The bicentenary of John Sims, M.D., F.R.S / [Laurence Dopson].

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By LAURENCE DOPSON

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am indebted to the Hon. Mrs. Trefusis for the following additional information:-

John Sims' daughter Anna Maria m. Edward Bontein, aged 20, at St. Pancras Old Church, 1806. She bore him 3 children: 1. Mary Trant, b. at the Sims's house in Upper Guildford St., 1 May, 1807, d. at Sims's next house, Wimpole St., 18 May, 1823, and buried St. John's Wood burial ground in pa. of St. Marylebone. 2. John, b. Upper Guildford St., 12 Feb., 1809. 3. Caroline, b. 26 Feb., 1811, d. 1 Nov., 1811, aet. 9 months. Anna Maria d. at her father's house in Upper Guildford St., 19 Jan., 1812, and was buried in a vault of the Bontein family in Aldgate churchyard.

The Hon. Mrs. Trefusis has a letter from Sims to his grandson, one from Konig to Sims, and letters from Courthope Sims.

THE BICENTENARY OF JOHN SIMS, M.D., F.R.S.

By LAURENCE DOPSON

It is strange that so little should have been written about John Sims, M.D., F.R.S., who was born 200 years ago, and that nothing, apparently, is to be found in medical journals, for Sims was a distinguished consultant, specializing in midwifery, as well as being a famous botanist and editor. A fairly full account of his life is given by Joseph J. Green in a paper "A Quaker Medical Trio named Sims and some account of that Family", which appeared in the *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 1913, p. 265. He should not be confused with John Sims (1792-1838), the pathologist, nor with James Sims (1741-1820).

The Sims's were a well-known Quaker family, who had mostly been tradespeople of some kind and who had suffered for their faith. The first of them to take up medicine was John's father, R. C. Sims, who graduated at Edinburgh in 1744, the title of his thesis being *De vomica pulmonis;* he practised for many years at Dunmow in Essex, where his surgery could be seen at least up to the 1914-18 war.

EARLY DAYS

John Sims, the only son of Dr. R. C. Sims, was born in the parish of St. Mary Bredman, Canterbury, on October 13, 1749. He was educated at home and at the famous Quaker academy at Burford, near Oxford, kept by Thomas Huntley, an ancestor of the Huntley of Huntley and Palmers, the biscuit manufacturer. In 1770, when he was twenty-one, John Sims went to his father's old university to study medicine. He remained at Edinburgh until 1773, going to Leyden for the session 1773-4. Returning to Edinburgh in the latter year, he was admitted to the degree of doctor of medicine on September 12, 1774. The title of his thesis was *De usu aquæ frigidæ interno* (Edinburgh, 1774) and he dedicated it not to one of the famous Edinburgh professors

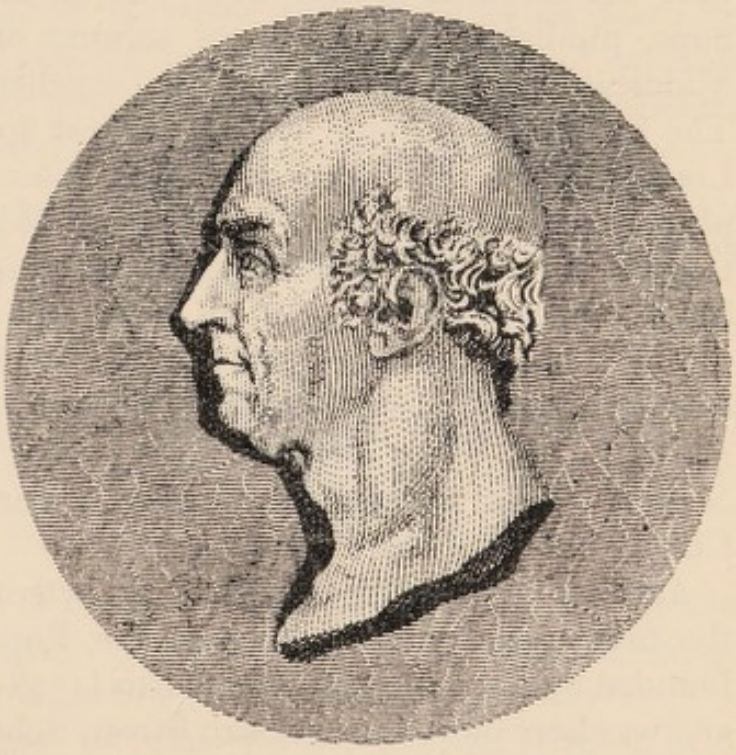

Fig. 1.—John Sims (1749-1831), M.D., F.R.S., physician and botanist. From an engraving in the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.

(as many candidates did, from motives perhaps not always dissociated from hopes for the results), but to John Fothergill, the famous Quaker physician. Among the points which Sims made in his thesis were that a moderate drink of water, by extending the muscles of the stomach, improved their tone, and that cold water, owing to its quality of being a fluid, cleansed the digestive passages and dissolved and carried away waste materials. He discussed its use in various forms of illness.

LIFE IN LONDON

In 1779 Sims came to London and bought the practise of Thomas Cogan (1736-1818), of Paternoster Row. The fact that he acquired this particular practise indicates that he had already decided upon his specialty, for Cogan, a founder of the Royal Humane Society who had been a clergyman but took up medicine at the instigation of his prospective father-in-law, was primarily an accoucheur. Sims was admitted a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of London on June 25, 1779, but although he became a leading obstetrical physician, he was not among the ten who were granted the licentiateship in midwifery by the College.

Sims was appointed physician to the Surrey Dispensary and to the Charity for Delivering Poor Married Women in their own Houses. The former was established in 1777 and was then at Southwark. Physicians holding consultations had the right of having their pupils in attendance; instruction was also given there to midwives. The Dispensary's activities were not confined to midwifery, and an early medical communication by Sims, published in 1784, is an account of a 40-year-old serjeant of the Middlesex Militia who died at the Dispensary from cancer of the stomach. The Surrey Dispensary was the earliest appointment which Sims held in London. It was some years later that he succeeded Cogan as one of the three physicians to the Charity for Delivering Poor Married Women in their own Houses. This organization had as its treasurer and dispenser Mr. Peter Sharp, chemist and druggist, of Bishopsgate Without; founded in 1760, it should not be confused with the similar Benevolent Institution for Delivering Poor Married Women in their own Habitations, started in 1779. A Fellow, one-time President, and for many years member of council, of the Medical Society of London, Sims was a member of the Society's Midwifery Committee.

Another facet of Sims' professional activities is shown by his being made the first consulting physician to the Royal Ear Dispensary, which was founded by Dr. John Harrison Curtis (1778-1856) at Carlisle Street in 1816, and was later moved to 10 Dean Street, Soho; it was under the patronage of the Prince Regent, and in 1904 was rebuilt as the Royal Ear Hospital at 42-3 Dean Street.

SOME PRIVATE PATIENTS

Dr. Sims had a number of distinguished private patients; one of them was

Mrs. Fothergill, wife of Dr. William Fothergill. He was the regular medical attendant upon John Henton Tritton, another distinguished Quaker, and his family; in 1791 Sims was paid an extra five guineas for inoculating John, one of the sons. Tritton was Sims' cousin and paid him an annual honorarium for his attendances. In her journal under date "Mildred's Court, Eleventh Month, 25th", 1802, quoted in her "Life" by Susanna Corder (London, 1853), Mrs. Elizabeth Fry wrote: "My cough has been so poorly that my husband called in Dr. Simms. I asked his advice about our one (their eldest daughter, born in August, 1801) being inoculated, he strongly recommended the cow-pox, and said he would undertake the care of her if we liked; I think highly of his judgement, and I believe it is our duty to avoid evil, both bodily and mentally".

It has been stated that Sims at first opposed vaccination, but later became convinced of its efficacy. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he adopted a cautious attitude towards it in the beginning. In a communication to the *Medical and Physical Journal* early in 1799, he said the facts and experiments of Jenner certainly called for careful inquiry, but he felt doctors should hesitate before recommending the introduction on a large scale of "a hitherto nearly unknown disease" and warned about "rash experiments upon our fellow creatures".

> "If such hazardous experiments be not discouraged, there is some reason to fear that to the opprobium, the profession already lies under, of not being able to cure many of the existing diseases, will be added, that of having introduced new ones".

An editorial comment recognized the importance of the issues raised by pointing out: "From the above general statement, our readers will perceive that the great question respecting the utility of the cow-pox is at issue before the public". In a subsequent letter, however, Sims clarified his position:—

> "I had no intention of declaring myself an enemy to the inoculation of this disease; my only wish was, to induce practitioners to pause a little, to obtain more experience of its utility, before it should be *generally* recommended".

Later he admitted:—

> ". . . It must be acknowledged, that the experiments already instituted seem sufficient to decide that the cow-pox matter which has been used for inoculation is effectual in preserving the patient from any further attack of the small-pox, unless it should be true, which I deem very improbable, that cow-pox enables the constitution to resist the contagion of the small-pox for a certain length of time only."

It is an interesting indication of Sims' status that an editorial note to the first of these communications said: "The signature of the following communication . . . renders any introductory observations unnecessary".

There are two other references to Sims' private patients. One is in a letter by William Miller, another Quaker: "J. Wigham Tertius is under the care of Dr. Sims, who has advised him not to sit more than one meeting daily". Another is in the *Memoirs of Samuel Hoare*, also a distinguished Quaker. In 1798 Hoare was seized by a nervous affection. "Dr. Sims, his

old friend, attended him, and Dr. Reynolds was called in". A trip to Bath was advised.

Sims was called into consultation in two celebrated obstetrical cases—those of Joanna Southcott and of the Princess Charlotte.

THE CASE OF JOANNA SOUTHCOTT

Joanna Southcott was a queer woman, born in Devonshire in 1750, who considered herself in the rôle of a latter-day prophetess. In 1792 she announced herself to be the woman referred to in Revelations, Chapter XII. In her "Third Book of Wonders" (London, 1814) Joanna again announced "the coming of Shiloh", declaring that "The Spirit" had told her: "This year, in the sixty-fifth year of thy age, thou shalt have a son by the Power of the Most High". Although she had ceased menstruating many years previously, Joanna was now convinced that she was pregnant. Her followers believed her in this as in all things, and are said to have showered upon her such gifts as "a mohair mantle, which cost £150!!! splendid silver pap spoons, and a caudle cup (one shaped like a dove)" and "a magnificent Crib" which, "with its ornaments, decorations, bedding, &c. cost upwards of £200!!!"

Not only her followers but also her medical attendant, Dr. Richard Reece, had no doubt about the cause of Miss Southcott's symptoms being other than as she claimed. Correspondence on the matter began in the public press in August, 1814, and it was said that the medical attendants were satisfied that the prophetess was with child—or more specifically, with Shiloh. In view of this, Dr. Sims, to make clear his position and opinion, wrote a letter which was published in the *Morning Chronicle* of September 5: "Several persons having expressed a wish that I should visit Joanna Southcott, that they might be satisfied what foundation there was for a report that she was pregnant, [he wrote] I consented to accompany one of her friends, a surgeon and accoucheur of experience, for that purpose, on the 18th of August". He describes in detail the examination which he made and the condition of the breasts. "I proposed to put my finger upon the navel, without any covering, which was permitted. This part I found sunk in, not at all protruded as in pregnancy". He could feel no movements of the fœtus, although Joanna declared that she felt them clearly. Dr Sims gave his opinion as follows:—

> "Considering all the above appearances, I did not hesitate to declare it to be my opinion, that Joanna Southcott was not pregnant; but was told that I was the first medical man that had seen her that was not perfectly satisfied of the contrary.
>
> "I believe that her uterine organs are diseased, and that the breasts, as is usual, sympathyzing with those parts, have an increased quantity of blood determined to them".

He ended his letter with these words:—

> ". . . Yet, before I conclude, I feel it right to say, that I am convinced that this poor woman is no imposter, but that she labours under a strong mental delusion".

Nothing was thought in those days of medical men discussing such a matter in the public press, and this letter—the only one which he wrote during the controversy—shows that Sims was sufficiently highly regarded in his profession to be looked to for an authoritative opinion in a difficult case —a regard justified by his views in this instance—that he was a thorough clinical observer, and, as is evidenced by the concluding paragraph, a kindly man.

His letter brought an instant rejoinder from Dr. Reece, which the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* refused to publish; it was, however, published in the *Sunday Monitor and Sunday Review*. In it Reece sought to argue that Sims was wrong in his conclusions. It is noteworthy that although other medical men, including Professor Assalini, Professor of Midwifery in Paris, saw Joanna Southcott, none of them, except Sims, instantly recognized and were convinced of the non-existence of the pregnancy.

Although Dr. Reece came to recognize the error of his earlier view, he could not convince his patient. Joanna Southcott, still believing that she had within her the Shiloh, died on December 18. She gave instructions that her body should not be opened before four days had elapsed, being certain that the corpse would remain fresh and that she would return to it. When the post-mortem examination was held, however, the "disciples" who attended fortified themselves by smoking strong tobacco—"a proof that they did not consider the prophetess to possess the most savoury odour". The examination was conducted by Dr. Reece, in the presence of Dr. Sims and Mr. Mathias. The result of the examination showed: "first, that there was no Shiloh; next, that there was no disease of the uterine organs, as imagined by Dr. Sims; thirdly, that the uterus, instead of being enlarged, was remarkably reduced". The omentum was extremely large and appeared to be one lump of fat. "Dr. Sims having expressed a wish to examine the state of the breasts, to satisfy himself on this point [wrote Dr. Reece] I dissected one of them, which shewed the fullness to proceed from an enlargement of the mammary gland as I had stated, and not from accumulation of fat, according to his opinion". This remark of Dr. Reece's would reflect more to his credit and professional acumen had he not been so stubborn in denying for a long while Sims' opinion on the vital issue, whether there was or was not a pregnancy. The necropsy failed to establish any organic cause for Joanna's death.

The case naturally aroused great interest, but at least Dr. Sims emerged with dignity and without loss of respect. One account says:—

> "Dr. Sims did not fawn on her when living, and vilify her when dead . . . Had the whole college of physicians been in attendance on her, a better understanding of her case, we take on us to say, from our professional knowledge, could not have been given. In the opinion Dr. Sims gave of herself and her state of body, he shewed the goodness of his heart as a man and a Christian. And, had all her attendants had the same penetration and integrity, she would have, in all probability, been delivered long before her death; not of a child, but of the delusion".

The danger of applying logic to medical matters is shown by the opinion expressed to Joanna by a lady who saw her after Dr. Sims had called, and assured her he was wrong: "I have had eleven children, and the objection he mentioned happened to me with every one of them", she told the prophetess hopefully.

DEATH OF THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE

It is unfortunate that the other famous case in which Sims was called as a consultant also ended tragically. It was that of the Princess Charlotte. The Princess seems almost to have had a foreboding of what was to come, for a month before her confinement, she wrote a letter to her mother which contained such phrases as "I fear less to die than to live".

Sir Richard Croft, a colleague of Sims at the Surrey Dispensary, was in charge of her confinement, and three weeks before it was due to begin, he went down to Claremont to be with the Princess. What followed is detailed in the following memorandum (Royal Archives, Georgian Papers 50067), which His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to allow me to reproduce for the first time:—

"The Labour of Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte began at Seven oClock on Monday Evening the 3d of November 1817, and terminated at Nine oClock on Wednesday Evening the 5th of Novr, in the birth of a Still-born Male child—The Labour therefore continued during fifty hours—The exertions of the uterus were feeble throughout the greater part of the Labour, but during the last few hours were stronger, and more satisfactory—As the Labour was very tedious, Dr. Sims was sent for by Sir Richd Croft on Tuesday Evening, and arrived at Claremont about Two oClock on Wednesday morning—He concurr'd entirely in opinion with Sir Richd Croft respecting the situation of Her Royal Highness, and that as long as the Labour was making progress, altho' slowly, the conduct of it should be left to Nature—Instruments were at hand to assist the Uterus, if it were thought adviseable to employ them—During the whole of this tedious Labour, Her Royal Highness was cheerful, look'd well, and Her pulse was good—She often walked about the Rooms, and was very little on Her bed—

"The Child was born, as before mentioned, at Nine in the Evening, and as upon examination, an hour-Glass contraction of the Uterus was discover'd, Sir Richd Croft took away, with the concurrence of Dr. Sims, the afterbirth about twenty minutes before Ten—Her Royal Highness appear'd quite as well as women commonly do after so tedious a labour, and much better than they often do under such circumstances, till about a quarter before Twelve at night—Her Royal Highness then complained of some sickness and singing in Her Ears—Soon after this Her Royal Highness threw up from Her Stomach a little fluid, which seem'd chiefly some camphor mixture, which She had swallowed—She then became a little irritable, and began to talk somewhat too much—About a quarter before One Her Royal Highness complained of great uneasiness in Her Chest, and breathed with great difficulty: Her pulse was very feeble and irregular, and She became extremely restless, not being able to remain a single moment in the same posture—This very alarming state continued and kept increasing till half past Two in the morning, when Her Royal Highness expired—Her mind was entire throughout the whole of this dreadful attack—

The Child had been born dead, but appeared not to have been dead long—The most strenuous efforts were made to reanimate it by means which had been previously provided, but they were unavailing—Some circumstances had render'd it

probably that the Child would be still-born, and therefore every means of recovery were in readiness".

Novr 9—1817

M. Baillie
Richard Croft
Jn° Sims"

Such were the terrible sufferings of this girl of twenty-one. It was Sims who made the "most strenuous efforts" to revive the child. Sims added the following postscript to the memorandum:—

"As some of the above circumstances could not come under my immediate observation, not having seen her Royal Highness till symptoms of danger occurred, I beg leave to add, that on my arrival at Claremont, Sr. Richard Croft proposed to mention it to her Royal Highness and to introduce me; but as the state of the labour, at that time, precluded all thoughts of having recourse to any artificial assistance, both Dr. Baillie and myself thought that this was not only unnecessary but unadvisable. And as the labour continued from that time to the end progressive, there was no period of it, at which a question about the propriety of using instruments could have been entertained.—I was in the adjoining room the greater part of the day, and was continually informed of the state of the labour, and could have seen her Royal Highness, whenever it had been thought advisable. When it was found that the afterbirth did not come away favourably, I was perfectly satisfied with Sr Richard Croft's representation and quite agreed with him in the propriety of removing it. I was at that time still engaged in fruitless efforts to reanimate the child; and the introduction of a stranger, at that moment, to the royal patient, as it appears to me, was particularly objectionable.

Jn° Sims"

In the collection of manuscript letters and other material relating to Mathew Baillie, in the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, the first part of the memorandum above, which is stated to have been "written for the satisfaction of the Royal Family", has been copied out by Mrs. Baillie. In this copy some parts of the original have been omitted and there are some textual variations, but the additional information is given that the child was perfectly formed and weighed nine pounds, whilst attached to the memorandum (on which only Baillie's signature is given) is the following note, stated to have been found in Baillie's own handwriting:—

"In looking back very often upon this most distressing event I am convinced that Sir Richard Croft did all that the melancholy case admitted of, and that the Princess Charlotte's life would not have been saved by any different treatment".

The controversy aroused by the death of the Princess was considerable. Although the Prince Regent assured Sir Richard that he was perfectly satisfied with his conduct, most blamed him for allowing the Princess to remain in labour for so long without attempting to terminate the birth. On February 13, 1818, Sir Richard Croft was found dead. He had shot himself.

Again it shows the regard in which Sims was held as an obstetrician that he should have been called in when complication arose and that he should so clearly have been appealed to by Sir Richard and Dr. Baillie as the superior authority. One account says of the summoning of Dr. Sims:—

"This, as a precautionary step, is honorable to Dr. Croft, and will ever shield him against a successful imputation of timerity".

Criticism has been raised against Sims because he did not go in to see the Princess, yet signed bulletins saying she was progressing favourably. "How this gentleman", declared Lady Anne Hamilton, "could allow his name to be thus affixed to a declaration, of the truth of which he was totally ignorant, we do not know, but the time-serving press said 'That Dr. Sims being unknown to the Princess, his appearance in her chamber might have alarmed her' ". As has been seen, it was Sims himself who took this view, which was thus not an invention of the newspapers—and she also rather destroys her case by being too violent and accuses Croft of having poisoned the Princess on instructions.

Sims, with Baillie and Croft, followed the remains of the Princess to her grave at St. George's Chapel, Windsor. One wonders whether the outcome of the whole affair might have been happier had Sims been summoned earlier. As it was, this tragedy brought about the reign of Queen Victoria.

LITERARY WORK

At the same time as he was involved in these two important midwifery cases, which show that he was actively engaged in practice, Sims was editing the celebrated *Botanical Magazine*. He became editor soon after the death in 1799 of William Curtis, the founder editor, although his name first appeared on the title page in 1801. That the editorship of a leading scientific journal of this kind, the circulation of which exceeded 3000, was no sinecure can well be imagined, and is shown in the correspondence in connexion with it preserved at the Library at Kew Gardens, and in letters by Sims in the manuscript collections at the Botanical Library of the Natural History Museum and the Linnæan Society of London. It is interesting to note from these letters that Sims in no way rose above the failings, or perhaps one should say had to contend with the same difficulties, as other editors of recent times, for one finds queries about what has happened to material sent for publication and when such-and-such note will appear. An editor, particularly of a scientific magazine, has to be tactful In a letter dated November 26, 1806, and quoted by courtesy of the Director of Botany, British Museum, Sims told Mr. Robert Brown, an eminent botanist, that people who sent new flowers to be drawn were apt to be offended if these did not appear fairly soon and would at another time send them to a rival journal: "In order not to give offence in this way I am often in some degree obliged to publish drawings, which I otherwise wish to delay". In another letter (to Dr. William Swainson, dated May 8, 1820, now in the possession of the Linnæan Society) Sims points out that as he is personally responsible for the nomenclature and the accuracy of the drawings, he may wish to see actual specimens, as well as drawings. As editor, Sims had his troubles also in respect of the circulation of his magazine. From the 172nd issue he increased the number of plates in each part to four, and later he increased the number to eight and the price to 3s. 6d. The rise in price and the

appearance of rival journals led to an immediate drop in circulation, sales falling by a half and later by more still. It was a grim prospect, but ultimately the *Botanical Magazine* weathered the storm, and its publication continues to-day, having been uninterrupted since 1799.

Sims undertook the editorship under the will of William Curtis, whose friend he had been for many years—probably they were schoolfellows together. Mr. W. Hugh Curtis, in his book "William Curtis, 1746-1799" (Winchester, 1941), explains that Curtis made Sims one of his executors; as such Sims's name appears in an agreement of January 16, 1815, by which George Graves became part owner of William Curtis's *Flora Londinensis*. In addition to the *Botanical Magazine*, Sims also edited, with Charles König, the *Annals of Botany*, of which two volumes only were published (London, 1805 and 1806); it is an interesting publication which includes historical articles. The combination of an expert interest in botanical matters with a medical practice was quite common at this time: John Coakley Lettsom, founder of the Medical Society of London, had a botanical garden at his country house at Camberwell, and it was he who introduced the mangel wurzel; whilst John Fothergill formed a large botanical garden at Upton. Sims probably inherited his interest in botany from his father, who was passionately fond of gardening.

No source that I have discovered has any details of Sims' medical publications; the *Surgeon General's Catalogue* only gives his degree thesis. He did, however, communicate a number of papers on medical matters, and a list of the ones which I have been able to find is given in an appendix to this article. In addition, Sims probably wrote the biography of William Curtis in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1799; it is said that Curtis left Sims the memoirs of his life. Sims delivered the Oration to the Medical Society of London during his year as President (1783), but this does not seem to have been published. A list of his botanical papers appears in J. Britten and G. S. Boulger's *Biographical Index*.

PERSONAL LIFE

Not a great deal is known about Sims' personal life. He married about 1790, and because his wife was not a member of the Society of Friends, he was compelled, under the rule then existing, to leave the Society. The same choice between love and creed had to be made by Lord Lister, when he had to leave the Quakers on marrying Agnes Syme, who was an Episcopalian. Sims, however, continued to move in Quaker circles and, as we have seen, many distinguished members of this sect were his patients. William Miller's letter of 1821 refers to Sims having "lately laid aside his cockt hat"; this may mean that he had been rather more ostentatious in his dress than strict members of the Society could altogether approve and that he was now adopting or reverting to the more severe style of dress. That he was a "clubbable" man is shown by his membership of societies of medical men,

whose meetings were more convivial affairs in those pre-Bevan, pre-Strachey days. The Society of Physicians, for example, of which select group he was a member, met "once a fortnight, on Wednesdays in the evening, at Old Slaughter's Coffee-house, for the purpose of conversing on the prevailing diseases, &c. and once a quarter they dined together at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand"; Old Slaughter's Coffee House seems to have been a favourite place for medical gatherings, for the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge, founded in 1782, "for the purpose of collecting useful essays and observations for publication", also met there once a fortnight, with Sims among the company, and this Society, too, had its quarterly dinners.

John Sims was a founder member of the Linnæan Society of London, and in 1816 he presented to the Library of this Society a particularly fine edition of Leonhard Fuchs' *De historica stirpium commentarii isignes* (Basle, 1542). He was admitted a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1814.

Sims was very early interested in the idea of forming a Society for Relief of Widows and Orphans of Medical Men, taking part in the early meetings in 1788 in connexion with it; his name appeared in the first advertisement as one of the four treasurers. In September, 1807, the Society had been experiencing difficulty in getting together a sufficient number of directors to transact business. Mr. James Ware, one of the Vice-Presidents, conceived that they might be more likely to come at the appointed hour if their fares were guaranteed, and he gave £100 of Navy 5 per cent. stock for this purpose; the Society doubled the amount, and Dr. Sims gave £10 also.

There is a rather quaint glimpse of the domestic life of John Sims in a reference in his paper on the use of pure ammonia in pregnancy (1799):—

"I was first led by accident to the discovery of the extraordinary power of the pure ammonia in correcting acidity in the stomach, over other alkaline substances. My wife being seized one night with a severe heart-burn, I arose with a view of getting her some magnesia; but not being able to find any, and being desirous of procuring her some immediate relief, I expected to obtain this by any alkaline substance, and not meeting with any but the water of pure ammonia, which I happened to have by me, I administered twenty drops in a glass of water; the relief was instant and more complete than she had ever experienced from taking magnesia".

Ann Sims was seven years younger than her husband. She bore him six children, four girls and two boys. One of the boys died in infancy; the other graduated M.B. at Cambridge in 1810 and became M.D. of that University in 1823. It is significant that Sims, the fashionable London physician, sent his son to one of the old universities in England and not to his *alma mater;* and further, that when this son, having qualified as a doctor, forsook medicine for religion, he should become a priest in the established Church of England. In a letter dated Dorking, September 3, 1828, John Sims writes of this son:—

"Courthope goes on preaching &c at two parishes every Sunday and goes through the duties of his profession *con amore*. It seems to suit him much better than the one he has deserted".

The letter adds that Courthope would soon be going to Fittleworth, "for which parish he was originally ordained". Green states that he became Rector of Petworth, also in Sussex, and died at Undercliffe, Isle of Wight. The present Rector of Petworth, Rev. Harold Godwin, informs me, however, that Courthope Sims' name does not appear in the official list of rectors. Courthope was, however, curate at Fittleworth between 1829-32; the first funeral he took there was on December 19, 1829, and the last on April 4, 1832. His own burial entry gives his age as thirty-eight, and his abode at the time of death as Ventnor.

Incomplete lists of Sims' London addresses have been given, but the following, supplemented by reference to original letters, is the full number: Paternoster Row; 31 New Bridge Street, Blackfriars; 67 Upper Guilford Street, Bloomsbury; 37 Wimpole Street.

One of the Kew letters must have caused Sims a little misgiving as he read it, for the writer, Thomas Guest of Sierra Leone, announces his intention of sending to England "a monstrous great Pelican".

"The Fellow is quite tame, and I hope to preserve him during the rains: He eats Fish, Flesh, Fowl, or any thing that comes in his Way; he devours a great Deal, and I am sometimes very much puzzled to get victuals for him. I suffer him to stroll about, and he is become the Terror of all the Women & Children in the Colony; if any of them are going by with Meat or Fish, and he sees them, he is after them immediately, and ten to one but he gets it".

However, Guest hastens to add:—

"I am aware you cannot keep him in Bridge Street, but I think among your Friends, there are some who would be glad to have such a Bird. Sr Joseph Banks probably".

These letters to John Sims show that in connexion with the *Botanical Magazine* he carried on a correspondence with people in all parts of the world. They also show that he could write shorthand. Several letters contain endorsements by Sims in shorthand, and one of the letters, from William Grover (21 February, 1825), states:—

"My dear friend,
Enclosed I hope thee wilt receive safe the System of Shorthand, as proposed".

I have submitted some copied examples of John Sims' shorthand to Mr. William J. Carlton, an expert on the history of shorthand, but unfortunately they were too fragmentary for him to identify. It was, however, definitely not Byrom's or Taylor's (two of the most popular pre-Pitman systems). It is also impossible to identify the "System of Shorthand" referred to by Grover, but if it was a different system from the one that Sims was using, it cannot have impressed him, for apparently he continued with the same outlines. It does appear that the shorthand which John Sims wrote was the same as that used by William Curtis, of which an example is illustrated in W. Hugh Curtis's book, but Mr. Carlton warns me that the

shorthand systems of this period often bear a superficial resemblance to each other.

CLOSING YEARS

The letters at Kew concern the *Botanical Magazine*, and when they are from medical men, make no mention of purely medical matters. The letters from William Fothergill, however, give some interesting glimpses of the life in retirement of this physician and of his interests:—

Carr End, Yorkshire. February 26, 1819.

"My dear Wife has for several months, been nearly quite confined to her room, yet on the whole she is something better, and I hope will again be restored to her usual share of health when that season arrives, inspiring 'Vernal delight & Joy'.

"We have had the finest autumn and winter hitherto, I ever remember. Our little garden has never been without a variety of flowers, & we are at this moment quite gay with a profusion of crocus's, winter aconites &c . . . During the time you were enveloped in cold gloomy fogs, we were enjoying bright sunny days, and the frost quite moderate".

A letter of October 30, 1826, tells of the arrival of a number of issues of the *Botanical Magazine*:—

"which indeed is to me & my wife and daughters a high treat; lock'd up as we now are in all the rigour of winter, we are enjoying the beauties of Flora, while sitting at our Fire-side. . . . My own health as well as that of my wife (thy old patient) continue much as when I wrote last, but the hand of time is upon us, and we must expect to feel the effects of increased years. I have recently entered upon my 78 year, & I hope I am endeavouring to be thankful that my infirmities are not more and greater".

In 1826, at the age of 77, John Sims resigned the editorship of the *Botanical Magazine*. He retired to Dorking, in Surrey. In a letter which he wrote from there to König on March 4, 1829, and which is now at the Natural History Museum, it appears that there was a question of his herbarium and library going to the new London University.

"What occurs to me as the best plan of disposing of my library and herbarium would be to submit it to a valuation and if the London University will agree to be the purchaser I will consent to deduct a fourth part of the price at which it may be valued.

"My library consists of most of the old botanical authors but not many of the expensive coloured works in a perfect state . . . "

The offer evidently fell through, for the library and herbarium were sold by auction by Mr. Thomas "at his Great Room, 38 King Street, Covent Garden, on Tuesday, May 26th, 1829, and following day, at Twelve for One o'Clock very punctually". The catalogue of the sale, a copy of which is at the Natural History Museum, lists 722 lots and states that in addition to the "choice Botanical Library" the collection included "a small misscellaneous Library, in which will be found Fowler's mosaic pavements, and a variety of Works of the best modern Authors". The herbarium is now at Kew.

In a letter to Alexander McLeay, on the latter's departure in 1825 to be colonial secretary in New South Wales, it is evident that Sims had become rather aware of the declining years, for he writes:—

"I am very sorry we are like to lose you soon and at my time of life I can hardly expect to live to see you on your return".

When he went to Dorking, the effect of the three score years and ten was upon him, as is rather pathetically borne out by two passages in letters to his friend Charles König. The first is dated Dorking, September 3, 1828:—

" . . . It would give me particular pleasure to see you, but I grow so feeble that I am able to go but a very little way from home and much question if I shall ever be again equal to undertake a journey to London, though I hardly like to think so, as I much wish to get another sight of some old friends, of which you stand among the foremost. I thank God my eyesight continues pretty good and I find amusement in reading; but writing has become difficult . . . "

Despite the difficulty in writing, of which he complains, this letter is in his own hand and the words are firm and clear. A few months later, however, he had evidently got past writing altogether, for the next letter, dated Cotmandene, Wednesday, March 4, 1829, has been dictated and is written out by another. In it, Sims says:—

"Mrs. Sims and my family are all in pretty good health and as to myself I have little to complain of but an increasing debility which is now so great it is not at all probable I shall be able to go to London again so that I shall feel the more gratified by any occasional visits from my friends".

It is probable that Sims chose his place of retirement to benefit his failing health. Of the situation of Cotmandene, a guide book of 1865 says:—

"This emminence overlooks the Town and embraces views of Denbies, Box Hill, Norbury Park House, and Camilla Lacey. This elevation has long been proverbial for the superiority of its situation, and the air is fresh, breezy and healthful".

Another guide book also describes it as "one of the healthiest parts of the town".

It was in this pleasant spot that John Sims, M.D., F.R.S., died, in his 82nd year, on February 26, 1831.

Surprisingly, very little attention seems to have been paid to his passing, and only brief notices appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and *Annual Register*, and none in *The Times* or the *Lancet*. Previously the place of burial of John Sims has been a mystery. Green stated he could find no indication of where either John Sims or Mrs. Sims was buried. The Vicar of Dorking, Rev. K. D. Evans, kindly searched the Register at Dorking for me without result.

In fact, John Sims was buried on March 5, 1831, at Fittleworth in Sussex, where his son Courthope was curate. The service was conducted by the Rev. Robert Tredcroft, the incumbent, who was at this date styled vicar. It was in the same churchyard that Courthope Sims was buried on November 8, 1833. Green states that Courthope's widowed mother died at

the Rectory House, Petworth, shortly after her son's death, on April 19, 1835, and there is a record of the burial at Fittleworth of Ann Sims "from Petworth" on April 28, 1835. She was aged 79 and the burial was conducted by Rev. C. Dyson, curate. I am indebted to Rev. J. E. Dieterlé, Rector of Fittleworth, for this information.

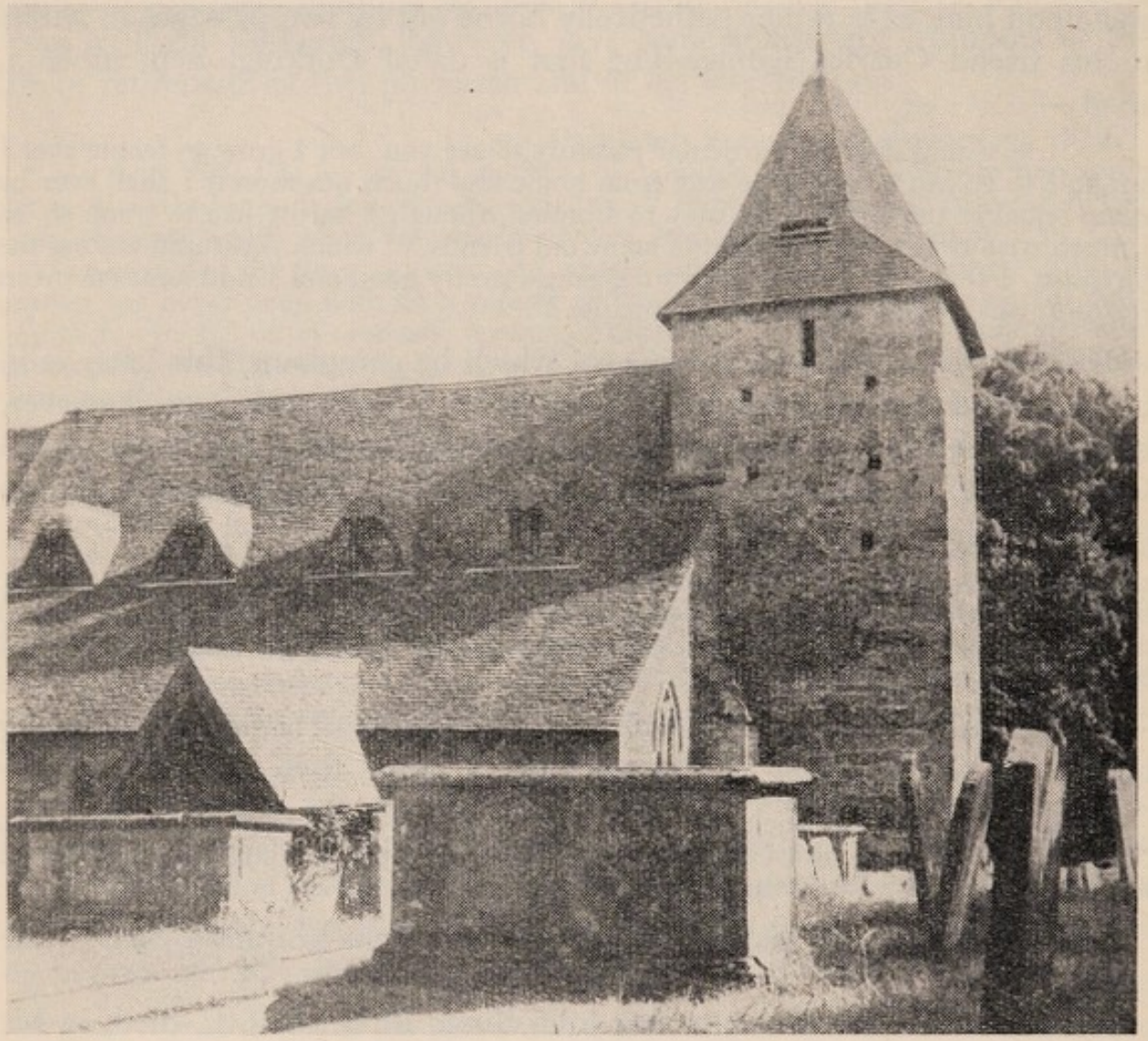

FIG. 2.—The church of St. Mary the Virgin, Fittleworth. In this Sussex church, where his son, Rev. Courthope Sims, M.D., was curate, the burial service of John Sims, M.D., F.R.S., was held. Under an old yew tree in the churchyard are buried John Sims, his wife Ann, and his son Courthope.

John Sims was at least not unremembered by his botanical friends. Robert Brown commemorated his name in the Mexican genus of compositæ *Simsia;* he is also commemorated by the plant *Simsia amplexicaulis.*

The only memorial to the Sims family is a small stone surmounted by a Maltese cross. It stands under the old yew tree in Fittleworth churchyard, and on it can be read just this:—

J.S. M.D. 1831
C.S. M.D. 1833
A.S. 1835

On either side of this headstone are two others, small, overgrown, and nearly buried in the earth until the Rev. J. E. Dieterlé had them dug out. One proved to be the headstone of Courthope Sims and is broken, which may indicate that the stones were shifted when the nave was taken down in 1871. The other is inscribed:—

I S

Born 10th Novr
1749

Died 26th Feby
1831

APPENDIX I

Medical Papers by John Sims

The following are the signed medical papers or communications by John Sims the publication of which I have been able to trace; the general index to the first volumes of the *Medical and Physical Journal* wrongly lists his contributions under the name of James Sims, whilst the paper read to the Medical Society of London in 1788 on "A passage from the Ancient Greek authors on Hydrophobia" by a "Dr. Sims", which Green thought might be by James or John Sims, was read by the former.

"An account of a cancerous affection of the stomach". *Medical Communications* 1782-4 (1784), **1**, p. 421.

"Letter on the Cow-Pox". *Medical and Physical Journal* (1799), **1**, p. 11.

Further letter on the same subject. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

"On the use of pure ammonia in pregnancy". *Medical and Physical Journal* (1799), **2**, p. 205.

"On the Cæsarean operation". *Ibid.*, p. 433.

"An account of a ruptured uterus". *Medical Facts and Observations* (1800), **8**, p. 150. Report and extracts of this paper are given in *London Medical Review* (1800), **3**, p. 372.

"On delivery in certain difficult cases of arm presentation". *Medical and Physical Journal* (1802), **8**, p. 481.

In addition, Sims communicated to the Society of Physicians "An account of expoliation of the internal surface of the tibia, removed by the application of the trephine" by Mr. Thomas Whateley, *Medical Communications* (1790), **2**, p. 386, whilst a paper by Mr. Whateley ("Cases of prolapsus uteri") contains an account of a support for a case of prolapsus uteri, designed by Dr. Sims (*Medical Facts and Observations* (1800), **8**, p. 172).

Sims' botanical papers are listed in J. Britten and G. S. Boulger's *Biographical index of deceased British and Irish botanists* (2nd edition, London, 1931).

APPENDIX II

Manuscripts of John Sims

The following list is given to supplement the incomplete reference in Britten and Boulger:—

Natural History Museum, British Museum. The Botanical Library possesses four letters, three by Sims and one to him.

Linnæan Society of London possesses two letters by Sims.

Kew Gardens library has a collection of letters to Sims, but not by him, and also notes of a botanical paper.

Permission to quote from these letters is gratefully acknowledged.

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