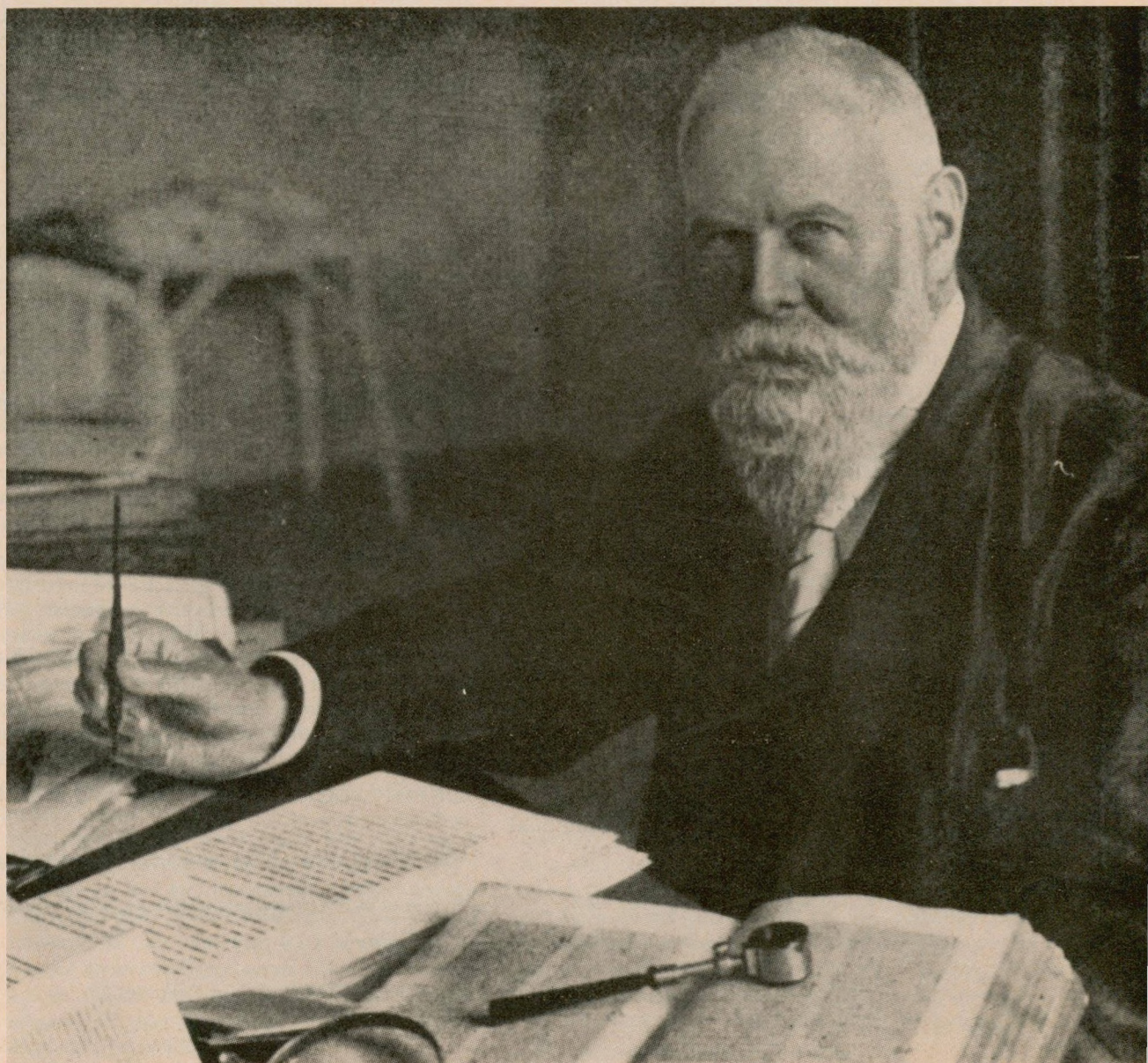


Detective of History



Opposite is a photograph of Dr. Karl Sudhoff working at his studies on the history of medicine at his desk. At right is a specimen of his handwriting and his signature dated 1927.

Gepfunden und am 21. VI 1927
Sudhoff
am 21. VI 1927

When on his seventieth birthday, Dr. Karl Sudhoff was presented with a volume of essays written by admiring students and friends, he was much pleased and deeply moved, but he could not resist later writing each contributor to point out their errors.

This was typical of Sudhoff's uncompromising scholarship with which in his own work he built a massive reputation for meticulous attention to accuracy. Not content to repeat the observations of others, he ransacked the archives of Europe, checked facts, compared manuscripts, traced every report back to its original source; in the process he gave new dimensions to the understanding of medicine's past.

He was also a physician who maintained a busy practice for nearly three decades, acquiring clinical insights which illumined his writing; not until middle age did he abandon practice to turn his full attention to the historian's task. Long life and extraordinary vigor allowed him the equivalent of two full careers; the bulk of his scholarly achievements were crowded into the years past 50.

The Man. The son of a Calvinist minister, Sudhoff was born on Nov. 6, 1853, at Frankfurt-am-Main; he was the second child and only boy in a family of three; the father died when he was 12. An early education at home was followed by training in the humanities at gymnasial schools in Frankfurt and Zweibrücken. He was well grounded in mathematics, history, German literature, the classics; every morning he rose at five o'clock to indulge his pleasure in reading Greek and Roman authors; on graduation he presented the gymnasium library with his own monograph on the poetry of Sophocles.

He was also an ardent botanist and a keen student of physics and chemistry; when given the task of cleaning a physics laboratory he and two classmates salvaged enough equipment to set up their private laboratory. They worked their way through all the experiments in a physics textbook, went on to chemistry experiments although that subject was not on the curriculum. Mineralogy also excited Sudhoff's interest; he attached himself eagerly to field expeditions conducted by a school instructor.

Though groomed for philology he was drawn increasingly to medicine; at 17 he entered Erlangen University as a medical student, graduated four years later.* University years were again marked by the diverse interests of scholar and scientist; he labored long hours preparing microscopic slides of botanic and zoologic specimens, being the only student in his group who saw any merit in such investigation; he also delved deeply into medical history, developing a special enthusiasm for the works of Paracelsus whom he claimed as a distant ancestor.

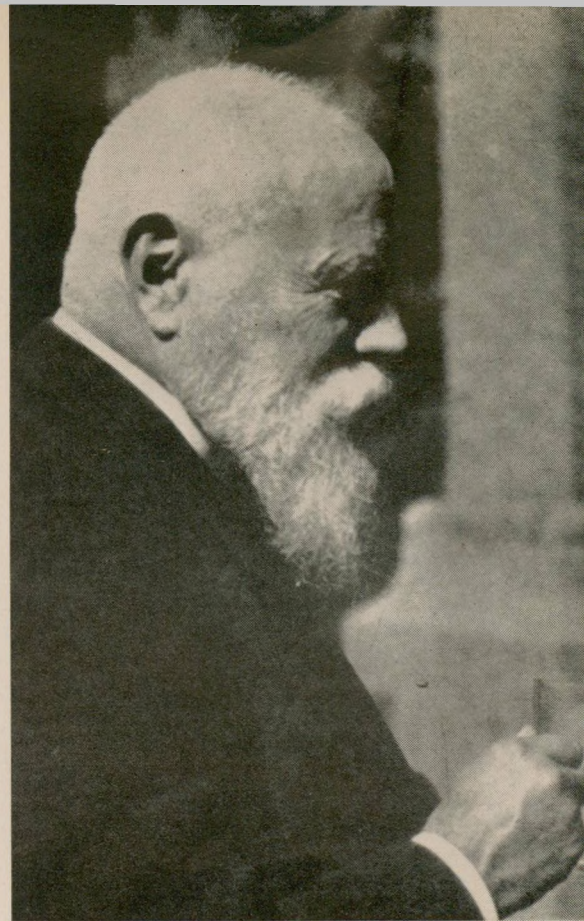
Dr. Sudhoff spent a year as assistant physician at Augsburg, interned in Vienna, began practice in Frankfurt at 28. A year later he married, and about the same time he launched into a major study of Paracelsus. The work so consumed attention in the household that the topic was taken up by his first child, a daughter; he reported with delight that her first words concerned "Paralus."

The Paracelsus research was undertaken in collaboration with Dr. Edward Schubert, a colleague met at a bedside consultation; through diligent investigation they vastly increased knowledge of the subject. The study required more than ten years, involved intensive search in state archives at Düsseldorf; when it was completed the known material on Paracelsus was expanded from 248 prints to 525, from 28 manuscripts to 170; ultimate result was the *Paracelsus-Forschungen* (1887-89) followed by the massive *Bibliographia Paracelsica* (1894-99). For Dr. Sudhoff it marked the beginning of a lifelong fascination: the careful scholar was oddly drawn to the flamboyant spirit of his subject.

To facilitate his research, Dr. Sudhoff moved to a suburb of Düsseldorf; there he continued an active practice, specializing in gynecology and attaining the rank of Prussian Sanitary Councilor; his family increased with the birth of two sons. In these years he rose every morning at dawn, spent two hours or so at his historical labor of love, then set forth on his professional rounds. Although he worked prodigiously he found time for robust pleasures: a large vigorous man, he was fond of horseback riding, loved good conversation over a table well supplied with food and wine. He read omnivorously in half a dozen languages, was par-

*Doctoral thesis was on carcinoma of the bones.

Paracelsus by Jan van Scorel. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Sudhoff's interest in Paracelsus inspired his studies into the history of medicine.



Sudhoff, left, with Dr. William Henry Welch the distinguished American pathologist who was professor of the history of medicine at Johns Hopkins University from 1926 to 1930.

ticularly fond of Guy de Maupassant and Emile Zola.

By 40 he had prospered sufficiently to build himself a fine mansion: his particular pride was a large study containing a fire-resistant closet where he stored a fast growing collection of rare manuscripts and books. Previously he had used his medical office as a library and was obliged to clear his desk as he turned from medicine to history; the study now became a sacrosanct retreat where papers piled up in a vast clutter which only he could disentangle.

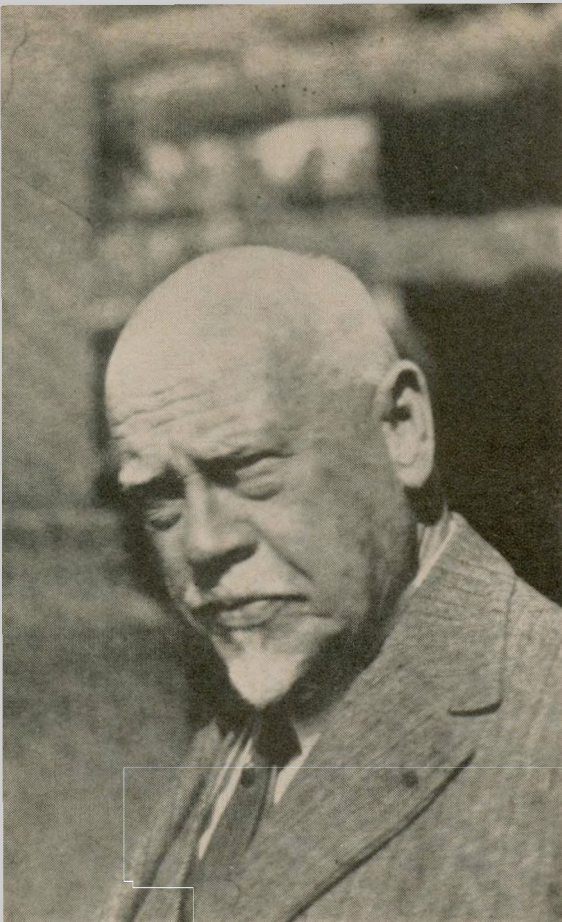
Honors accrued steadily for his continuing research: he organized two highly successful historical expositions in Düsseldorf, became a leading figure at scholarly assemblies, was named first president of the German Society of the History of Medicine; he published much additional work, including studies of Goethe, and an exhaustive monograph on iatromathematicians of the 15th and 16th centuries. But historical work remained essentially a sideline until he was 52; the decisive turning point came when he was offered a post as director of the newly formed Institute of Medical History at Leipzig.* For Dr. Sudhoff it presented a difficult choice, requiring a financial sacrifice and entailing also the abandonment of medical practice to which he was deeply committed. He accepted, after laying down careful conditions which gave him entire authority over the program: thus launched at last was a career for which all else in his life had been but a preparation.

*The institute was founded with a bequest of 500,000 marks provided in the will of Professor Theodor Puschmann, a Viennese medical historian.

The Historian. Dr. Sudhoff was already an established authority on medicine of the Middle Ages; now he laid out a long-range program embracing ancient oriental medicine, the classic period of Greece and Rome, the papyrus literature of Hellenized Alexandria. As a self-taught historian he employed methods essentially his own: he drew heavily on both his broad background and his practical experience; especially useful was the philology for which he had studied in youth.

He was the dogged detective of history, depending not on brilliant ratiocination but on endless checking of every detail. Typical was his work on the much debated origin of syphilis: he put aside theoretic speculations, sought specific proofs: he unearthed mercurial prescriptions by Arab and Salernian physicians alongside apparent syphilitic treatments from old Florentine recipe books; a court record from Dijon contained what seemed an ancient reference to the disease, so did a long forgotten edict against blasphemy by the Emperor Maximilian. Concluded Dr. Sudhoff: syphilis was well known in pre-Columbian Europe, was not acquired from the Americas as some historians maintained.

In pursuing such research, Dr. Sudhoff searched monasteries, libraries, museums, city archives, castles all over Europe; a series of Italian investigations began in 1903 when he searched documents in Naples, Salerno, Pompeii, Rome; in six subsequent visits he crisscrossed the country repeatedly, examining every record he could find in more



Display case containing Sudhoff memorabilia at the Institute of the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.



than two dozen principal cities. He also delved intensively into English, Belgian, German and Austrian archives.

Out of this labor came a continuous stream of published works: he produced in all more than 1500 monographs, periodical pieces, reviews and other items; almost half of this output was devoted to his particular specialty, the Middle Ages, but the entire effort ranged from prehistory to his own time. Dr. Sudhoff's first big work issued under Institute imprimatur was *Medicine in Papyric Archives: A Building Stone for the Cultural History of Greek Medicine*. There followed in swift succession four other important monographs dealing with such diverse topics as illustration of medieval medical manuscripts, German medical incunabula, the history of anatomy in the Middle Ages, and the history of Leipzig's early medical faculty; he also helped to launch the Institute yearbook called *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin*.

Dr. Sudhoff next attacked problems of epidemiology and public hygiene in the Middle Ages: the project included the history of syphilis; studied also were sanitary measures taken against leprosy and the plague. Published in the *Archiv* were a number of hygienic ordinances passed by medieval towns; brought to light also was an enormous literature on plague and leprosy.

Another huge endeavor was organization of the Dresden Hygienic Exposition in 1911: an exhibit of 20,394 objects and texts was prepared, each item serving as a point of departure for a special investigation in the history of hy-

giene. Dr. Sudhoff played a principal role in planning the exposition, was responsible also for an annotated catalog which ranks today as a rare and valuable document.

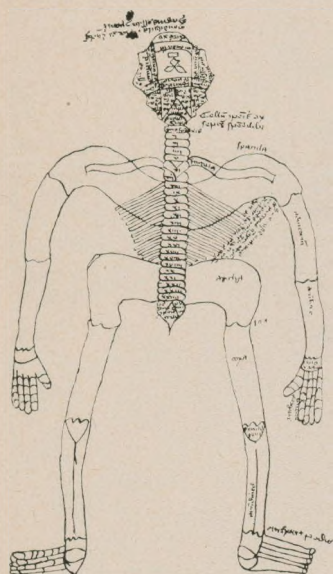
World War I brought a partial interruption of the prodigious labors: Dr. Sudhoff spent four years as a medical officer in a Leipzig military hospital; he kept the *Archiv* going, produced more than 50 papers in one year. The war severely strained his relations with colleagues in other lands but he prided himself on remaining scrupulously fair in all historical evaluations.

At war's end, Dr. Sudhoff picked up the pieces of his Institute, carried on with still more ambitious enterprises. Published in 1921 was the memorable *Survey of the History of Medicine*, written in collaboration with Theodor Meyer-Steineg; Dr. Sudhoff's contribution covered the period from the end of the Greek era to the time of Francis Bacon. Appearing the same year was his *History of Dentistry*, compounded from 69 previously published articles and reviews.

In the postwar misery, the Institute was so hard pressed that Dr. Sudhoff and his students often worked in overcoats because of fuel shortage; when Dr. Henry E. Sigerist joined the staff he was invited to sleep in the director's room in order to share the luxury of heat.

Dr. Sudhoff had now attained the status of a living legend: he had become a white-bearded man of imposing appearance whose head bore a striking resemblance to the composer Johannes Brahms. To casual acquaintances he

Skeleton drawing, 14th century, was published in Sudhoff's Studien zur Geschichte der Medizin in 1907.



History of Medicine section of the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden, ca. 1930. In 1911, Dr. Sudhoff organized the mammoth Dresden Hygienic Exposition for which 20,394 objects and texts were prepared.

seemed abrupt and distant; with old friends the crusty manner dissolved into straightforward simplicity. When a contributor sent the *Archiv* an article prefaced with a tastelessly fulsome eulogy to the Institute and its director, Dr. Sudhoff printed one page of the preface, stopped it in the middle of a sentence, explained that he could not afford to clutter his journal with such nonsense. His particular pride was his linguistic command: he was a brilliant scholar in at least half a dozen languages but was eloquently unintelligible in all except his own. An apocryphal tale is that when Dr. Sudhoff addressed an international gathering, an Englishman and an Italian argued as to which language he was using.

Known only to close associates was that Dr. Sudhoff longed to be the Goethe of his profession, writing medical history in the grand manner, setting it against the whole background of human experience; stern intellectual honesty would not allow him to attempt this while the factual framework was still incomplete. Wrote he: "We are in danger of becoming self-indulgent, and tend to erect massive structures too heavy for the shaky foundations, built of loose rubbish. To those who, like myself, long to create artistic shapes in the round, I say, to work with spade, pickaxe and hammer in hand."

In 1925, at age 72, Dr. Sudhoff retired as the Institute's director; still ahead was more than a decade of continued devotion to his task. He finished the work begun as a special consultant to Stanford University's Lane Medical Library, advising on the acquisition of rare books; through his innumerable contacts and vast bibliographic knowledge

he helped the library assemble an outstanding collection. He also maintained an arduous schedule of research, writing, editing. He published *Essays in Medical History* (1925), an anthology of pediatric incunabula, books on Cos and Cnidos, a study of plague incunabula in collaboration with Arnold Klebs, a book on prehistoric German medicine. In 1933 his lifelong interest in Paracelsus culminated in a magnificent edition of his medical writings.

Fittingly, Dr. Sudhoff's final article was a farewell to Paracelsus who had inspired his original interest in medical history; it dealt with Paracelsus and music. A year later, on October 8, 1938, Dr. Sudhoff died at Leipzig, aged 85.

His life's end was marred by the gathering of new war clouds: Dr. Sudhoff was drawn into resurgent German nationalism, found himself again estranged from many of his old colleagues. Said Dr. Sigerist: "About the later years I will hold my tongue, since I did not share them with him. An ocean lay between our worlds. But in my eyes he always stands as the most benevolent instructor and fatherly comrade he had been to me for so many years and to whom I owe so infinitely much."

Added medical historian Dr. Fielding H. Garrison: "If the history of medicine is today an important branch of science, employing as tools the data of archeology, anthropology, ethnology, folklore, paleography, bibliography, numismatics, the graphic arts, and every other phase of cultural history, it is due to the enterprising, resolute and self-helping labors of Sudhoff."

Summing Up. To Dr. Karl Sudhoff the cultured physician of today owes an incalculable debt.

