
CENTENARIES

Bree, Robert (1759-1839)

ROBERT BREE, a British physician, was born at Solihull, Warwickshire, in 1759. Having received his education at various places he took his M.D. in 1791. After having served for a short period, he had to return from the profession temporarily in 1793 as a result of an obstinate attack of asthma.

AUTHORITY ON ASTHMA

He resumed work next year at Birmingham. In 1797 he published his *Practical enquiry into disordered respiration, distinguishing the species of convulsive asthma, their causes and indications of cure*. This work is said to have embodied experiments in his own case. It soon became a popular book and reached its fifth edition in 1815, in addition to its having been translated into several languages. It is claimed that this book gave a complete account of the disease and laid down some therapeutic rules of universally acknowledged practical value. Bree's specialist knowledge of asthma brought him to the notice of the Duke of Sussex, who induced him to migrate to London.

HIS OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Bree also published a small tract entitled *Cholera asphyxia* (1832) and a few papers, e.g., *On the use of digitalis in consumption* (1799) and *On painful affections of the side from tumid spleen* (1811). He delivered the Harveian lecture of 1827 and published it later.

HIS END

It is an irony that this specialist in asthma fell a victim to the disease once again in 1833 and was thus disabled from further work. Eventually he died of the same disease on 6 October 1839.

Thurston, Robert Henry (1839-1903)

ROBERT HENRY THURSTON, an American engineer and educationist, was born in a family of engineers in Providence R.I. 25 October 1839. Having worked in his father's shops for some time, he entered the Broun University and graduated in 1859.

PIONEER IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

On the outbreak of the Civil War, Thurston volunteered as a military engineer. Having seen active service from 1861 to 1865, he became

assistant professor in the Naval Academy. In the meantime his contributions to the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* had earned such a name for him that he was invited to organise the newly founded Stevens Institute of Technology. His work at this Institute was largely pioneer in character as there were few precedents and guides. He built up this Institute in a bold and striking way from 1871 to 1885. He made laboratory training compulsory and he established the first mechanical laboratory in 1875.

BOBBYLOGY

After a short breakdown in health due to his zeal for work outrunning his physical endurance, Thurston became the Director of the Sibley College of Mechanical Engineering in the Cornell University. This post he held till his death. During this period the strength of the College rose from 63 to 885. He had the ability to present scientific results with great clearness. He was affectionately known among the undergraduates as "Bobby" and his lectures on steam-engine as "Bobbyology".

HIS CONTRIBUTIONS

He served on many engineering and industrial commissions. He was one of the founders of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (1880) besides being a member of several other learned bodies. He was a voluminous writer. He published 20 volumes and 300 papers besides contributing to the *Century dictionary* and editing the engineering articles of the *Universal cyclopædia*. His first book *A history of the growth of the steam-engine* came out in 1878 and every succeeding year saw at least one new book of his till his publication of *The animal as a machine and a prime motor, and the laws of energetics* in 1894.

HIS INFLUENCE

In spite of the prolific nature of his writings, it is said that his influence was even greater through his teaching. It is claimed that "Hundreds of engineers who passed under his personal instruction, being touched by his loyalty to scientific truth and his high ideals of life and service and carrying into after-life the inspiration of his example, were the most influential contribution to his profession of this pioneer in the domain of engineering education".

Thurston died suddenly on 25 October 1903.

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