Iconographic archives of European nephrology: arteriocapillary fibrosis

Sir,
As always, I enjoyed my good friend Tita Fogazzi’s Iconographic Archives of European Nephrology on arteriocapillary fibrosis (14: 1327–1329, 1999). However Dr Fogazzi’s title is misleading and unfair; ‘The description of renal “arterio-capillary fibrosis” by William W. Gull’ should have included ‘and H. G. Sutton’. I write only because Sutton—although mentioned in Dr Fogazzi’s article—is almost always neglected in favour of the older, charismatic, ambitious, rich and famous Sir William Gull, and this paper reinforces this unjustifiable neglect.

Perhaps this was because Henry Gawen Sutton (1836–1891) (Figure 1) was small, shy, studious, quiet, partially deaf, unambitious and slow to publish—although he was an excellent lecturer—that he has been almost forgotten. His main hobbies were quiet ones, poetry and fishing, whereas Gull revelled in controversy. Nevertheless, the illustrations Dr Fogazzi reproduces of arteriocapillary fibrosis were Sutton’s: it was said by one commentator ‘Sutton primed the gun, and Gull fired it’. Another wrote ‘it is well known that the main work which was published in their joint name was the laborious and individual achievement of Dr Sutton’. It was Sutton also who presented and defended his histological preparations against the attacks of Sir George Johnson at various medical meetings following the publication of their revolutionary paper.

Nothing, however has been published about Sutton, in contrast to books about Gull, and I hope to address this imbalance in the near future. In the meantime, perhaps the iconography could be extended to include a picture of Sutton.

Fig. 1. Dr H. G. Sutton (courtesy of the London Hospital archives).

J. Stewart Cameron
Melmerby
Cumbria
UK

Reply

Sir,
Yes, Professor Cameron, whose declared friendship to me I consider a honour, is right. I should have included Henry G. Sutton in the title of my Iconographic Archive.

In all honesty, however, from the available literature I could not have known the pivotal role of Sutton in the work about ‘arterio-capillary fibrosis’. This even though something about his greatness transpired in a chapter, again about William W. Gull (!), in which it was said of Sutton: ‘The world outside knew little of him, neither the Lancet nor the British Medical Journal gave an obituary notice of him, but those who were fortunate enough to know him recognized in him a profound, original thinker and a thorough physician, skilled at the bedside and in the post-mortem room’ [1].

At this point we do now need the announced contribution of professor Cameron about this great physician of the past, who was unfortunately neglected by most of his contemporaries and by posterity, myself included.

Giovanni B. Fogazzi
Divisione di Nefrologia e Dialisi
IRCCS Ospedale Maggiore
Milano
Italy