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 Melsetter", 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 enthnography 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.

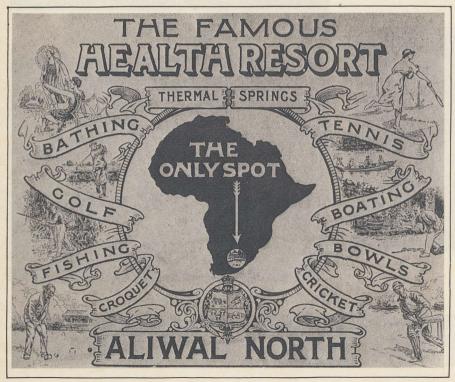
Dr Arthur Fuller was the author of a book whose long title is sufficient almost to describe its contents: "South Africa as a Health Resort, with Especial Reference to the Effects of the Climate an Consumptive Invalids, Full Particulars of the Various Localities Most Suitable for their Treatment and Also 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 Sojurn 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 Tijdscrift" 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 fo anorexia, "Verslapping der lever en milt waardoor geelzucht en allerlei kwalen der spysvertering ontstaan".



It is interesting to note the use of early Afrikaans in this article.

The various health resorts have also printed books and brochures to advertise their benefits. Caledon, one of the best known of these resorts, built a fully equipped Sanatorium. The Sanatorium and the composition of the water in the Springs is described in a book "The Climate and Mineral Waters of Caledon, S. Africa", by GWB Daniell MRCS (Eng) LRCP (Lond) — Medical Superintendent to the Caledon Mineral Baths, Sanatorium etc., published in 1902 (London).

This book was an amplification of a paper published in the Journal of Balnealogy and Climatology. Today we would find the book extremely quaint especially the photographs of the bathroom and the sleeping and eating quarters.

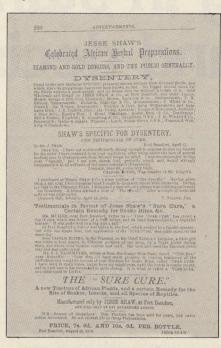
Daniell had already written a paper on medicinal springs in South Africa for the Medical Congress in 1893 and this was published in the SA Medical Journal in 1895. The London edition of 1902 which I possess is extremely scarce but the original article of 1895 is even more so.

Unusual sources of medical history

Medical references can be found in the most unusual books and pamphlets. The "Cape of Good Hope Almanac and Annual Register" for 1849 is such an example. Apart from some medical information important to the historian, there are two pages of amusing "Simple Medical Recipes", two examples of which are: "Chin-cough or Hooping-cough (sic), use a cold bath daily, or rub the back lying down, with old rum — it seldom fails. In desperate cases, change of air alone has cured." (This reminds me of the days when airplane trips were prescribed for pertussis). For cancer of any part of the body apply red onions bruised. Cancer of the breast of 13 years standing has been cured by frequently applying red poppy-water, plantain and rose water, mixed with honey of roses."

Many old cookery books contain such recipes as well as advice on nursing, room ventilation and invalid diets. Some of these books have become household works and many are now scarce and valuable. Titles include Mrs Dijkman's and Hilda Duckitt's well-known books.

Hilda Duckitt in "Hilda's Diary of a Cape Housekeeper", 1902, devotes a chapter to killing of animals and reptiles painlessly. e.g. "On Killing crabs and lobster mercifully". In her recipes she suggested mixing Castoroil with brandy or whiskey to hide the unpleasant taste of the medicine.



Travellers and explorers

The traveller and the explorer played an important rôle in the opening up of the Dark Continent, through the publication of books describing their journeys. Among the most famous travellers was Dr David Livingstone.

However it is Thomas Baines' book "The Gold Regions of South Eastern Africa" published shortly after the author's death in 1877 which is my own favourite item of medical Africana.

In the text, Baines describes his treatment of a black man, not of his party, during his expedition; he sampled the medicine first in front of witnesses to prove that should the patient die it would not be due to the treatment.

The advertisements at the back of the book are of special interest. Jesse Shae of Fort Beaufort advertises the "Sure Cure", a new tincture of African plants, and a certain "Remedy for the Bite of Snakes, Insects, and all species of Reptiles".

The testimonials include one from the Transkei where "a young girl on the Chief Zazela's Location was bitten four times in different parts of the body by a night-adder whilst asleep, her whole body becoming calloused and cold. She took the tincture twice only and was cured."

Jesse Shaw also suggests that no one venturing into the interior should do so without the celebrated "Shaw's Specific for Dysentery". Charles Roting, a wagon-maker at Bulgins, stated that he had consulted doctors as far afield as Grahamstown without relief, but was cured by taking the Shaw Specific.

Advertisements

It was advertising in books during the last century that made the publication of some of these books possible.

In our modern times we have a similar situation with pharmaceutical firms sponsoring journals and other publications through advertising.

By producing calendars, prints, maps and other works of art they contribute to Africana and are at the same time sponsoring a local artist.

A recent example is a signed print by the artist Wietz (one of a series) available to only a few doctors, the original sketches being presented to the Northern Transvaal Branch of the SAMA issued by Ethnor.

Through the years Noristan has produced a calendar with works commissioned from well-known artists such as Dick Findlay and the late Dr Irmin Henkel. The reproductions are of a high quality but unfortunately most doctors do not appreciate the value of these calendars as Africana. I have a complete set of the calendars in my collection.

MER-National were early on the scene with contributions to Africana with reproductions of animal and bird prints, including the magnificent Fish Eagle beautifully framed, and the set of signed prints by Barbara Tyrrell of Bantu females in full regalia.

Burroughs-Wellcome have made photo-reproductions of historical medical instruments in the Cyril Adler Museum. These are still available at the museum which gives another incentive for a visit to this wonderful museum.

BW & Co have published many books on Africana exploration throughout the 100 years which have passed since their establishment. These have become extremely scarce and warrant a full description which I hope to have published shortly.