

Professor John Attfield: biographical entry in an encyclopaedia from 1891

ATTFIELD, Professor John, M.A. and Ph.D. of the University of Tubingen, F.R.S., Professor of Practical Chemistry to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain was born near Barnet, Hertfordshire, on Aug. 28, 1835. His first taste for science was given by the physical and chemical lectures of his schoolmaster, the Rev. Alex. Stewart, at Barnet. In 1850 he was articled to Mr. W. F. Smith, manufacturing pharmaceutical chemist, London. In 1853-4 he was a student in the Pharmaceutical Society's School, and First Prizeman in all subjects — chemistry, botany, pharmacy, and materia medica.

From 1854 to 1862 he was Demonstrator of Chemistry at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and lecture-assistant and research-assistant to the Professors of Chemistry there, Dr. Stenhouse, F.R.S., and afterwards Dr. Frankland, F.R.S., at the hospital, at the Addiscombe Military College, and at the Royal Institution. During the same period he wrote most of the chemical articles in "Brande's Dictionary of Art, Science, and Literature", and in the Arts and Sciences Division of the "English Cyclopaedia", besides being a frequent scientific contributor to several journals and newspapers. In 1862 he took his University degrees, his thesis being an account of an original research "On the Spectrum of Carbon", a paper read before the Royal Society, and published in the "Philosophical Transactions". In the same year he was appointed to the Chair of Practical Chemistry in the Pharmaceutical Society's School, where he is now (1890) senior professor and dean.

He is a fellow, and was for several years on the Council, of the Chemical Society; is a Fellow, was one of the founders, and was for several years on the Council of the Institute of Chemistry of Great Britain and Ireland; is a Life Member, and on the General Committee, of the British Association for the Advancement of Science; is a Fellow of the Society of Chemical Industry; was for two years President of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society; was one of the five founders, for seventeen years Senior Secretary, and for two years President, of the British Pharmaceutical Conference, an organization for the encouragement of original research in pharmacy, each of his presidential addresses "On the Relations of Pharmacy and the State" drawing supporting leading articles from the Times and other chief newspapers; the members, on his retirement, presenting him with an illuminated vellum and five hundred specially bound volumes of general literature. He was Secretary of the Food Jury at the International Health Exhibition. He also wrote the Exhibition Handbook on "Water and Water Supplies", which has reached a third edition. He has written largely on pharmaceutical education, and the relation of education to examination, his views, especially as regards compulsory public curricula, having gradually won the support of all leading pharmacists. The present chemical

nomenclature of the Pharmacopoeias of Great Britain and the United States was adopted on his recommendation and long advocacy.

His great work is "A Manual of Chemistry: General, Medical and Pharmaceutical", of which there have been published thirteen large editions in twenty-three years, seven being adapted to British and six to American medical and pharmaceutical requirements. For this book he was awarded a gold medal at the exhibition in Vienna in 1883. He was appointed by the General Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom to be one of the three editors of the "British Pharmacopoeia of 1885", has since been Annual Reporter on the "Pharmacopoeia" to the Council, and has been appointed by the Council Editor of an Addendum to the "Pharmacopoeia". In the production of the latter he has successfully brought about the recognised co-operation of the two leading representative bodies of medicine on the one hand and pharmacy on the other; co-operation that will, doubtless, be maintained in the compilation of future editions of the great medicine-book of the empire. In the Royal Society's Catalogue he appears as author of thirty-seven original scientific papers, mostly of pharmaceutical interest, published in the "Transactions of the Royal, Chemical, and Pharmaceutical Societies".

His scientific and educational work has gained for him not only the much coveted honour of being a Fellow of the Royal Society, but also the following twenty honorary distinctions:— Honorary Member of the Pharmaceutical Societies of Great Britain, Paris, St. Petersburg, Austria, Denmark, East Flanders, Australasia, and New South Wales; of the American Pharmaceutical Association; of the Colleges of Pharmacy of Philadelphia, New York, Massachusetts, Chicago, and Ontario; and of the Pharmaceutical Associations of New Hampshire, Virginia, Liverpool, Manchester, Georgia, and the Province of Quebec. At the Chicago College the chief lecture theatre is named "Attfield Hall", and his portrait in oils is hung on the College walls "in recognition of his aid in raising the College from its ashes after the great fire of 1871, and of his devotion to the cause of education."

Professor Attfield is a chemical analyst, and consultant, as well as teacher. Resides at "Ashlands", Watford, Hertfordshire, and is a namesake and probable descendant of the John Attfield who flourished in "the Ville of Staundon" (now Standon), Hertfordshire, in the fourteenth century.

Source:

Men and Women of the Time, A Dictionary of Contemporaries, 13th Edition, G. Washington Moon, editor, George Routledge and Sons Limited, London, 1891, pp 40-41.