Leading Article

Archibald Garrod and the individuality of man

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Archibald Garrod (1857–1936) is remembered by senior citizens for his *Inborn Errors of Metabolism*¹ and by a few others for his later essay *The Inborn Factors in Disease*.² A younger generation would know as little about him as they do about Osler. Sakula provided the world with a timely reminder of Osler,^{3,4} and now Professor Alexander G. Bearn has done the same for Archibald Garrod.⁵

This scholarly monograph is dedicated to all those who, like Archibald Garrod, have the faith to pursue science in the quest for a higher medicine. Son of a Harley Street physician, young Garrod was educated at Marlborough, Christ Church, Oxford and Bart's, where he was Brackenbury Scholar. Eventually he became physician to the West London Hospital, the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street and to St Bartholomew's. After wartime service in the Army in Malta, he became Director of the Medical Unit at Bart's, and, in 1920, followed William Osler as Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. These are the conventional roads which led to a knighthood and several honorary degrees.

Readers will enjoy following in his footsteps particularly if they identify themselves with some of these well-trodden paths. But this book has a much wider significance, for its subtitle embraces the individuality of man. This is the aspect which the author has deftly developed for our ultimate pleasure. Garrod's concept of biochemical individuality stems from his earliest devotion to coloured urine, onwards to alkaptonuria, to hereditary chemical imbalances of metabolism and to a wide-ranging marriage of biochemistry and genetics. Garrod's recurring theme 'Diathesis (or constitutionality) is only another name for chemical individuality'. Try it out in the diseases in which you readers are particularly interested. If you wish, look at it this way – 'Whereas the intruding agents (call it antigenic invasion if you wish) are the actual cause of disease, the reactions of the patient's tissues shapes the clinical picture'. This was Garrod's lifelong sermon which he preached with the

Sir Archibald Garrod 1857–1936
(photograph courtesy Oxford University Press)

stamina of John Knox. Already, dear reader, you agree that it holds for tuberculosis, asthma, multiple sclerosis and the disorder, whatever it may be, in which you are particularly interested. That was Garrod's marriage of biochemistry, genetics and constitution.

The author's professional training, indeed his whole lifestyle, was equipped perfectly to write this book – English by birth and education, a physician, medical scientist, geneticist, medical historian and professor of medicine. This background has allowed him to regale us with many more aspects than just the definitive biography. As an Oslerian of distinction, he has provided a fascinating comparison of successive Oxford Regius Professors; Osler the diagnostician and teacher of clinical medicine; Garrod the contemplative medical scientist.

For those who are more interested in science than history, there is a delightful last chapter entitled 'A summing up' which brings genetics absolutely up to date; enjoyable because it simplifies and clarifies the mysteries of genetics. Bearn describes the international project for mapping the human genome with the ultimate goal being a complete road map of the human genome – a DNA dictionary. Garrod would approve.

References

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3. Sakula, A. *The portraiture of Sir William Osler*. Royal Society of Medicine, London, 1991.
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