

CVS4/17/35.63

P.C. from Dr. Wickersheimer to W.O.

Paris, July 29, 1913.

Dear Sir,

I have found nothing on Astruc except the biographies in the encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries which you of course have already seen, and a note in "Le Monde médical Parisien au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", by Dr. P. Delaunay, Paris, 1906, page 251. According to this note, Astruc had all the faults of character

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imaginable, but nothing is said of his immorality. Dr. Delaunay might be able to give you some further information on the subject, as he knows the eighteenth century very well. His address is 14 rue de la Prifecture, Le Mans (Sarthe).

I am looking forward with pleasure to my stay in London and to the honor of meeting you there.

Very truly yours,

G. WICKERSHEIMER.

It was at this time that the Historical section of the Royal Society of Medicine, of which Sir William Osler was President, was getting under way, and as was characteristic of him, he prevailed upon Sir Alexander Simpson to write the subject up, and the pamphlet to which reference has been made was the outcome of a meeting on Feb. 17 as published in the Society's Proceedings.

On this occasion Dr. Norman Moore, Dr. Skinner who speaks of himself as a 'Hebraist' and Old Testament student, and Dr. I. Abrahams, and Dr. A. E. Garvie and Sir William participated in the discussion. Sir William spoke as follows:-

"The literary output of a long life shows Astruc to have been a hard-working, painstaking student, and we are all very much indebted to Sir Alexander Simpson for reminding the profession of the important position he occupies in the history of Biblical criticism. Some months ago I was shocked to read in an address by the Rev. A. C. Dixon on "The Bible and the Origin of Life", reported in the Times of 14th June last, the statement that the father of modern biblical criticism, though a man of considerable learning, was of profligate life. In the medical biographies there is no hint of anything to justify such a remark, but Sir Alexander Simpson called my attention to an extraordinarily bitter criticism of Astruc by Professor Howard Osgood in the Presbyterian and Reformed Review, January 1892, vol. iii. The main contention is that he was the intimate friend and paramour of Madame de Tencin, perhaps the most famous of the infamous Court circle of that day and the mother of the great d'Alembert, whom as an infant she had deserted. At her death all her property went to Astruc. I must say Professor Osgood tells a hard story of Astruc, but it is chiefly of his associations, and the sources are drawn from bitter enemies of the Jesuits, with whom Astruc was associated. And we must remember what Montaigne says, that a man may sail over troubled waters without fishing in them. About the Conjectures, Professor Osgood quotes from Voltaire a statement that Astruc and his son-in-law, Silhouette, who was a candidate for some Government position, bought up all the copies in the kingdom,

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"and that is the reason why they have become so rare at present." Altogether, I feel that we should accept the charitable opinion of our President, on the distinguished author of the Conjectures.

(Dr. Norman Moore)

Then followed this letter from Sir Alexander Simpson:-

52, Queen Street,  
Edinburgh.

June 15, 1915.