Our Legacy—of What? Of the \textit{JID}, of Dermatology, of Physician-Hood, of (Wo)man-Hood?

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Our editor asks, rhetorically, “Is humility the coat in which striving, even successful, scientists of today should clothe themselves?” (Goldsmith, 2004). Yes, it is. And no musing over our past. Recalling, as he does!

It is to the moral and scientific credit of the editor that a legacy of the past is addressed; all the more, because the \textit{JID} in its present format is a first class biotechnological arena where the past ranks somewhere behind our backs, one would suspect. Extrapolating from the level of the printed sheet one could at least call upon another legacy, the legacy of the written word, of language—the dermatology lexicon alluded to in the very same issue of the \textit{JID} is ample proof of that.

Bateman (1813) writes almost 200 years ago “I am aware, indeed, that there are many individuals professing themselves to be practical men, who affect a contempt for all nosological disquisitions, and deem the discussion relating to nomenclature, in particular, idle and frivolous, or, at best, a sort of literary amusement, which is not conducive, in the smallest degree, to the improvement of the medical art.” A short course in Latin and Greek would seem advisable, printed as a supplement to the \textit{JID}, to avoid many of the ridiculous and discrediting errors spread over the pages of today’s medical periodicals.

And what about ideas professed one, two, and more centuries before the \textit{JID} was founded,—highly reputable and ranking foremost, as it does today? Volume 4 of the “German” archives, Austrian as it was, edited in Vienna, printed in Prague, carries the two famous articles by Kaposi (1872a, b). (i) p. 36–78, the first extensive treatise on LE, describing systemic symptoms, forgotten thereafter for more than half a century. And (ii) the entity honoring the author’s name, Kaposi sarcoma, p. 265–273, specifically p. 272–273, last sentence “must be assumed for this evil a general dyscrasia present from the beginning” (muss fuer dieses Uebel eine bereits von Anfang her vorhandene allgemeine Erkrankung angenommen werden). What a foresight!

Or, one hundred years earlier, Lorry (1777), in Paris, “(skin) is not simply an envelope; no, it’s an organ” (non illa pro simplici habenda est involucro, sed organum constituat). No less than Kaposi’s foresight.

Or, in between, and combining the idea of pathological examination with terminological specificity, Jackson (1792), proposing to call the field dealing with diseases of the skin, \textit{dermato-pathologia}.

This avenue could be pursued backwards, say, to Turner, when he writes about wasp stings, innocuous to some, dangerous to others, or, that upon coagulation, cells of the blood release active substances, etc. A clear prescience of a functional component of the vasculature of skin and its humours. Or, elsewhere, when describing the “Auspitz” phenomenon. Turner’s first edition came out in 1714, so we have a tercentennial perspective, almost, of our dermatological forefathers’ foresight—our legacy today (Turner, 1736).

The above should make us proud. Proud of what? Of what keen intellect could produce without fancy machines. Such a look backwards may be permitted from this side of the waters.

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References

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