearing the Turkish decorations he had won at Plevna thirty-seven years before. His death on 23 October 1926, brought a colourful life to a close.

At a meeting of the Section held on 24 February 1959, the speaker was an overseas visitor, Dr. E. T. Renbourn, from the Physiological Establishment of the Ministry of Supply. The subject of Dr. Renbourn's paper was 'The Chills of Damp Cold, an Historical Survey'. In tracing the development of various concepts on the effects of

cold and damp on the bodily economy, Dr. Renbourn distinguished a number of distinct historical periods. The first period extended from ancient times to the end of the seventeenth century. In this early period medical practice was based on the concept of four elements, four humours, and four temperaments. Associated with this concept was the idea of 'insensible perspiration'. It was believed that air, water vapour and effluvia could enter and leave the body by invisible pores in the skin as well as by the lungs. The second period discussed was the eighteenth century when various theories of chills and damp cold were put forward. The third period was the early nineteenth century when many studies were made of the physiology of the 'damp-cold' phenomenon. Finally, Dr. Renbourn dealt with the views put forward in the late nineteenth century. In concluding his paper, Dr. Renbourn pointed out that in the past damp cold was the concern of physicians who wrote lengthily on the subject. So-called logical arguments, subjective and personal impressions and coincidences were interpreted by them as representing objective truths. Today the expression 'damp-cold' is one largely used by laymen.

News, Notes and Queries

JOHN SNOW AND THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE

PRACTICALLY all that is known of John Snow's life is derived from the Biographical Memoir which Benjamin Ward Richardson published in Snow's posthumous masterpiece *On Chloroform and Other Anaesthetics*.¹ In this memoir, Richardson states that Snow accompanied an uncle, Mr. Empson, to Paris in 1856 and that during the visit he deposited at the Institute of France a copy of his work on Cholera, submitting it as an entry for the prize of 10,000 francs offered for the discovery of a means for preventing or curing the disease.² Richardson proceeds, 'The decision of the judges has since been published, but no note seems to have been made of Dr. Snow's researches'. In 1887 Richardson repeated these statements.³

By 1898 the Dictionary of National Biography had reached Snow's name and an article written by the late Sir D'Arcy Power contains the following:

To Snow's scientific insight was due the theory that cholera is communicated by means of a contaminated water-supply and his essay on the communication of cholera, which was first published in 1849, was awarded by the Institute of France a prize of 1,200l.⁴

Garrison's *History of Medicine* contains the following note:

John SNOW (1813-1858), of York, a London medical graduate of 1844, first stated the theory that cholera is water-borne and taken into the system by the mouth (1849) in an essay which was awarded a prize of 30,000 francs by the Institute of France.⁵

There are thus two contradictory statements, apart from the discrepancies in the sums mentioned. It seemed reasonable to approach the Institute itself to clear up the confusion and this was done with the kind help of Dr. G. Vourc'h, the distinguished French anaesthetist. He received the following reply:⁶