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THE HISTORY AND WORK OF THE ARMY MEDICAL LIBRARY¹

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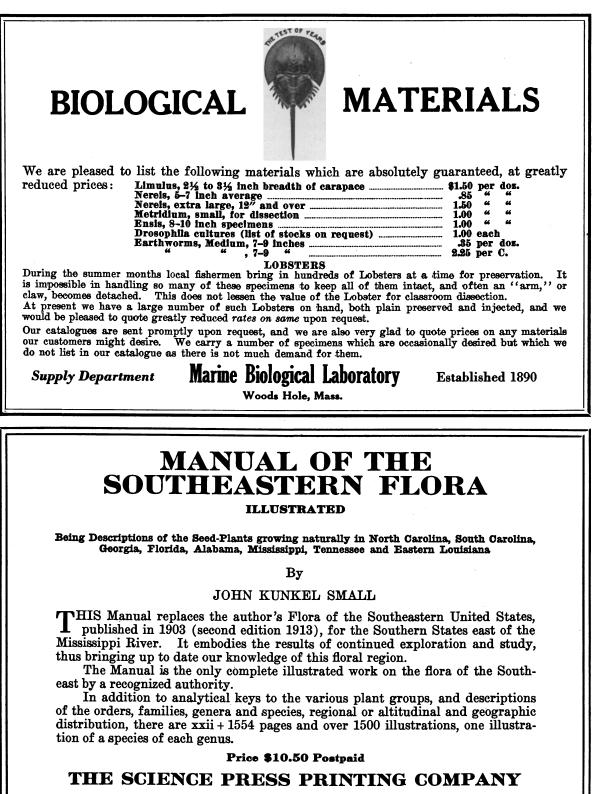
THE celebration on November 16, 1936, of the centenary of the foundation of the Army Medical Library served to bring home to a large number of persons not engaged in work in the medical sciences the importance of this great collection of books. This celebration was attended by six or seven hundred representatives of universities, libraries and learned societies of the world, and cablegrams, letters and diplomas of honor were received from nearly 200 foreign institutions alone. These bodies joined in commemorating the establishment of what is now the largest collection of medical literature that the world has ever seen. The development of this mighty library in so short a time is a phenomenon in which American science and letters may take pride.

Established in 1836 by Surgeon General Lovell as a

small number of reference medical texts for the use of his staff, it was in fact as well as in name "The Surgeon General's Library." The collection, hardly more extensive for some years than President Eliot's five-foot shelf of books, grew but slowly until, at the close of the Civil War, one of the greatest men of science our land has produced was placed in charge and given the congenial task of building up a great national medical library.

This man was Surgeon John Shaw Billings (1838– 1913). When he took up his new work the library consisted only of 2,253 volumes (602 titles under 11 topical subdivisions). A catalogue of the collection was printed in 1865. Billings was given the sum of \$80,000 left over from the hospital fund of the war, and wise Surgeon General Barnes likewise gave him a free hand. Billings had realized the need for such a library ever since he was a medical student at what is now the University of Cincinnati. Writing many years later he said:

¹ Read on December 30, 1936, at Brown University, Providence, R. I., before the joint session of the History of Science Society and the American Historical Association.



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