

DOCTORS AFIELD

Georg Kloss (1787-1854)

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DOCTORS who have chosen for their avocation book collecting or historical studies are not unknown. Some even have made these hobbies into a profitable source of income, but the name of Kloss, who assembled a very large private library of the rarest books and then sold it, only to turn to the history of Freemasonry, is scarcely to be found in medical literature. Even *Monro*,¹ the scholarly professor of medicine in Glasgow, fails to mention him in his standard work. The bare facts of his life, however, are easily found. Born in Frankfurt a.M. on July 31, 1787, the son of an army surgeon, Kloss graduated at Göttingen in 1809, settled in Frankfurt and for many years was in charge of the hospital for smallpox and other diseases. He also taught in the University. His son became a physician. Death came to Kloss on February 10, 1854, in his native town. Upon this background there may be built a story of unusual interest, for Kloss went far afield from his routine practice, hospital administration and teaching.

HIS VOCATION

After Kloss graduated from the University of Göttingen in 1809 at the age of twenty-two, he returned to his native city of Frankfurt to practice medicine. Three years later he was made an extraordinary professor in the Medico-Chirurgical Special School of Frankfurt University. In 1816 he began his long service as head of the Rochus-Hospital, an ancient foundation for cases of smallpox, scabies and syphilis,

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uniting under one roof the disciplines of dermatology and syphilology, as was the custom of the time, a pattern that has lasted up to the present in many hospitals and medical schools.

His Avocation

Kloss had, besides his hospital practice, two interests, which seemed to have given him equal pleasure: book collecting and the study of Freemasonry. One followed the other for he sold his extensive library in 1835 and devoted the last twenty years of his life to writing the history of Freemasonry.

Book Collecting

He began acquiring books as soon as he had become established in the Rochus-Hospital in 1816, and in the course of the subsequent eighteen years seems to have missed no source in Germany in amassing his amazing library. His chief interest was in acquiring and annotating incunabula, but he did not stop with books printed before 1500, adding many volumes on plague and similar subjects published in the early sixteenth century. His first aim was to add a supplement to Panzer's *Annales Typographici ab Artis Inventae Origine ad Annum M D*, that vast listing of all the then known incunabula. This had been published in Nuremberg in nine fat volumes, with an index of two additional volumes, between the years 1793 and 1802. It was a remarkably complete standard work of its time and is still a useful reference source. In spite of the labors of Georg Wolfgang Panzer, Kloss was able to list many books that had escaped Panzer's notice. Indeed, he found such a large number that the task of listing and collating them overwhelmed him, and he finally gave up the idea of publishing an addition to Panzer. His labors, nevertheless, were not entirely lost, for many of his scholarly notes on individual books were pre-

served and published in the sales catalogue of his books, dispersed in 1835. These notes are often comprehensive; for instance, those of books by Vincent of Beauvais are said to be the only known descriptions in English. Because he owned a number of copies of a single book, Kloss was frequently able to disentangle bibliographic puzzles, much to the advantage of future historians. Osler² thought that "the Kloss library was



FIGURE 1. *Book Label of Georg Kloss.*

the most important collection of early printed books ever made by a medical man," and it possibly remains so today if one realizes that its scope was nearly limited to early printed books. The books from the Kloss library are easily distinguished by his distinctive book label (Fig. 1). Other physicians have assembled larger collections under not dissimilar circumstances, but their fields of acquisition were wider and no private collector has rivaled Kloss in books of one class. There is a parallel in the Erik Waller collection of modern times, now at the University of Uppsala Library, for Waller was also a hospital director at the Länslasarettet in Lidköping, Sweden, during the years when he collected most avidly, but there the similarity ends. Waller's incunabula section was relatively small although his whole collection in size far exceeded that assembled by Kloss.

For some unknown reason Kloss gave up his hobby of book collecting, sold his library and began to cultivate another field. The change did not come quite

so abruptly as he had anticipated, for there was an aftermath to the sale of 1835 and he took a vigorous stand against the overexpansive tone used by the compiler of the catalogue.

The library was sold in London by Sotheby and Son at an auction beginning on May 7, 1835, and lasting twenty days, with remaining portions sold on November 27, 1835, and on June 18, 1841, the last being disposed of by L. A. Lewis in place of Sotheby.³ The Medical Historical Library at Yale has the Harvey Cushing copy of the catalogue of the first auction sale and has kindly allowed a reproduction of the title page (Fig. 2). The catalogue lists 4623 items, mostly books printed before 1537, with a few important manuscripts.

As can be seen from a glance at the title page of the catalogue, there was considerable emphasis on the annotations by Philip Melancthon on the "many original and unpublished manuscripts" that Kloss is supposed to have owned. This was the brain child of the compiler, Samuel Leigh Sotheby, for Kloss connected only three items with Philip Melancthon (1497-1560). This addition and falsification by Sotheby was repudiated with scorn by the honest Kloss a few years later,⁴ after Sotheby had attempted further justification in a book on the subject.⁵

Freemasonry

Soon after his library was sold Kloss turned to the study of Freemasonry. This was perhaps not an unnatural step since the leading exponent of the Masonic order in Germany, Goethe, had been born and brought up in Frankfurt, where his father was Imperial Councillor, and the city was foremost in the establishment of this secret fraternal order. Freemasonry was based on old established customs, much in form and spirit of a medieval guild, and this aspect of the problem must have aroused Kloss's his-

torical sense. His first book on his new adventure was a *Bibliographie der Freimaurerei* (Frankfurt, 1844),

CATALOGUE
OF THE
LIBRARY
OF
DR. KLOSS,
OF FRANKFORT AM., PROFESSOR;
INCLUDING
MANY ORIGINAL AND UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS,
AND
PRINTED BOOKS WITH MS. ANNOTATIONS,
BY
PHILIP MELANCTHON.

Nulla dies absque quinque diebus superstit
PH. MELANCTHON.

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Belgium, &c

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FIGURE 2. Title Page of the Auction Catalogue, 1835 (from the Cushing Collection, Historical Library, Yale University School of Medicine).

containing 5381 references and a full index, followed quickly by a history, *Die Freimaurerei* (Leipzig, 1846) and in the next year by the *Geschichte der*



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FIGURE 3. Portrait from Wilhelm Kallmorgen's *Siebenhundert Jahre Heilkunde in Frankfort am Main*, Published in Frankfurt in 1936 (Reproduced through the Courtesy of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, London).

Freimaurerei in England, Ireland und Schottland (Leipzig, 1847). Finally came the *Geschichte der Freimaurerei in Frankreich* (Darmstadt, 1852-53), in two large volumes, completing an important series of books, written in a scholarly manner. The final volume was published in the year of Kloss's death.

His full name appears to have been Johann Georg Franz Burkhard Kloss, but he is usually known by the name on his book label, Georg Kloss. The portrait reproduced in Kallmorgen refers to him as G. Johann Kloss (Fig. 3). The books, sold in 1835, found their way into many libraries. Some of the choicest were acquired at once by the Bodleian Library at Oxford and by the British Museum. Others came to rest in the Waller Library and the Osler Collection and in the Cushing books, now at Yale. The reproduction of the book label (Fig. 1) is taken from a rare pest tract, *Ordenung und Regiment* (Frankfurt, 1531), by Theobald Fettich, now in the Boston Medical Library. It was this book that set me on the hunt to find out what I could about Georg Kloss. Thus, the results of his endeavors became widespread, and his name serves to recall the natural linkage between scholarship and good practice of medicine by physicians, even by those who travel afield.⁶

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