

## CENTENARIES

### Carlisle, Anthony (1768-1840)

SIR ANTHONY CARLISLE, a distinguished British surgeon, was born near Durham in 1768. The early part of his medical education was at Durham under Mr. Green, founder of the hospital of that town. He completed his education under Mr. Watson of the Westminster Hospital where he succeeded him as surgeon in 1793. He continued in that post till his death. From 1808 he also held the post of professor of anatomy to the Royal Academy.

Carlisle was a good surgeon. His introduction of the thin-bladed, straight-edged amputating knife, in place of the old clumsy crooked one, and his use of the simple carpenter's saw make his name worthy of note. The number of papers he contributed after 1800 were 17. The last one entitled *Some observations tending to demonstrate the dependence of vascular organisation upon physical causes* appeared in the *Reports of the Guy's Hospital of 1840*, the year of his death. In 1804 and 1805 he delivered the Croonian lectures on *Muscular motion* and *Muscles of fishes* respectively.

Carlisle contributed to other fields of knowledge also. For example, in 1800 he collaborated with W. Nicholson in his researches on voltaic electricity and is credited to be the first in observing the decomposition of water by the electric current.

The chief of his published books are *An essay on the disasters of old age, and on the means of prolonging human life* (1817); *Alleged discovery of the use of the spleen* (1829); and *Physiological observations upon glandular structures* (1834).

Carlisle was very early elected on the Council of the College of Surgeons. In 1800 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society. He was surgeon to George IV, when he was prince regent, who conferred knighthood on him at the first levee he held after he became king.

Carlisle died at his house in Langham Place November 2, 1840.

### Brashear, John Alfred (1840-1920)

JOHN ALFRED BRASHEAR, an American instrument maker, was born of a saddler at Brownsville, Pa, November 24, 1840. His maternal grandfather who had a passion for astronomy taught the boy the constellations by the time he was eight; he also presented him in 1850 with a set of Dick's *Works* and paid

for a first view of the heavens through a telescope. About this Brashear wrote later: "Young as I was, the scenery of the moon and the rings of Saturn impressed me deeply". From 1856 to 1881 he was engaged in various pieces of hard work. But the memory of the beauty of the first vision of the heavens persisted so much that he decided to make a telescope for himself as he was too poor to buy one.

He knew nothing about the polishing of lenses, but he brought a glass for a five-inch lens and some books on the grinding of lenses. After toiling in the factory throughout the day Brashear would spend long hours in the night in polishing the glass. This he did for three full years and at last he realised his ambition. From this modest beginning he rose to become the peer of any maker of astronomical and other instruments of precision.

This telescope he made for himself brought him into touch with astronomers and in 1881 he set up independent business as maker of astronomical instruments. It is impossible to estimate accurately the progress in astronomy due to his mechanical genius. To-day his glasses are still in use in most of the observatories of the world.

Brashear's mastery of the art of making a plane surface was marvellous. The speculum metal plates from which the famous Rowland Diffraction Gratings were made required a very accurate surface. The error had to be less than one-fifth of a light wave or one two-hundred-thousandth of an inch. Surfaces of such evenness were produced by Brashear.

Another great contribution to science is the Brashear Method of silvering mirrors, which was of immense use in the design and development of the spectroscope.

His personality even overshadowed his mechanical genius. To literally thousands of people he was known familiarly as "Uncle John". The force that dominated him was a sincere desire to share the beauty of the universe with all mankind. He was one of the three men selected by Andrew Carnegie to draw up plans for the Carnegie Institute of Technology. When Henry C. Frick decided to make his gift of half a million dollars to establish the Frick Educational Commission, he stipulated that Brashear should direct the organisation. Such was his geniality and the confidence that his conduct had induced in others.

Brashear died April 8, 1920.

University Library,  
Madras.

S. R. RANGANATHAN.