

Professional Review.**THOMAS SYDENHAM.**

By JOSEPH FRANK PAYNE, M.D., Oxon.,

*Fellow and Harveian Librarian of the Royal College of Physicians,**Late Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.*

A new volume of the Masters of Medicine series, published by Messrs. T. Fisher Unwin, Paternoster Square, is always welcome, and "Thomas Sydenham," by Dr. J. F. Payne, is in some ways the most interesting of them all, for this "Master" lived in stirring times, and came of a family which gave to the ranks of the Parliamentary Army, during the Civil War, no less than five sons, two of whom lost their lives in fighting for the cause of freedom. One of the five was Thomas Sydenham himself, who rendered great service to the Parliamentary cause, as was subsequently recognized by no less a person than Cromwell himself. There is little doubt that the experience of these strenuous times, and the insight thus afforded into the real issues of life, and their relative values left their permanent mark upon Sydenham's character, and that his independent attitude when he subsequently adopted the profession of medicine was due to this influence. Such an attitude was as uncommon and as much resented in those days as it is at the present time, and brought our hero into ill odour with a certain section of his professional colleagues.

It is a curious revelation of the customs of the times that as during the King's residence at Oxford the degrees of the University were conferred "by creation" for political and personal reasons, so when the Puritan party came into power the same course was adopted, and in 1648 Thomas Sydenham was created Bachelor of Medicine by command of the Earl of Pembroke, when he had been barely a year resident in the University, and could not have made any serious study of medicine. It is presumed that this degree was given in order to qualify him for important preferment, namely that of his appointment as a Fellow of All Souls' College, and shortly afterwards as Senior Bursar.

The medical curriculum laid down was at this time a very primitive one. There was no hospital for clinical instruction, and only one dissection in the course of the year was prescribed by statute, a newly executed criminal being obtained for this purpose if possible. There is a ghastly story told of a woman hanged at Oxford who when brought to the anatomy school was found to be still alive, and was revived by the care she received there. In another similar instance the executioners ruthlessly insisted on finishing their work.

The next epoch in Sydenham's life was his marriage and subsequent settlement in King Street, Westminster, as a physician. The selection of this neighbourhood was a wise one, as it was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Protector's Court, and of the official residences of statesmen, members of parliament, and army officers, amongst whom his connection lay. His official career was, however, interrupted by his residence at Montpellier for further study. It is conjectured that he accompanied a patient to the South of

France, and availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded.

In 1663 Sydenham obtained a license to practise from the Royal College of Physicians.

As has been already stated, Sydenham was not exempt from the persecution which seems to be the lot of all who are exceptionally brilliant, or who endeavour to advance the best interests of their profession, indeed he complained to a friend that "he had only gained the sad and unjust recompense of calumny and ignominy, and that from the emulation of some of his collegiate brethren, and others, whose indignation at length did culminate to that height, that they endeavoured to banish him, as guilty of medicinal heresies, out of that illustrious Society."

It is regrettable that during the Great Plague of London Sydenham went out of town. A record of the epidemic by so keen an observer would have been of the greatest value. It is urged with some weight in his defence that the patients among whom his practice lay had all gone away, and that he had to consider his wife and young children. At the same time many apothecaries and herbalists remained at their posts, and one of these had a bitter gibe at the fashionable physicians. The fee of the regular physicians was an *angel*, a coin worth about £2 in modern money. It is recorded of Culpepper, a herbalist, that he said, "Physicians of the present day are like Balaam's ass, they will not speak until they see an *angel*."

Such a reproach, however, could scarcely be brought against Sydenham, whose conception of his duty as a physician was a noble one. Here are his own words:—"Whoever applies himself to medicine ought seriously to weigh the following considerations: First, that he will one day have to render an account to the Supreme Judge of the lives of sick persons committed to his care. Next, whatever skill or knowledge he may, by the Divine favour, become possessed of, should be devoted above all things to the glory of God, and the welfare of the human race. . . . Finally, the physician should bear in mind that he himself is not exempt from the common lot, but subject to the same laws of mortality and disease as others; and he will care for the sick with more diligence and tenderness if he remembers that he himself is their fellow sufferer."

He also goes on to say that "every physician who desires to be held an honest man should not only do his best to restore health to the sick, but also to give greater certainty to the art which he professes, so that it may become better and richer, and some benefit may accrue to mankind even when he is in his grave."

Sydenham's reputation as an author rests upon his work on "Method of curing Fevers," which was very well received on the Continent, and reprinted at Amsterdam. His reputation, we are told, "grew more rapidly in foreign countries than at home, as is often seen in the case of innovators in all departments of science." Later many important Continental professors of medicine showered praises upon him. The book was subsequently republished with considerable additions under a new title, and will remain to all time as a medical classic.

Another work on the management of small-pox appeared in 1681. Sydenham did not forget his friends. His first book on fevers was dedicated to the Hon. Robert Boyle, who although a diligent investigator in many departments of physical science, was not popular with the medical profession; and in his

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