

This report is of such importance that it must, and we are sure will be studied carefully by all the Royal Colleges and used as the basis on which to build for the future.

### THE APOTHECARIES OF LONDON

THE publication of a short history of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London by Dr W. S. C. Copeman reminds us of the early days of the Royal College of General Practitioners when the foundation council met in the Hall of the Society. Dr Copeman, in his book, gives a lucid account of the development of the apothecary from the tradesman working in his shop to the fully-fledged general practitioner that we know today. Before 1617, when the Great Seal was affixed to their Charter, the apothecaries had been members of the Grocers' Company, dealers in spices and herbs. It was their growing importance as purveyors of medicines, potions, possets and boluses which made the break advisable, as King James remarked "Grocers are but merchants, the business of an Apothecary is a Mystery, wherefore I think it fitting, that they be a Corporation of themselves". As time passed the apothecaries took over more and more of the work of the physicians. This was forced upon them in a way by the high fees and arrogance of the physicians; the umbrage of the physicians was none the less for this. The apothecaries were still unable to charge for their advice or their attendance on patients but merely for the medicines which they provided. This state of affairs continued until a butcher, Steel, complained to the College of his treatment by an apothecary called William Rose. The College sued the apothecary, the case was taken to the House of Lords and there decided against them. Thereafter, until 1815, the apothecary was able to practise medicine, but was still unable to charge for his advice. The Apothecaries Act of 1815 established the Society of Apothecaries as the licensing body for general practitioners. Many have paid their tribute to the painstaking and thorough way in which the Society exercised its right. It must have been an onerous duty and we learn that every week the panel of 12 examiners met to license applicants. By then the society was charged with laying down standards of medical education and the time to be spent on what we would today call undergraduate study. In 1839, a written examination was instituted and the way was prepared for the Medical Act of 1858 when the General Medical Council took over the duty of licensing practitioners.

No building in London or indeed in the provinces could have been a more appropriate place for the foundation council of the College of General Practitioners to hammer out its constitution and its

policy. It is the oldest medical building in the country and, as would be expected, has a grace and sombre dignity all its own. Little did those who met there dream of the tremendous impact that the College they were founding would make on medical practice during their lifetime. Dr Copeman's brief history based on his 1967 Gideon De Laune lecture makes no mention of those early meetings, yet it is good to remember that the society which in the past had done so much to mould and establish the general practitioner of medicine was continuing, through its generosity, to further the work which it had started. Last year was the 350th anniversary of the granting of the Royal Charter to the Society by King James I. Last year, also, was the year in which Her Majesty The Queen granted the use of the prefix Royal by our College. For both the College and the Society 1967 was a memorable year.

#### REFERENCE

Copeman, W. S. C. 1967. *Apothecaries. A history of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London 1917-1967*. Oxford. Pergamon Press.

#### THE TEAM

Disappointments, complaints, tough budgets, demanding bank managers, delayed plans, frustrating committee decisions are all in the air, and unfortunately far too realistic a problem for many of us. Is this adronergic state worth it all? Is there a silver lining? Is there progress? Without doubt there is, but much of it has got lost in the general day-to-day work and the rumbustious noise of politics and the queaks about Review Bodies. All around us medical teaching schools are investing in general practice. Undergraduate, vocational and postgraduate teaching is growing; too slowly perhaps, but nevertheless it is happening.

Whilst some are still cautious about subscribing to these new declarations of faith in general practice, others are forging ahead with planning and implementing: Manchester, Cardiff, Newcastle, Nottingham, St Thomas's, Aberdeen, Glasgow, to name a few only. Postgraduate medical centres are being started, completed and put to good purpose, with results astonishing to the cynics who prophesied this as 'a flash in the pan'.

In general practice itself, there is planning and scheming, mainly to see what can be achieved in order to give the practitioner time for his clinical work, his real medical occupation. Attachment schemes, employment of ancillaries, nurses, secretaries, all this is giving the cottage industry of the forties and fifties a new look. Clinical investigations, as expressed by more laboratory specimens, from general practice are increasing all round.

The timely publication of the proceedings of the symposium on *The Team\** (The General Practice Team) gives plenty of encouragement and know-how from those who have succeeded. This volume is a fund of ideas for the believers and the unbelievers.

\*Obtainable from the Royal College of General Practitioners, 14 Princes Gate, London, S.W.7, for 8/- post free in United Kingdom.