

Book Reviews

There are two notable features of the book which merit special commendation: the first is the publication of early surgical texts, the second the inclusion of exceptionally good illustrations. The surgical texts are those of the pseudo-Galenic *Introductio sive Medicus* from the ninth-century manuscript of Reichenau, the *Epistula de fleotomia* and the *Epistula de incisione* from Brussels, and the *Liber chirurgie Hippocratis* from Paris. We must be grateful for the enterprise which led the author to transcribe these valuable fragments, but it is a pity that he stopped there and did not give us a critical text based on all the available manuscripts. The Paris text of the *Epistula de fleotomia*, for instance, is much more correct and would have made clear quite a number of readings which make nonsense here: it would also have saved him from putting *idem* for *idest*, *ut* for *vel* and several other details he will surely correct on another occasion.

As for the illustrations, a number of which concern manuscripts in the British Museum (and these are in colour), and which enable us to control the author's commentary on them, we have nothing but praise. He has successfully interpreted the figure in Harley 1585, which has puzzled many others, as that of Isaiah having his lips cleansed by a burning coal and serving as an *apologia* for cautery, but I think he is mistaken in saying, p. 114, that the surgeon in Sloane 2839 is not a monk. If he looks closer I think he will find that the surgeon has a tonsure, and so is at least a cleric. These blemishes apart, and they are very minor blemishes, the book is extremely good and one can but hope that the author will continue to follow up the studies he has so promisingly begun.

C. H. TALBOT

St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin 1863-1963, edited by BRIAN RUSSELL, Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone 1963, pp. viii, 71, illus., 27s. 6d.

St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin achieved its present eminence only after a checkered career during which time, on more than one occasion, it appeared as if its doors must be permanently closed. Founded in 1863 through the efforts primarily of John Laws Milton, a surgeon with a special interest in cutaneous problems, the purpose of the new hospital, so it was announced, was to provide special care for diseases of the skin, notably for the assistance of the working and serving classes whose employment was at the mercy of superficial appearance. Opposition to the new hospital was vigorous, especially in the columns of the *Lancet*, which pointed out the danger of further division of available public contributions which might better be used for the support of existing hospitals.

First located in Church Street within the parish of St. Anne's, the new hospital, owing to internal strife, came perilously near to closing after a year of operation. In the succeeding years, during which time it was moved from one address to another within the same vicinity before gaining its present site on Lisle Street (1935), the hospital was beset by a succession of further misfortunes weathered through the personal conviction and strength—even ruthlessness—of Mr. Milton and then of Dr. Morgan Dockerell, consulting physician from 1888 to 1920, who during much of his tenure appears to have exercised a well-meaning but autocratic control. Bad publicity, inexperienced but innocent handling of finances which permitted rumours of peculation, the resignation of such men as Erasmus Wilson and Tilbury Fox, and a rash of competing institutions sprung up around 1870, represented problems finally met and overcome. Ultimate success appears to have been based first upon the will to survive, then reorganization of the accounting system, several successfully prosecuted libel suits, lessening of a kind of domineering control of the staff which formerly had undermined morale, and from about 1920 onwards a succession of appointments

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of real merit. Naturally the growing recognition of dermatology as a genuine medical specialty was a contributing factor, too.

The story of this struggle for recognition, frequently for continued existence, and finally a more placid development, edited by Dr. Brian Russell and in considerable part presented through excerpts from contemporary publications, is an interesting one which will naturally appeal to all those concerned with the development of dermatology and, additionally, to all with an interest more generally in the growth of British medicine during the last hundred years. The book is concluded by a series of chronologically arranged appendices providing the sequence of annual orations, various individual facts of interest, important dates, statistics, and staff members.

FRANCES KEDDIE

The Plague of the Philistines, by J. F. D. SHREWSBURY, London, Gollancz, 1964, pp. 189, 25s.

This is a collection of seven essays, the first five of which have appeared elsewhere in some form or other. The longest is yet another discussion of Henry VIII and his ailments. Until some new or well-documented evidence concerning Henry's case becomes available, it would be wiser to avoid more speculation. In the essay, which gives the book its title, Professor Shrewsbury suggests that the disease afflicting the Philistines was bacillary dysentery rather than bubonic plague as often thought. But his main evidence comes partly from the corrupt Vulgate and it is not included in the more accurate versions of the Old Testament. To work only with translations where the whole interpretation may hang on the meaning of one or two words is to court disaster.

The 'Folklore of Pertussis' is an interesting collection of local medical superstitions, and the 'Scourge of St. Kilda' describes tetanus neonatorum in an isolated community. It is curious that in the latter the author makes no mention of Fuller's earth which, as an umbilical dressing, was a frequent cause of the disease. There is nothing new in 'The Saints and Epidemic Diseases' and only out-of-date literature is cited; although Sigerist is mentioned, his classical account of the plague saints ('Sebastian—Apollo', *Arch. Gesch. Med.*, 1927, 19, 301–17) is not acknowledged. 'The Terror by Night' is a slight piece which merely amasses information about bed bugs. This and the final essay, 'Epidemic Diseases and the Colonization of the West Indies', which deals mainly with smallpox and yellow fever, are the only wholly original portions of the book.

EDWIN CLARKE

Curare: Its History and Usage, by K. BRYN THOMAS, London, Pitman Medical Publishing Co., 1964, illus., pp. 144, 30s.

The writing of medical history is beset with the problems of where to start and where to leave off, and the difficulty is not only chronological. Dr. Bryn Thomas's book is a fascinating mixture of social anthropology, exploration history, South American botany, organic chemistry, neuro-physiology and pharmacology, clinical medicine and anaesthesia; his references cover several centuries and extend to 1962. For a total of 96 full pages of text this is pretty good value for money: it goes without saying that the treatment is not excessively detailed, but an excellent balance is maintained and the overall impression is of a useful and enjoyable review. There is an introductory chapter on the earliest 'traveller's tales' from the Amazon and the Orinoco, followed by chapters dealing with early investigators, the botanical problem, the chemical question, the myoneural junction, curare in disease, and twenty-one years of curare in anaesthesia. Finally, there is a brief presentation of early references relating to