

# Medical Africana

By Dr M Slotow

**A**fricana may be defined as any permanent record including books, photographs, paintings, ephemera etc., which relates to Africa. The South African collector usually restricts his collection to material pertaining to Africa South of the Zambesi.

Medical Africana, a small though many-faceted section of the General Africana collection, includes the work of qualified doctors, pharmacists, travellers, and explorers, the study of ethnic medicine, medical advertising and general history.

## Historiography

There is as yet no complete, definitive history of medicine in South Africa. The two large published histories extend only to the end of the 19th century.

In 1958 Edmund H. Burrows' "A History of Medicine in SA", was published under the auspices of the SA Medical Association. This is a reliable history but not a very readable work. It remains the main reference work in our medical historical literature. The bibliography supplied is quite extensive and could provide a nucleus for any further bibliographical studies.

The first attempt at medical historiography was that by Dr PW Laidler, editor of the SAMJ: in contributions to this journal between 1937-38, he traced the history of medical institutions in the Cape during its earlier period.

He later worked on a complete history of medicine and, some years after his death, his manuscript was made available to Dr Michael Gelfand who completed Laidler's work.

The book was published in 1971 as "South Africa Its Medical History 1652 — 1898". This is a large, readable work but not as accurate as the work by Dr Burrows. An alphabetical bibliography is not supplied but source references are given at the end of each chapter.

"The History of the Development of Nursing in South Africa 1952 — 1960", by Charlotte Searle is an important work including medical history associated with the various institutions in the country. This is a fine work but does not fill the gap in the literature of medical history.

Burrows, Laidler and Gelfand, all qualified doctors have also contributed to other fields of Africana, and these books therefore belong in a Medical Africana collection.



Burrows traced the story of the "Moodies of Melssetter", a family history extending from the landing of the 1820 Settlers at Algoa Bay, the initial settlement in the Free State and their final trek to Rhodesia.

Laidler published a short history of the stage in the Cape and Gelfand proved a capable writer in the field of ethnography with his book "Shona Ritual", (1959), and the history of medical pioneering in Rhodesia, with his best known book "Tropical Victory", in 1953.

These books are out of print and quite sought after.

The Adler Medical Museum in

Johannesburg possesses perhaps the best collection of books, articles and papers written by doctors. These books include various medical books and articles, as well as general literature, poetry and novels.

The Museum also produces a journal which is of Africana importance and the journal includes several articles of socio-historical importance.

These journals were printed and sponsored by the medical firms MER National and the Adcock Ingram group.

The best known medical practitioner to contribute to our general literature, both in English and Afrikaans was C Louis Leipoldt. He was poet, novelist and historian as well as Medical-Inspector of schools in the Transvaal.

An unusual item written by him, which I have in my collection is "The Report of the Medical-Inspector of Schools for the year ended 31st December 1914", issued by the Transvaal Education Department.

This book is in the nature of a Blue Book and it is possible that there was a Dutch version as well. Two cases of venereal disease were noted in the report.

As an historian Leipoldt wrote three works: "Die Hugenote", "Jan van Riebeeck" (also in English) and "Die Groot Trek".

## Medical autobiographies

Some doctors have found time outside their profession to leave a lasting contribution to Africana. One such doctor is Prof CJ Mieny, whose great interest in Leipoldt led him to duplicate the poet's travels in Britain and Europe, visiting the places which interested Leipoldt.

Prof Mieny has recorded his impressions in a book published in 1980 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Leipoldt.

This book, "Leipoldt in London, Die Vormingsjare" was sponsored by

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the Rio Ethical branch of Adcock Ingram Laboratories Ltd., and was published under the auspices of Geneeskundige Historiese Vereniging Pretoria, to coincide with the centenary of Leipoldt's birth.

This pharmaceutical firm has also been the sponsor of a journal published by this society. Several issues of this journal are now out of print and the issue celebrating Leipoldt's anniversary is particularly sought after.

History appears to be the hobby and interest of many doctors.

Prof Tom Dunstan and his artist wife, Lola, compiled, published and distributed a fine history of Pretoria, "Young Pretoria 1889 — 1913", in 1975. The early history of the Capital City is described in word and picture, including important photographic reproductions and studies by Lola Dunstan. Many of the houses and buildings recorded in this book no longer exist.

Several autobiographies of doctors have proved of great socio-historical importance. In "Doctor to Basuto, Boer and Briton 1877 — 1906 — Memoirs of Dr Henry Taylor", the author described his medical activities, and the small platteland dorp of Ficksburg. He described the relationship between the English- and Afrikaans-speaking villagers and the change in their attitudes resulting from the two Anglo-Boer Wars.

Taylor was a doctor who practised

in Ficksburg but crossed the Caledon River daily to treat the sick Basuto, and he describes his adventure there when caught in the internecine wars.

An amusing anecdote is his description of the treatment for Scarletina as recommended by one of his Boer patients from the outlying district. Blood taken from the ear of a dog and administered to the child. Of course this advice was given to the neighbour. When it did not work the neighbour was told that he should have taken the blood from the left ear instead of from the right.

"Incwadi Yami or Twenty Years Personal Experience in South Africa", by Dr JW Matthews is an entertaining and well written autobiography. Published originally in 1887 it is now available in a good facsimile edition published by "The Africana Book Society", reproducing even the pictorial cloth cover which was a characteristic of the Victorian era.

Matthews practiced as a doctor at the diamond fields of Kimberley for several years before being elected as member of Parliament for Griqualand West. He describes life at the diggings and several medical incidents.

In his travels he met General Piet Joubert shortly after Majuba. The General ascribed the Boer victory at Majuba to "the work of the Lord" — a miracle. Matthews also visited Robben Island in an official capacity and

described the leper colony and discussed the advisability of having these patients relocated on the mainland.

I have a Cape Blue Book which soon afterwards examined such a venture, and it was mooted that the lepers be removed to a hospital to be built near Worcester in the Cape.

## South Africa as a health resort

In the latter part of the 19th century, South Africa was recognised as a place where invalids could recuperate from severe illnesses and for the treatment of consumptives. The various shipping lines vied with each other to advertise the Cape Colony as a health resort and several books were published. These include two books which have become extremely scarce.

Dr Arthur Fuller was the author of a book whose long title is sufficient almost to describe its contents: "South Africa as a Health Resort, with Especial Reference to the Effects of the Climate on Consumptive Invalids, Full Particulars of the Various Localities Most Suitable for their Treatment and Also the Best Means of Reaching the places indicated". This booklet was issued by the Union Steamship Company, (my copy — 6th ed. 1898).

The opposition Company "The Castle Line" issued "Health: The Voyage to South Africa and Sojourn There", in 1891. This includes a chapter by E Symes a well-known doctor of that period, who describes South Africa from the medical viewpoint.

The medicinal properties of the various hot water springs in the Cape Colony had already been recognised in the 18th Century. In the "Nederduitsch Zuid Afrikaansch Tijdschrift" vol vi of 1829 we find an article on the use of natural springs for health purposes.

This was written by J Knockers van Oosterzee, M Dr van de Kaap de Goede Hoop.

He listed some 29 conditions which would benefit from treatment at these baths including one named "Engelsche Siekte". It was beneficial for anorexia, "Verslapping der lever en milt waardoor geelzucht en allerlei kwalen der spysvertering ontstaan".



