

MEDICINE ON STAMPS

(The following article was read by Dr. C. Cassar, at the monthly meeting of the Association, in December 1970.)

In philately the medical literature in stamps is extensive but scattered in reviews and journals which is not easily accessible. I am not entering into philatelic details but what interests me is the study behind the stamps. When we come to classification it is difficult to set a uniform one. Different collectors have their own fascination and what one likes to call a Medical, someone else takes it as purely scientific. Today I am not exhibiting a complete list of these stamps, far from it, and I have no ambition to reach such a level, surely it is beyond my modest means since collectors go for a particular classification such as 'Medicine' and 'Science' in Postage Stamps, Medical Portraits, Philately in Red Cross, Maternity and Child — Welfare, Medical Symbolism and so on and so forth. In the past, Medical Stamps were few but within the last thirty years these issues have increased by leaps and bounds. In fact these last years we have witnessed the craze for commemorative and anniversary stamps. Nowadays doctors and scientists are inserted in philatelic galleries side by side of kings, queens, presidents and generals. The word democracy has wiped out the privileges of kings and queens and instead its place was taken up by doctors and scientists. In my opinion this is a wise move because the world is showing that the brain is master of the world.

Students of the Medical History are allured by these stamps. Some of these representing worthies are easily detected but more often than not one is tricked by the word doctor. Some of the 'eminent' doctors portrayed on stamps of certain countries are easily detected; but portraits of others who enjoy a reputation for their achievements in other fields are not known as such and it is difficult therefore to recognise them. Others are taken as doctors but at the end one finds out that they are doctors of law or of philosophy. Thus, the identification of these is at times very puzzling. Medicine and its history is very interesting and when it is depicted on stamps it is more so. Primitive medicine is founded on magic, and the doctors had even the touch of expelling the demons of disease. This was represented by a stamp of the Belgian Congo, now only Congo. After magic come the Gods and these were even represented on stamps such as the Greek

stamps. Asculapius was bothered in our times on an International Congress of History of medicine in 1932. Imhetop, the physician and architect, is on a stamp commemorating the International Medical Congress held in Cairo in 1928. Andrew Vasalius and Leonardo da Vinci both renowned and favoured anatomists are commemorated on stamps, the former by Belgium and the latter by his native land, Italy. Theodor Billroth the originator of abdominal surgery is shown on an Austrian Stamp issued in 1937. Well Louis Pasteur the father of the germ theory of disease, is commemorated on many foreign stamps besides on those of his fatherland. We in Malta too, have our Medical men commemorated on stamps. Themistocles Zammit goes to posterity for his discovery of Undulant Fever transmission from goat to man. As such he is depicted on one of the stamps which I am exhibiting. Another stamp after a great and prominent man is that of Robert Koch, the discoverer of Tubercle Bacillus, who was honoured by Germany and Douzing of pre-war date. Men like Schiller and Chekkov who studied Medicine but devoted their time to other work, go by one class, other bear portraits of the medical profession for their contributions on Medicine, and lastly those who studied medicine for a time but were less fortunate to qualify, but devoted their time to some other achievements. Simcelwiess who in his lifetime was humbled for his discovery in connection with the spread of infection of puerperal fever, was sent to Mental Hospital, is commemorated on a stamp of his Country and thus his reputation as a famous obstetrician was posthumously vindicated.

Red Cross, the conception of Henri Dunant is well represented on several stamps of different nationalities and so Tuberculosis, hospitals and medical symbolism.

Well, had I to continue with my talk about this line of Medical Philately, it would take much of your time, here, because the men that were eminent in this connection and that devoted their lives and energies to humanity are myriads. I would therefore present to you some of these stamps which I am sure you would, as collectors, will be delighted to see.