

Book Reviews

The way in which the descriptions of objects are linked with the illustrations, furnished by the resources of the Wellcome Institute and the skill of its photographer, makes for ready reference. The Catalogue represents what is in the Wellcome Collection and though amplified by the notes is not held out as a complete guide to all the pharmaceutical glassware of the period though there cannot be much that has eluded the vigilant eyes of the authors. The briefest reference is made to the laboratory equipment used by the small-scale preparer of chemicals and galenicals which, well into the end of the period reviewed, was operated in the back premises of the enterprising chemist and druggist before the era of the manufacturing chemist and wholesaler furnished him with what he needed at no trouble to himself. It may be that this is intended in order to leave the field clear for a separate monograph on chemical glass in which the Wellcome Collection is rich.

The authors by their systematic study have made a most useful addition to the Wellcome Catalogue series and have maintained the high standard now accepted as consonant with publications of the Wellcome Institute.

LESLIE G. MATTHEWS

Die Geschichte der Arzneimittelforschung, by B. ISSEKUTZ, translated into German by Adam Farago, Budapest, Akademiai Kiado, 1971, pp. 651 [no price stated].

Bela Issekutz, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, has, over a long period, collected a large number of references pertaining to the discovery of new medicinal agents and their introduction into therapy. The information is presented in this book which is so packed with names, dates and references that it must be considered a valuable contribution to the reference literature on the history of modern therapy. Its value to the historian, however, rests more on the facts and references it contains than to narrative or interpretation. The introductory section on the history of therapy and pharmacology is short, sketchy and limited in scope. The remainder of the work is divided up in the manner of a modern textbook on clinical pharmacology. The thirty-four chapters are each devoted to a distinct pharmacological group, e.g. analgesics, anticonvulsants, heavy metals, ganglion-blocking agents and anti-carcinogens. Each discovery is discussed in chronological order and related to discoveries and developments in the same branch of pharmacological and therapeutic knowledge. This method of presentation is useful for reference purposes but tends to obscure the significance of an individual piece of research in relation to the total development of modern therapy. It also squeezes out or reduces to a mere passing reference studies which, although they do not fit any of the pharmacological categories, nevertheless had a significant influence on the progress of the science, e.g. Magendie and Delille's experiments with arrow poisons in 1809.

Each section ends with a comprehensive list of references. These lists are impressive and for that reason the reader is warned that there are some gaps. In the section on hypnotics Liebreich's study of chloral is discussed but his 1869 paper on the subject does not appear in the list of references. There is no reference to the work of T. C. Butler who showed that chloral is reduced to trichlorethanol—a conclusion which led to the discovery of the narcotic tribromoethanol. In the literature on curare reference is made to eighteenth-century experiments by C. M. de la Condamine and

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F. Fontana but not to those by Richard Brocklesby and F. D. Hérisant. In general it may be said that this book does not adequately cover the early periods or adequately discuss the older drugs. The people who will find it of greatest use are those preparing lectures in clinical pharmacology, students setting out on research into pharmacological problems and historians of medicine interested in the post-1850 period.

M. P. EARLES

XIle Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences (Paris 1968) Actes, Tome VIII; 'Histoire des Sciences naturelles et de la Biologie', Paris, A. Blanchard, 1971, pp. 228, illus., Fr. 45.

In this well printed and illustrated volume are published forty papers read at the Paris meeting (1968) and devoted to the history of biology and medicine (the latter not mentioned in the title of the book). These are given in alphabetical order of the authors' names. Nine of them (Andreev, Clarke, Goutina, Klein, Levene, Raspadori, Rytel, Tchesnova, Widy-Wirski) deal with medico-historical problems. Most of the articles concern nineteenth- and twentieth-century biology. Some are stimulating and bring new material and ideas, but the drawback of such a publication is that it constitutes a mosaic of facts instead of a consistent corpus discussing and deepening a given question or problem. The time has now come for a suppression of such 'big' congresses and their replacement by Symposia or Colloquia on a restricted theme.

J. THÉODORIDÈS

Irish Peasant Society: Four Historical Essays, by K. H. CONNELL, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, pp. xiii, 167, illus., £1.75.

In this scholarly and entertaining book Professor Connell discusses, using oral and mainly official printed sources, the Irishman's liking for drink and his skill at producing it illicitly; and also examines certain factors that help to explain why Ireland has had a traditionally low illegitimacy rate (lower than Wales, for instance) combined with, since the Famine, an apparent averseness to marriage.

During the 19th century illicit distilling was rampant in Ireland. Not only did it express the peasantry's native genius for flouting authority; on a more practical plane it provided a drink cheaper than 'Parliament whiskey', while at the same time it created work for idle hands and increased the income of peasant, landlord and church alike. It naturally flourished in rural conditions and was able to survive much longer than in urban England where poteen-making (an Irish activity) went on the decline after 1870. The story of how it once prospered is a fascinating one and is told here with great skill and ample documentation.

Ether-drinking, subject of a second essay, was localized to the area in Ulster between Loughs Erne and Neagh. It was indulged in mainly by Catholic small farmers and labourers who, like drug-takers today, sought a cheap and easy passage into fairyland. ('You always heard music and you'd be cocking your ears at it . . . Others would see men climbing up the walls and going through the roof, or coming in . . . down the walls, nice and easy.') Increasingly from about 1850 onwards supplies of ether made their way from Britain into the shops of apothecaries and grocers and were bought in