The Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh: Sale of its Library at Sotheby's*

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ABSTRACT
The library of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, which has been in existence for nearly 250 years, was sold by Sotheby & Co. of London at three auction sales during 1969. The author describes her attendance at the three sales, with emphasis on the most valuable items sold and the considerable acquisitions made for the Middleton Medical Library of the University of Wisconsin. Concluding observations concern some of the practical problems of acquiring antiquarian books at auction.

The following is the account of a protracted courtship of a lot of books, with all the conventional elements of suspense, competition, pursuit over great distances, and, finally, conquest. If the jingle of gold seems to serve as the theme for this rhapsody, one must accept the melancholy fact that monetary considerations inevitably enter into such romantic affairs.

It all started three years ago with a query from the firm of Bertram Rota, Ltd. in London: would we be interested in buying a library, a rather famous medical library? Sitting in a brand new library building with a suitably housed historical collection and gift funds in the bank—although not by any means enough, as was soon apparent—I put out the first cautious feeler. The library proved to be that of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh. One look at its 1896 printed catalog was enough. Even though, as it turned out, a considerable block of botanical works had been disposed of, this catalog is still a fair representation of an impressive library, ranging over more than four centuries of scientific publishing.

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During the months of advance and withdrawal when the fate of the library was being decided, I checked holdings, looked up prices, estimated the resale value of the duplicates and discussed the desirability of the purchase with faculty members and bibliographers. It became almost a matter of surprise to look up any important medical figure of the last four centuries and find not a single listing in the library's catalog. There was no doubt of the value of the collection but also little doubt that the sale price was likely to strain any library's immediate resources. (The quarter of a million dollars eventually realized confirms this assessment.)

As is usual when a decision must be made by committees, the negotiations (if such a formal term can be used for these preliminaries) were protracted. Finally a message from London announced that the decision had been reached: the original hope to sell the library intact, to preserve its continuity even in a transatlantic setting, had been relinquished. The library would be sold at a series of auctions by Sotheby & Co. However, a number of books of which there were no other copies in Edinburgh were to be retained.

Founded in 1734, the Royal Medical Society (to quote from the auction catalog) "survives as the oldest scientific society in Scotland, the oldest existing undergraduate medical society and the only undergraduate society to hold a Royal Charter." During its long history the Society not only bought contemporary works for communal use but also acquired notable titles by gift from its members and from colleagues abroad. Even as early as 1812, the catalog of the library listed the Rhazes of Vesalius (1544) and his Chirurgia magna of 1569. Moreover, in two and a half centuries, even trivia
become rarities. Displaced from its quarters by redevelopment and lacking funds for upkeep and supervision, the Society reluctantly decided that a historical collection of this value was an unsuitable responsibility for an undergraduate medical society, and should be sold. A 1676 Sydenham is not much consolation to a student who needs a 1967 Cecil. (Figs. 1 and 2 show the previous and the current library reading rooms.)

Our advisors agreed that we should capitalize on the time already spent in checking and evaluating the collection to acquire as many suitable titles at the auctions as we could afford. Issuance of the catalog for the first sale, February 11-12, 1969, brought a call from London: because of the lotting, our agent despaired of making the necessary judgments without personal consultation. Could I attend? Receipt of the familiar green-covered catalog, barely three weeks before the date of the sale, confirmed the difficulty: although most lots had some con-
MEDICAL SOCIETY LIBRARY SALE AT SOTHEBYS

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DAYS OF SALE:

Monday, 27th October, 1969

Lots 969-1337

At 11 a.m. precisely

Tuesday, 28th October, 1969

Lots 1338-1636

At 11 a.m. precisely

On view at least two days previously (Not Saturdays)

Price 2s. 6d. (10p.)

A printed list of all Prizes and Buyer's Names at this sale is supplied for six shilling, and for all sales at low subscription rates.

Fig. 3.—The Third Sale Catalog

sisistency in language or period or roughly grouped authors or subjects, others might include such a range of subjects as homeopathy, anatomy, urology and physiology. (Lot 1187 on Fig. 4 indicates this range. This and Fig. 3 are taken from the third catalogue.) In addition, a single lot might contain two titles already held in identical editions, another owned in a different edition, and two or three listed simply as "and others." (These are the most tantalizing to a prospective buyer who must bid by mail.) Also, the practice of offering two copies of the same title in a lot does no service to the private or institutional collector, however useful to a dealer buying for stock. It is, perhaps, naively to cavil at these traditional practices of auction houses, but they will make the catalogues of these sales a less than adequate record of a great library.

SOTHEBY & CO.

The Sotheby building is unpretentious and rather shabby, with sudden stairways leading to a diversity of showrooms and offices, and strewn with works of art. The staff goes about its business, hurried, incurious, absentmindedly, copier matter-of-factly with the pressures of a constant succession of sales. Monday and Tuesday are traditionally devoted to books, prints, and other small works of art. Each sale is preceded by at least two days of public inspection, during which other activities may spill over into the Book Room.

The book sales are held in a pleasant, high-ceilinged L-shaped room with a low stand for the auctioneer and a horseshoe table and additional chairs for participants. The books in the sale are shelved by lot, the main series at the rear, additional volumes and folios at the side and front, and a considerable number of bundles on the floor. Valuable small items and unbound

Fifth Day

Monday, 27th October, 1969

1183 Priestley (Joseph) Harteys theory of the human mind, on the principle of the association of ideas, second edition, marginal dust-soiled and thumb-marked throughout, F3 torn areas, lower half of last leaf torn away with the word "The" on half calf, very worn, broken, 1790—Macbride (David) Experimental essays on medical and philosophical subjects, second edition, plates, calf, worn, 1767—Wintingham (Clifton) An experimental inquiry on some parts of the animal structure, 1 plate, half-calf, calf, Broken, 1740.

Bos (3)

1184 Priestley (Joseph) A familiar introduction to the study of electricity first edition, 4 plates only (of 7, lacks plates 1, 2, 4, 5, 1768—Trye (Ch. B.) Illustrations of some of the injuries to which the lower limbs are exposed, plates, 1802—Home (Sir Everard) A dissertation of pus, 1788—Wardrop (Andrew) An address to the members of the Royal College of Surgeons on the... surgical department of the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, 1800—Macartney (James) Observations on curvatures of the spine, Dublin, 1817—Liston (Robert) Memoirs on the... crural arch, plates, Edinburgh, 1819—Polley (John) An essay on the proximate cause of animal impregnation, 1801—Henry (William) Experiments on carbonated hydrogenous gas, presentation copy from the author, [1791]—Desar (Henry) Inoculation, Insanity, Infirmary, three articles extracted from the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, presentation inscription from the author, [Edinburgh, 1813]; and another; all disbound; sold as a collection of tracts not subject to return for (10)

1185 Primrose (James) De mulierum morbis et symptomatis libri quinque. ownership engrav: William Patern, Edinburgh, 1752, old vellum

4vo Rotterdam, 1655

1186 Pring (Daniel) A View of the relations of the nervous system, 1815—Wardrop (James) An account of some diseases of the toes and fingers, 1 plate, 1814—bound with two others; half calf, broken—Golls (C. A.) A treatise on the hydrocephalus acutus or inflammatory water in the head, translated from the German, half calf, 1821—Vaughan (Walter) An essay on headaches, half calf, 1825.

Bos (3)

1187 Prochaska (Georg) De carne musculari tractatus anatomo-physiologicus, 6 plates, plate 6 torn, half-calf, Vienna, 1778; De structura nervorum, 7 folding plates, numbered on plate b shared. Paris, 1779; 2 works in one vol., half calf, worn, upper cover loose

Bos (8)

Fig. 4.—A Page from the Third Catalog

pamphlets are likely to be collected in a separate cupboard.

A considerable number of dealers and a sprinkling of collectors and librarians were examining volumes when I arrived. The whole effect was rather casual, but I don’t doubt that an inconspicuous surveillance was kept on visitors. I occasionally consulted the head porter—a very important figure in the hierarchy, whose good offices are sought (and suitably rewarded) by experienced bidders. When I inquired about a missing book, he gave me the accolade of “you’re on the ball! That was withdrawn this morning.”

I found myself a stool and a corner of a felt-covered table and went to work. Both I and the felt became progressively more snuffy as I worked my way through as many as possible of the 500-some lots, mostly in moldering calf bindings. Sotheby’s clings to the single belt of tape around a lot. The use of slip knots and the scrupulous care not to waste tape make it hard to maintain one’s respect for fragile volumes while struggling with dusty fingers to tie them up again. By the end of the viewing period the floor was littered with bits of bindings and many more covers had given up their tenuous hold on the spines.

After the inspection I recalculated our tentative bids and indicated final ranges and priorities to Mr. Taylor, who was to be our major bidder. Predicted ranges of selected items were also secured from Sotheby’s. The speed with which the market for scientific books is rising was indicated by the discrepancy between most of these expected prices and the eventual bids. I found my estimates, based on current dealers’ offerings, to be generally more accurate because higher than the suggested range, which was probably perfectly sound a year or two earlier.

The First Sale

The auctions were scheduled for “eleven o’clock precisely” each day, and ended as precisely at 1:00. We were in place well before the opening. Bidders were seated around the horseshoe table and in chairs around the walls (rather more decorous than participants in the auction Rowlandson pictured in Fig. 5). I had a first-row seat with Anthony Rota of the Rota firm. Ronald Taylor was strategically located behind the dealers expected to offer the major competition. Except as an observer, an amateur is at a disadvantage at an auction; an experienced agent is necessary to keep up with the speed of the auction and protect against auction fever. Although the Rota firm deals in first editions rather than scientific books, Mr. Taylor’s grasp of our priorities and ability to calculate the breaking point was responsible for much of our success.

At the stroke of 11:00 the auctioneer, Lord John Kerr, entered, accompanied by his clerks. (See Fig. 6.) As the auctioneer, soft-voiced and dignified, announced a lot, a wooden-faced porter at the head of the horseshoe table displayed the book or handed it to anyone at the table desiring a closer look. The auctioneer, who must not only watch all bids from the floor but insert offers received by mail, announced the opening bid and each step thereafter. Each bidder indicated his acceptance of the bid in his own way, usually by a head or hand gesture. Voice bids were rare, and if anyone used anything so subtle as an eyebrow signal, I did not see it. However, some head signals were so slight that only the auctioneer could have picked them up.

The steps were usually in two to five pound increments. In only one case did a bidder make a large leap as if to indicate an assured sale and contempt for the more plodding process. Only a few lots were passed entirely.

Whatever the atmosphere when a Rembrandt or a Picasso is on the block, a book auction is rather restrained. The same sense of high drama that one imagines surrounding disposal of a work of art fetching £100,000 cannot be expected when the top is £2,000. There are moments of tension when a duel is taking place; however, the bidders at these sales are mostly professionals with a definite job to do, either buying for stock or executing commissions. They have been there before and they will be there again. This is not to say that strain is lacking. Lots are sold at the rate of more than four a minute, and such is the concentration required that both bidders and auctioneers are grateful that each session is limited to two hours. Each bidder is operating under the pressure of time and of responsibility to his principal: judging how far to stretch the limits laid down by his commission, gauging the deter-

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Fig. 5.—From Sotheby's 217th Season, October 1960–July 1961. p. 4

Fig. 6.—Lord John Kerr officiating at a book auction

mination of his opponents, calculating previous savings against the distance yet to go. Keeping a tally of expenditures is a job in itself, and there is little time for consultation.

As each lot was sold, the auctioneer announced the final price and the successful bidder. One could feel the speculation as “Sold to Rota” occurred with increasing frequency. When the successful bidder was unfamiliar to the auctioneer, a clerk quietly went to him to record name and address.

As was expected, our chief competition came from the major British dealer in medico-historical books, Dawsons of Pall Mall, represented by two tall men, Herbert Marley and W. F. Hammond. When books out of scope for us or already in our collection were on the block, we could relax while other bidders had their innings; among them the London dealers, Francis Edwards, Hugh Elliott (whose regretted death occurred shortly after the second sale in July), G. Walford, and Gurney; Israel of Amsterdam; and some individual buyers. Other dealers from the continent were present but none, I believe, from America. Also represented were Maggs, Quaritch and Blackwell, who bid sparingly on significant titles. A dark intense young man was pointed out as Dr. Richard A. Hunter who, with his mother, Dr. Ida Macalpine, has written widely on the history of psychiatry. A major-general acquired a book on gunshot wounds. A chemist named Sondheimer acquired many of the Boyle items against stiff competition. A half-dozen physicians were among the successful bidders.

Several institutions in the United States entered bids at this sale, but mostly through agents. There was a little stir when the University of Texas was announced as successful bidder on several titles, and Duke University and the University of Alberta, one or two each.

"SOLD TO ROTA"

And now for the question, "How did we do?"

In general, very well. By giving up a dozen or so of the top medical titles we acquired almost exactly one-third of the total lots, including, however, 55 percent of the medical volumes. Counting the titles already in our collection, 70 percent of the medical titles in this portion of the Edinburgh library will be available at Wisconsin. Disposition of the unique run of Edinburgh dissertations is still a question mark, this lot having been removed from the sale when Sotheby's discovered a couple of "teachests full" of additional volumes in the basement.

Unhappily the top dozen included Bright's Reports of Medical Cases (1827–31) and Baer's De Ovi (1827) at $3,840 each and Carpenter's An Account of Two Successful Operations for Restoring a Lost Nose (1816) at $3,360. Auenbrugger's Inventum Novum ex Percussione Thoracis (not a prepossessing volume physically) fetched $1,800. A price of $2,880 paid for a presentation copy of Bernard's article, De l'origine du sucre, indicates the length to which collectors will go for completeness. We were also out of the running for a number of works by Thomas Beddoes, one of which went for $1,560. The sixteen Boyle items, none of first importance, averaged about $250 each. Ampère's Théorie des phénomènes électrodynamiques (1826) fetched $1,080 and a Casalpinus De Plantis of 1583, $2,880. Chalmers' Account of the Weather and Diseases of South Carolina (1776) sold for $576.

Some of the more valuable volumes we acquired were Fabricius' Opera Anatomica de Formato Foetu... (1625), Fallopis' Opera (1584), and John Hunter's Natural History of the Human Teeth (1771) with the supplement. It was gratifying to sit out the competition for titles already owned, such as the first edition of Beaumont's Experiments ($576) and Charles Bell's Anatomy of the Brain ($408).

Our effort was, first, to acquire titles not available in the library in any form or edition; second, to strengthen subject fields in which we are already strong, such as anatomy, physiology, and neurology; and third, to fill in titles lacking in the works of authors already well represented in the library, such as Charles Bell, Boerhaave, and John Hunter. The thousand volumes acquired add many works by distinguished Scottish and English physicians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Baillie, Cullen, Bateman, Brodie, Fothergill, Allan Burns, Armstrong, Abercrombie, and many others. More distinctive is the one medical work of the poet, Mark Akenside, (De Dysenteria Commentarius, 1764) with inscription from Dr. William Hunter to Dr. Cullen in a volume including also Felice Fontana's Dei Moti dell'Iride (1765).

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One lot of library catalogs, membership lists, and similar official publications of the Royal Medical Society and other societies and institutions will be invaluable for documenting their history.

The strong collections of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century French authors, initiated by Dr. Erwin Ackerknecht, were considerably augmented and at unexpectedly reasonable prices. A surprising acquisition, unlisted in a lot of sixty-seven French works, was a second edition of Brunet's Manuel du Libraire et de l'Amateur de Livres. Seventeenth century imprints include Du Laurens, Fernel, and Bartholin. The great bargain of this sale was the extremely rare journal edited by Fourcroy: La médecine éclairée par les sciences physiques (4 v., 1791–1802) in the French lot, which averaged $5 a volume.

To a considerable extent the condition of the volumes worked to our benefit. Although most of the texts were in good condition (except for such occasional legacies from bygone students as thumbprints and inkspots) the bindings were not. Instead of the signs of mildew I expected from the Edinburgh climate, dryness was more in evidence, and too many of the covers were detached to make these attractive buys for collectors and dealers. A selection of volumes was left to be repaired or rebound in London, where hand repair is still available. A colleague at Wisconsin who was formerly an officer of the Society claims to be able to tell whether a book was shelved at the back of the building near the candy factory or in the room with a fireplace which belched soot (visible in Fig. 1). The latter group are still distinguishable after many handlings but the subtler distinction escapes me.

BERTRAM ROTA, LTD.

Immediately after the sale, we were given the courtesy of the use of the “Sotheby cart” for delivery of the books to Rota. While I sorted and examined our purchases, I had the rare experience of seeing something of the workings of a first-edition firm. Bertram Rota, Ltd. occupies the first floor of a modern yellow-brick building on Savile Row, sharing some of the glamor of this prestigious location with the Beatles next door. The pleasant, high-ceilinged showroom held an appealing variety of contemporary works and some attractive exhibits.

The spider-web of rooms behind gave easy access from showroom to offices, mail room and private cubicles for staff members engaged in various tasks. To a bookman there was something very familiar in the flow of comment and movement: triumph over a catalog finally delivered from the printers, exasperation over a “layaway” temporarily mislaid, departures to inspect a library or attend an auction. The youth and enthusiasm of the staff were impressive, from the partners down to the youngest junior in narrow Edwardian tailoring or the blonde mail clerk disappearing around the corner with a flirt of a plaid mini.

It was obvious that a firm dealing with manuscripts and first editions calls on many professional skills to keep up with literary trends and discoveries, to select stock, to appraise offerings and to present its wares attractively in saleroom and printed catalog. Probably no other profession requires such a unique combination of literary taste, astuteness, and probity.

I noted particularly the respect given to the cataloger, who has some of the duties of a library cataloger but a more creative responsibility: the manuscript cataloger who must extract the sense of a letter and describe it in a phrase or quotation that will attract a buyer; the book cataloger who must not only describe a volume honestly but often provide annotations in which “a great deal of learning is unobtrusively inlaid.”

Time for personal indulgences was limited, but I had the pleasure of lunching with two medical librarians well known in America: Mr. Philip Wade at the Royal College of Surgeons and Miss Hilda Clark of the British Council Medical Library. An illness prevented an anticipated reunion with Mrs. Lilian Sargeant of King’s College Medical Library.

To the exhilaration of simply being in London were added memories of much good book talk, alternating serious discussion of unrecognized literary talent with gleeful anecdotes of eccentricity; intense concentration and light-hearted relaxation; wet feet and warm hospitality. I brought back more from London than books.

THE JULY SALE

The second two-day sale on July 14–15 found me in the same chair that I had occupied in

February, with the same team of Rota and Taylor in attendance. Also present was Dr. Malcolm Macnicol, honorary librarian of the Royal Medical Society when the idea of selling the collection was first entertained. By an odd coincidence, he was spending a semester on the University of Illinois medical campus at the time of the first sale and was unable to attend it. His hopes for a good return from the sale of the library were tinged with regret that it was not sold intact. His gift from the Society, the Gray History of the Royal Medical Society 1737–1937 (1) has been at my elbow ever since and I am indebted to him for the illustrations of the Library’s quarters. (Figs. 1–2.)

The second sale ostensibly covered the G–M section of the alphabet, although many authors from A to Z were included in the lots. The Dissertations, withdrawn from the first sale, were reoffered, with additions, as Medical Dissertations.

There were definite differences between the two sales. In spite of weather in the humid 80’s, the bidding seemed to me to be brisker, with more dealers actively engaged than at the first sale and, possibly, more mail bids entered by the auctioneer. Some bidders active at the first sale were absent. E. P. Goldschmidt was represented at this one sale only, and one American dealer, Rittenhouse of Philadelphia, bought many of the American items. It seemed to me that private collectors were less in evidence, although the number listed in the price list is about the same.

With the exception of the great lot of Edinburgh dissertations, both highs and lows were lower at the February sale. The bidding occasionally hit a kind of air pocket when lots went at bargain prices. Certainly no one would expect many items of this vintage to sell in the $5 to $10 range, even with minor imperfections. Horstius’ Opera Medicae, three folio volumes, sold for $5, the nine volumes of Friedrich Hoffmann’s Opera Omnia (1740–60) for $10 and we acquired John Hunter’s Animal Oeconomy (1792) and a Giunta edition of Mercurialis’ Opuscula Aurea (1644) for $10 each.

The second item in the sale was a set of Galen’s Opera, the second Greek edition of 1538 in five volumes, with minor imperfections not affecting the text. I was as surprised as anyone in the room when we acquired it for $29. My only explanation is that dealers who had not intended to bid on it were caught off balance when the bidding stopped so suddenly. (We made up for it later when other bidders were all too alert). The effort of checking auction catalogs sometimes seems excessive when returns are minimal, but such bargains are encouraging.

The total fetched at this sale was nearly one-third less than that of the first sale. The number of lots was also smaller as was the number of items considered deserving of individual listing. It may be that A–F authors are intrinsically more interesting than those in G–M: what price Galen and Malpighi as compared with Bright and Fabricius? Even from the perspective of my vast experience at two auction sales I can see that there is no predicting results.

The Medical Dissertations did not come up until late in the second day. Our effort to conserve funds for this great collection exerted a restraining influence on preceding bids. Even so, we acquired a higher percentage of the total than in February.

**Highs**

The high price of the sale was $2,280 for the first English edition of Guillemeau’s The Frenche Chirurgery or All the Manuale Operations of Chirurgery published in 1597, of which only eight other copies are recorded, half in American and half in British libraries. Second was the splendid Micrographia (1665) of Robert Hooke at $1,800. It is deplorable that the integrity of the fine seventeenth century vellum binding, with Friedrich Hoffmann’s inscription, was ruined by removal of another volume from the covers. Fortunately this edition is available both in the Memorial Library and, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Maurice Richardson, in the Middleton Library.

Other highs included $1,200 for the John Mayow Tractatus Quinque (1674), which sells for much more if in better condition (The Middleton Library has 1708 editions of two of these tracts, on respiration and on rickets.) Not surprisingly, the Jenner items were in the higher range. Two copies of the first edition of the Inquiry (1798) fetched $1,152 and $1,080. Since we have a copy of the admirable facsimile

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of this edition (printed in only 500 copies), we settled for a copy of his Further Observations (1799) and Continuation . . . (1800) at a more modest expenditure.

The Malpighi De Bombyce (1669) brought $912. (A donor has promised us a copy of this work.) We were fortunate to acquire Malpighi’s Opera Omnia (1686) and Opera Posthuma (1697) in one folio volume for $29, lacking only a few small plates in the original work which are available in an edition already held.

Although we relinquished Glisson’s Anatomia Hepatis (1654), which sold for $840, we did acquire a scarce 1655 edition of De Rachitide, and his Tractatus de Ventrículo et Intestinis. We also acquired the De Mulierum Organis (1672) and De Vironum Organis (1668) of de Graaf in a single volume.

Since we have the first two volumes of Hewson’s Experimental Inquiries, we did not feel justified in spending $720 for the sake of the very scarce third volume on the red particles of the blood. The same amount was paid for an inferior copy of the Laennec first edition. (We owe our impeccable copy of these volumes to Dr. William S. Middleton and his former resident, Dr. Meyer Friedman.) As was anticipated, the first English edition, translated by John Forbes, fetched as much as the original. We did acquire a second edition of this work which is still the standard English edition.

We added also a number of other works of significance in the Edinburgh context: six titles by John Hunter’s brother-in-law, Sir Everard Home (pronounced, I am given to understand, Hume); and eleven works of the three Alexander Monro’s, whom I shall not endeavor to disentangle here.

The elephant folio of William Hunter, Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidì (1774) at $576, brought only half its peak price because of its shabby condition. We have an excellent copy of this splendid work from the Baskerville press.

We acquired a number of significant titles in neurology and psychiatry, notably nine works by the neurologist, Marshall Hall. The Scriptores Neurologici Minores (1791–95) of C. F. Ludwig is a valuable selection of papers, many not available in the original. Competition for more modern neurological works is indicated by the $216 paid for the Hirschfeld Neurologie (1853) and the $528 brought by a first edition of Ferrier’s Functions of the Brain at the previous sale.

One of our major purchases was a set of ten thick folio volumes (approximately 120 lbs.) of the Opera of Hippocrates and Galen, parallel Greek and Latin texts edited by Renatus Charterius and published in Paris in 1678–79. With the 1538 Galen mentioned before, we now have for the first time Greek originals of these basic works.

The Dissertations

Uncertainty concerning the Medical Dissertations cast a long shadow over the whole sale. This collection of some 3,200 dissertations published during the years 1749–1839 is certainly one of the most complete outside of Edinburgh. As the sale catalog notes, “it is almost half as large again as the set of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Aberdeen sold by us in 1967 [for, as I recall, $6,000] and then believed to be the largest set offered for sale in modern times.” Although the Gray history gives 1751 as the date of the first published thesis, this set includes two printed in 1749 and a volume for 1750.

This collection would form a kind of capstone to the volumes Wisconsin had already acquired. Singly many of them would sell for from $10 to $40, and the value of at least one—that of Joseph Black—would be almost impossible to calculate. The dissertations contain the first published work of many members who later reached distinction. Sir James Mackintosh wrote of the meetings at which the dissertations and cases were presented to the Society: “Such debates were the only public examinations in which favour could have no place, and which never could degenerate into mere formality: they must always be severe, and always just” (2).

I had mentally resigned myself to an average price of $4 or $5 which would effectually remove us from the bidding. By tallying our savings as we went along I knew that we could meet the ceiling previously agreed on. I am sure I held my breath as the offers mounted—and whether in steps of tens, fifties, or hundreds of pounds I maintain no memory. One could feel the sigh that greeted the “Sold to Rota” at the final bid. The total was less than we expected to pay and very much under the
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value of the individual dissertations. It was appropriate that George Lawson, the representative of the Rota firm who had conducted the negotiations with the Society and with Wisconsin over a period of several years, was bidding at this point. It was also uncanny that Anthony Rota, exhibiting the kind of prescience that comes from years of unconscious timing of the auction process, appeared at my elbow at almost the minute this lot was decided.

The significance of these dissertations rests on the position of Edinburgh as a center for medical study. Founded in 1726 by the senior Alexander Monro, the Medical School of the University of Edinburgh had, by the end of the 18th century, succeeded Leyden as the leading medical school of the world. Because Edinburgh anticipated by nearly sixty years the first systematic instruction in medicine in English universities, the English graduates during the eighteenth century outnumbered the Scots, as did the Irish. Almost as many students came from the West Indies and North America as from Scotland. The geographic designations for the candidates—"Carolinensis", "Barbadensis", "Americanus", "Virginiensis", "Antiguensis", "Marylandensis", "Novo-Eboracensis", and of course, "Pensylvaniensis"—and the recurring topics of scurvy, of dysentery, of putrid fever, of phthisis, of the bilious malignant fever of America, of Peruvian bark, conjure up the sailing ship and the hazards of an eighteenth century environment.

The first American member of the Society was John Moultrie of South Carolina, who was also the first American to graduate in medicine abroad (1749). The next was Peter Middleton (1749), author of the earliest American history of medicine. Moultrie's dissertation is not included in this collection and Middleton's was apparently not published. Other prominent Americans are represented: William Shippen (1761) and John Morgan (1763), who were to found the first American medical school in Philadelphia; Samuel Bard (1765), later of King's College; Benjamin Rush (1768) and Caspar Wistar (1786).

The Statuta Solennia de Doctoratus in Medicina Gradu in Academia Edinburgena (1817) acquired in another lot gives an invaluable list of the dissertations accepted from 1705 through 1817.

Although the remainder of the sale was somewhat of a letdown, the exhilaration of success with solvency encouraged me to bid rather steeply on a title whose rarity justifies such indulgence: Johannes Müller's De Glandularum Secernentium Structura Penitiori (1830), like most of Müller's monographs both highly significant and very scarce.

SHIPMENT

The books were shipped in stout wooden boxes, via airmail. An export license was secured for the dissertations, in case they might be interpreted to fall under regulations concerning export of "documents" of national interest. Any considerable sale of manuscripts or documents to an American library is likely to lead to fulminations in the British press over loss of national treasures. Concerning this recurring controversy, an editorial in the Book Collector comments:

Despite the far from satisfactory machinery governing export of manuscripts now, we have been lucky in our American friends. First, generally speaking, it is quicker to get a microfilm from America than it was to travel half way across England to transcribe in a bad light in a freezing house. Second, American buyers have often, when thwarted by the licensing procedure, behaved with great consideration, and without the slightest trace of malice.... If objects of historic interest are allowed to reach their full price in the open market, and the nation is able to compete in the market, then both vendor and buyer will have a fair deal, and both are given the added incentive of high price to look after and preserve such objects. (3)

The Middleton Library has added more than a hundred Garrison-Morton titles in recent purchases, most of them from the Edinburgh sales and many of them not previously available in the midwest area. The Garrison-Morton list naturally concentrates on "firsts" and a collection based solely on these titles would be sound but thin; other works of authors listed, works almost equally important but not "firsts" and the minor works that more adequately mirror medical practice of different periods are necessary to flesh out the figure of medicine in history. The books acquired from the Edinburgh Library are a composite of these categories, particularly valuable for the works from the Edinburgh school but also strong in the texts in many languages that the members consulted

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over two centuries. The acquisitions are balanced between significant and expensive single items and a large volume of works which, although not epoch-making, are important to a scholar concerned with a single author, a particular period or a special subject.

MOON OVER EDINBURGH

Rather unexpectedly, I visited Edinburgh on this trip, as a guest of the Lawson family, and had the unique experience of witnessing the moon landings on their excellent TV. I also spent an afternoon at the new library of the University of Edinburgh, a modern building with a wall of windows giving a breathtaking view of the old city. The keeper of rare books, Mr. Charles Finlayson, showed me the collection under his care. The extent of the collection, and the holdings in science are impressive. The four mammoth volumes of the Audubon birds, the despair of everyone who tries to display them in normal exhibit cases, were on permanent display in well designed cases. The original owner of these volumes was one of Audubon's patrons.

I was also privileged to hold the Servetus' Restitutio Christianismi (1553) in which this contemporary of Vesalius recorded his discovery that the blood in the pulmonary circulation passes into the heart, after having been mixed with air in the lungs. Only three copies of this work survived when Calvin had both the author and his book burned at the stake for, as Garrison puts it, "a mere juggling of verbiage, a theologic quibble" (4). Some pages from this work were known to have been used in evidence against Servetus, and some pages lacking from the Edinburgh copy have been supplied in photocopy. The complete copies are in Paris and Vienna.

I also visited the attractive Miss Margaret Bell at the Medical School library; like many of her transatlantic colleagues, she is cheerfully coping with overcrowding and heavy use in expectation of a new building.

LAST LAP

The final sale (except for a number of journals and a few residual book lots offered in February 1970) was held on October 28-29. It included not only the R-Z portion of the major alphabet but a large appendix of A-Ls; a number of odds and ends; "crippled" books and odd volumes of sets; hundreds of pamphlets and brief works, either bound together or disbound from previous volumes; a large number of lots only partially listed; a considerable collection of periodicals; and a roundup of approximately 2,000 volumes of nineteenth and twentieth century works not considered entitled to individual listing. The total of nearly 5,000 books (incorporating a much larger number of individual titles), and about 2,700 periodical volumes taxed the facilities of Sotheby's as our purchases from this and previous sales will tax the facilities of the Middleton Library for a long time. It was in some ways the most promising of the three sales and the hardest to evaluate in advance.

I left for London a day early in the hope that the Book Room would be open for inspection on the Wednesday rather than the Thursday preceding the sale. Most of Tuesday was spent in circling England, landing in Paris to refuel, and then circling again, waiting first for the fog to burn away and then for permission to land as one of a long line stacked up over Heathrow.

I spent the next three days stretching for books on the shelves, stooping over bundles on the floor or up the book ladder examining volumes at ceiling level. There was some competition for the ladder, which blocked a whole section if one stood, as the head porter politely and quite rightly suggested to me, facing the wall. However, inspection of several big odd lots of British and continental books on these top shelves revealed some very desirable items which we acquired for almost nothing.

Even though the Book Room was open Wednesday, the porters were still sorting the periodical lots when I left after normal closing time on Friday afternoon, and the big lot of 2,000 volumes was not available for examination until the morning of the first sale. The Monday sale was also to start at 10:30 rather than the usual 11:00 hour to handle the extra volume.

There is some advantage in being an eccentric American female who does not worry about losing face by engaging in manual labor. Early Monday morning found me up-ended over tea chests, trying to take the measure of the 2,000-volume lot that had overrun the shelves. These

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chests, of thin boards lined with foil, stand hip-high and still contain old flakes of tea in addition to 75–100 volumes each. I was joined in this hopeful rummaging by Dr. C. W. M. Pratt, Lecturer in Anatomy at Cambridge, who once lectured in Madison while on a year’s appointment at the University of Illinois Medical School. He and his charming wife have the fondest memories of Madison.

At 10:30, dusty but better informed, I was joined by Ronald Taylor and George Lawson. C. F. John Grindle, a member of the Royal Medical Society and Richard de Soldenhof, currently the honorary librarian, were also in attendance and bid on some titles. In addition to the dealers who had participated in the previous sales, the periodical offerings had attracted a representative of Swets & Zeitlinger of Amsterdam. I was honored to meet the respected Menno Hertzberger, also of Amsterdam.

THE LARGE LOTS

As the bidding proceeded from Lot 969 (McAvoy) to lot 979 (MEDICAL BOOKS: a very extensive collection of upwards of 2,000 volumes of medical books . . . published during the period from 1840 to about 1900), Mr. Taylor admitted to exerting his best telepathic pressure against purchase because he knew he would have to direct the logistics of transferring, storing, and shipping this formidable load of material. However, oblivious of thought-waves, I nudged Mr. Lawson to a modest $1,000 bid, which took the lot.

I estimated that a hundred selected titles from this lot would repay the cost; later sorting indicated the estimate to be on the low side. The printed description omitted the 20th century works, which were well selected and in very good condition. Included in the lot were the original or only editions of Albee’s Bone Graft Surgery, J. K. Mitchell’s On the Cryptogamous Origin of Malarial Fevers, A. B. Garrod’s Treatise on Gout and Rheumatism, A. E. Garrod’s Inborn Errors of Metabolism, William James’s Principles of Psychology, Helmholtz On the Sensations of Tone, Wilfred Trotter’s On the Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War and Collected Papers; and works of Quain, Moynihan, Liston, Playfair, Tait, Treves, and their contemporaries. The value per volume is modest in comparison with that of the older works but far from negligible.

When this lot was delivered to Savile Row, the cartons labeled “Best British Eggs” were piled head high the length of the busy corridor to the packing room. No two volumes of a set or works of an author seemed to be in the same box, and any logical sorting or listing was out of the question.

Also offered in large lots, twenty-eight of them, were some 800 pamphlets, of which we acquired about 500. They offer a rich lode, particularly for the student of the Edinburgh school. Buried in the unlisted titles I found the anesthesia number of Littell’s Living Age (1848); another copy of the Mitchell monograph on malaria; Hamilton on purgative medicines, Scarpa on the accessory nerves, Millar on asthma, and two gruesome little monographs, Lair’s Essai sur les Combustions Humaines (1823) and Malcolmson On Solitary Confinement (1837). I expect our catalogers to greet these lots with some reserve, knowing the difficulty of treating composite volumes containing monographs, letters, orations, prize essays; proposals, counter-proposals, protests; an occasional reprint from the Royal Society transactions or the proceedings of a local society; or a stiffly offended tract entitled Observations on the Remarks of Dr. ______ concerning ______ followed by an even stiffer Answer of Dr. ______ to the observations of Dr. ______ on ______.

One collection of fifty tracts on medical education includes works of Robert Knox, Liston, Balfour, James Clark, Andrew Duncan, Syme, and others, written at a time when such discussions were shaping the pattern of medical education in the British Isles.

The fine collection of Probationary Essays of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh is a suitable companion to the medical dissertations acquired in July, with the additional virtue of the English tongue. Among the many familiar names are Knox, Benjamin Bell, Syme, Fergusson, Lizars, Liston, Cullen, and Argyle Robertson.

ODD LOTS

The odd lots, more than anything acquired at this sale, satisfied the urge for discovery and, at less than $1 a volume, the hope for bargains. The “crippled” or “hurt” volume may lack the titlepage, one or more plates, or portions of the text; it may be damaged by ink or

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water or be literally worn away by use. The sales catalog must itemize such defects but even so such damaged items are sold on a "not subject to return" basis.

A collector naturally wants his purchase to be in mint condition, uncut and unopened, with all errata sheets and, hopefully, the original paper covers and advertising matter intact. If it bears also the inscription of the author, preferably to an equally famous contemporary, so much the better. The older the book the less the likelihood that these qualities have survived. However, when usefulness rather than resale value is concerned, a library is in a different position than the individual collector or even a book dealer. Unless a scholar is studying textual or printing variants, a missing page provided in photocopy may be no real handicap. A partial set acquired cheaply may satisfy some needs until a complete set comes along. The plates from one edition may be usable with the text of another. I am sure we shall have many occasions to be grateful that we bought most of this pitiful residue of a great library.

Lots of 40–50 items were also listed under MEDICAL BIOGRAPHY, MEDICAL HISTORY, and PSYCHIATRY AND NEUROLOGY. These and the odd lots mentioned came up early on the first day, requiring an advance decision on how deeply to plunge on this miscellaneous material at the risk of losing important titles later.

One literally mammoth lot of thick folios acquired at less than $4 a volume included the ancestor of all the encyclopedias, the great Diderot in seventeen volumes (lacking the plates, however) and the five-volume Bayle Dictionary Historical and Critical of 1734–38. Also included in this lot were two valuable works of Manetius which alone of the books purchased showed evidence of long continued storage in a damp place. In both the Bibliotheca Chirurgica (1721) and the Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medicorum (1731) the pages nearest the cover are as fragile as snowflakes from dry rot.

Very gratifying was acquisition of another big bibliographical work, Plouquet's Initia Bibliotheca Medico-practicae (1793–94). An excellent edition of Paracelsus (1603–05) adds another to the large number of collected works acquired in these sales. Important anatomical works were also added: Sandifort, Soemmering, Valsalva, Weitbrecht (published in St. Petersburg), Tiedemann, Steno, and ten works by Scarpa, who has been less well represented in our anatomy collection than the quality of his work deserves. The unusual number of important works on the heart include Peacock, Piorry, Senac, Purkinje, Portal, Prichard, and, in an odd lot, one volume of the collected papers of Jenner's friend, Caleb Hillier Parry, in addition to three of his other works bid for separately.

Metchnikoff's long-sought Lectures on the Comparative Pathology of Inflammation, unlisted in one of the modern lots, was acquired along with a listed title, his more common but also highly valued Immunity. Also in this choice lot were not only the first but the second edition of Pavlov's Work of the Digestive Glands (1902, 1910), both in much better condition than our brittle copy which was ruined by the well-meant efforts of a borrower to repair it. Other welcome contemporary titles, also unlisted, were some works of Sherrington, Adrian, and Freud. These indicate the quality of the 20th century portion of the library.

My personal favorite from all the sales is a volume by Stukely that we could afford only because half the plates are missing. I treasure the absurd juxtaposition of subjects: Of the Spleen, its Description and History, Uses and Diseases, particularly the Vapors with their Remedy . . . to which is added Anatomical Observations on the Dissection of an Elephant (1723).

HIGH PRICES

By far the highest individual price in the three sales was the $4,800 required to take Parkinson's Essay on the Shaking Palsy (1817). The annotation explains the stubbornness of the competition:

The book is one of the rarest of medical classics. There is no copy in the British Museum or the main medical libraries in London nor is there a copy in the Cushing, Osler, or Dr. Waller collections.

There was much speculation concerning the identity of the Mr. Campbell who was the successful bidder. Fortunately, for more frugal collectors there is a satisfactory facsimile of this little sixty-six-page monograph.

Aside from the dissertations, the high lot price was drawn, not surprisingly, by the 300

volumes of *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London, dating from 1667 and sold for $6,720. However, the per-volume price was higher for the fifty-seven volumes of *Transactions* of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which fetched $2,160. The long run of *Lancet* brought $5 a volume, the *British Medical Journal*, under $7. The forty-two volumes of Sydenham Society *Publications* sold for less than $8 each, the New Sydenham Society series of 182 volumes for a very modest $2 apiece.

Our only periodical purchases will give us some completion volumes of two early American journals, a set of the *London Medical Journal* (1781–90) and a set of the rarely held *Journal de Physiologique Experimentale* of Magendie (1821–30) lacking only the final two issues. From the other journals offered in the final sale in February 1970 we acquired a complete set of the *Medico-Chirurgical Transactions* which spans the nineteenth century. Tennent’s *An Epistle to Dr. Richard Mead Concerning the Epidemical Diseases of Virginia* (1742), with its exposition on the Seneca rattlesnake root, brought $400.

Other single titles drawing high prices were the *Cerebri Anatomi* (1664) of Willis at $528, twenty-five monographs and reprints of James Young Simpson in one volume (from 1839 on) for $960; the *Vesalius Chirurgia Magna* (1569) for $1,248 and his first published work, *Rhazes*, for $720. Also fetching more than $500 were botanical works by Hans Sloane and John Ray; the Wharton *Adenographia* (1656) and the first edition of Virchow’s *Die Cellularpathologie* (1858).

Among our most expensive purchases was the very rare *Opuscula Anatomica Nova… Instauratio Magna* of Jean Riolan (1649). Almost simultaneously, members of the Medical Library staff at the Medical Library Association meeting in Louisville were hearing Dr. Nikolaus Mani, Professor of the History of Medicine at Wisconsin, announced as winner of the Hafner award for his article on Riolan.

Another choice acquisition was the *Osteologia Nova* (1691) of Clpton Havers, a pioneer work on the fine structure of the bone.

Having the German edition of 1801, we waived the Rollo *Account of Two Cases of the Diabetes Mellitus* (1797) which sold for $408, but acquired a second edition (1806) very reasonably.

We also acquired John Snow’s *On Chloroform* (1858). The catalog entry for Dr. Robert Macintosh’s copy of this work, sold at Sotheby’s a few months later, points out that only 450 copies were published, and only 126 copies of Snow’s volume on ether, of which we already had a copy. These are significant to Wisconsin because of Dr. Ralph Waters’ effort in reawakening interest in Snow’s work in anesthesia, long overshadowed by his contribution to epidemiology. (These and other pertinent works on respiration were purchased from the O. Sidney Orth Memorial Fund.) I was told by members of the Rota staff that there is a John Snow pub—presumably somewhere near the old Broad Street pump!—but did not have time to follow up this tempting research lead.

Among the few volumes of American interest in the last sale was Benjamin Rush’s *Account of the Bilious Remitting Fever*, 1st ed., 1794, which sold for $180. The English edition, 1800, of Noah Webster’s *Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases* brought $156. Earlier the Bayley *Account of the Epidemic Fever which Prevailed in the City of New York* (1796) had sold for $228. These are examples of the range and value of the epidemiological works in the Edinburgh library. The Middleton Library already owned these titles.

The length of the sale list and the unusually large number of “desk” bids kept the auctioneer and his clerks at strict attention throughout the sale. Nor did the major bidder have time to waste. Disposal of 629 lots in two and one-half hours comes out to better than five lots per minute. At that rate we acquired 2,165 volumes in the space of one crowded minute—something rather special even in these days of quantity purchases. In all, we brought home close to 1,600 antiquarian volumes, incorporating a much larger number of individual titles. A number of volumes not worth transport—out-of-date American student texts, for instance—were eliminated from the large modern lot, the remainder of which will total about 1,500 volumes.

The auction world is highly competitive, and any bidder who walks off with a major part of a sale must expect to arouse uncharitable feelings. As one lot after another was knocked down to Rota, the antagonism of other bidders was palpable. However, with one very unchar-
acteristic exception, the attitude of both dealers and individual bidders was personally cordial, with a rueful acceptance of the westward flow of scholarly resources.

A successful bidder is open to the suspicion of overbidding. To check whether our bids were excessive and whether our participation actually raised prices, I compared reports in the 1967/68 Book auction record (which lists prices of individual items at both British and American auction houses) for identical titles sold at the Edinburgh sales. Because the sale of the Aberdeen Medical Society Library in 1967 was recorded in this volume, a relatively large number of identical titles was found. Only a quarter of this sample had remained the same or declined slightly; the average increase for the whole list was 32 percent. However, the rise for the titles we acquired was slightly less than average. The fact is that, as more and more volumes are funneled into libraries, competition for the remaining copies—especially the acknowledged classics—inevitably raises the price level. Prices in current antiquarian catalogs are averaging better than twice what we paid for the identical titles, leaving a good margin for expenses.

THE SALES CATALOGS

My experience at these sales left me with considerable sympathy for H. A. Feisenberger of Sotheby’s, who was responsible for the sale catalogs. The mass of material, its age and its physical condition must have made preparation of the catalogs an exhausting job. The front covers came off in one’s hands, the aged calf bindings disintegrated on to one’s clothes, the uncut pages resisted opening and yet required gingerly handling with dusty fingers; the volumes had to be examined for plates, portraits, supplements, inscriptions, idiosyncracies of publication that might affect values, extra titles bound in, foxing and other defects. Listing and describing the pamphlet lots must have seemed interminable. Matching up works published in more than one volume was undoubtedly difficult in inadequate space.

The printed sale catalogs would have made a better historical record of this great collection if more titles had been given individual listing. What is more lamentable was the dispersion of some extensive subject collections throughout the sales catalogs and subsequently to the four winds. The original collections on cholera and other epidemic diseases must have been impressive. The works on mineral waters and medical climatology were extensive. Naval and military medicine included many choice items, such as Blane, Larrey, Lind, and Thomas Trotter. The brisk demand for the numerous works on colonial and tropical medicine assured that, whereas Ainslie came to Wisconsin, Annesley, Hillary, and Chalmers went far afield.

When purchases are added to existing holdings, the Middleton Library will have at least three quarters of the medical books sold in these sales, in either the identical edition offered or another contemporaneous edition. The additions build on existing strength in anatomy, pathology, physiology, internal medicine, and the neurological sciences. Increase of the surgical collection is significant. A wide range of important works was acquired in specialties previously not high on the priority list: pediatrics, obstetrics, dermatology, and ophthalmology, for instance. The Memorial Library also made some additions to its notable holdings in chemistry and pharmacy.

The one area in which the Edinburgh Library was unaccountably weak was in the development of the science of bacteriology in the late nineteenth century. Pasteur, Koch, Behring are not represented at all and Lister only by his Collected Papers. The definite swing to English language publications after about 1850 is partly responsible for this deficiency, but it may also indicate low student interest in what is essentially a graduate discipline.

These purchases must be considered in relation to other important acquisitions of the past year: 1,200 substantive volumes, plus several hundred dissertations and smaller works, bought from Fritz Haller of Munich; and the substantial library contributed by Dr. Hans Reese, recently retired from the Medical School faculty. Formerly the property of an Italian collector and an Austrian medical society, the Haller purchase includes several dozen sixteenth century titles, notably a number of early editions of Hippocrates and Galen, and a wide representation of Italian, French and German authors, with no definite subject emphasis. The earliest volume is a Valescuss de Tharanta of 1502. Dr. Reese’s library is typical of his wide-ranging interests but with particular emphasis.
on neurology and medical history. The scarce volumes are probably the impressive folio of Parisano (1623–28) and the Medicae Artes Princeps (1567) of the Stephanus press, but the library staff particularly welcomed that status symbol, a set of the Oxford dictionary in the original edition.

Acquisition of whole libraries enriches a historical collection in ways not at first apparent. A library collected over two centuries subtly reveals, by emphasis on specific authors and subjects, the tone of a period. We acquired enough of the Edinburgh library to preserve some of these interrelationships and the interplay of languages. For instance, I have mentioned Johannes Müller’s De Glandularum Secernentium (1830). In the next sale we bought Samuel Solly’s commentary on this work. We also got a French edition of Mueller’s Handbuch der Physiologie and an English translation by Charles West, with the highly valued plates, of his scarce work on cancer which we already owned: Ueber den feinern Bau und die Formen der krankhaften Geschwiiste (1838). The value of a collection to a scholar is increased by acquisition of variant editions and translations; collected works of important figures; minor works of major authors and major works of minor authors; and supporting historical and biographical works. The inevitable duplicates are a disposable extra.

To make these additions available to the scholarly world, a continuation of “Neu” should certainly be anticipated. This checklist, Chemical, Medical and Pharmaceutical Books Printed before 1800 in the Collections of the University of Wisconsin Libraries, was edited by John Neu, History of Science Bibliographer at the Memorial Library, and published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 1965. Meanwhile, individual volumes as processed are reported to the Union Catalogue of the Library of Congress and, as of late 1969, to the new union catalogue of holdings of libraries affiliated with the Midwest Regional Medical Library at the John Crerar. The Wisconsin holdings will also be updated in the projected checklist of Garrison-Morton book titles held by the midwest libraries affiliated with the Center for Research Libraries.

How to Approach an Auction

Should you go to an auction? The answer depends on whether you are merely curious or have a serious professional intent. Without some genuine interest in the outcome, a book auction would probably be rather tame. There is in any auction, however, the hint of treasure trove, the challenge of competition, the suspense of uncertainty. One must be prepared for a great deal of drudgery in advance and for the very demanding effort of pricing and decision-making. Knowing that one’s decisions are going forever into the published records of auction sales can be a little intimidating.

A second question is whether to bid for oneself or to commission an agent. Again, the volume of business controls. If one can bid on a book, make payment and carry it away, there is no need for an agent. However, institutional buyers would find this difficult. If one purchases more than an armful of books, the logistics of getting them packed and shipped enters in. With one auction treading on the heels of the one before, an auction house must clear its shelves promptly. (Our purchases were in transit to the Rota packing room the afternoon of the sales and were wrapped for shipment as fast as I could clear them.)

A colleague asked me, “How do you decide what to bid at an auction?” The only sound basis for price estimates is some knowledge of the importance of an author in the history of science, a determination of his significance to one’s own collection, and familiarity with current prices through constant checking of the Bookman’s Price Index, auction sale records, and current antiquarian catalogs. Auction sales, particularly, allow very little leafl-off time for painstaking checking of price sources.

It is in fixing on a top bid for the rarest items that personal attendance is most helpful. These are hardest to estimate in advance because they do not turn up often enough to establish a price range or are sold privately and not entered in trade records. Buyers in attendance can judge from the intensity of bidding whether the price is being driven up by one or two tenacious bidders or whether interest is more widespread. The association item is particularly subject to pressure from collectors intent on acquiring what may be a unique copy. Inevitably some items high on one’s priority list sell at what one recognizes as a high price; however, one has the reassurance at an auction that whatever the successful bidder pays, someone else was willing to pay almost as much. The auction price will

inevitabaly establish a new baseline for future sales, particularly of items bought by a dealer for stock.

Know what you want and how badly you want it. Decide whether you are more interested in getting a number of books as cheaply as possible or a few at any price. Establish rigid or flexible ceilings according to these priorities, leaving your bidder some room to maneuver. With funds for substantial purchases a flexible bidding plan can make the difference between moderate and outstanding success. Recognize that there's no backing up: what is saved on Zollickofer can't be applied on an Abercrombie someone else has already gathered in. Accept the fact that, although you may occasionally be forced into a higher price than you intended, it is likely to seem reasonable the next time a copy comes on the market; and meanwhile you have had the use of the book. This all-out incursion into the auction market was made possible by a large bequest from G. Paul Miller, a Madison business man, and smaller contributions from medical alumni and many other friends. The official Friends of the William S. Middleton Medical Library, which came into existence with an initial contribution from Dr. Chauncey Leake, continues (with constant support from Dr. Middleton himself) to underwrite purchases for the historical collection.

Flying off to London three times in one year to buy books at auction has an insouciant jet-set sound that has made me the envy of my associates. This picture is slightly out of focus. I would not have missed the experience, but it has been the most grueling of my life, second only to moving a library. The interminable checking of holdings is tedious and wearying; the decision on prices and the weighing of one title against another is very demanding, as Dr. Mani can corroborate; and the sheer physical effort of examining, manipulating and rechecking tons of books leaves little energy to enjoy the glamor of a foreign city. These responsibilities can be eased by colleagues but not really shared; and only a person with a strong acquisitive instinct and the conviction of taking part in an historic event could accept them as a privilege rather than a burden.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Sotheby & Co. for permission to reproduce Figs. 3–6.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid., p. 73.