

Book Notices

G. J. FRAENKEL, *Hugh Cairns: first Nuffield Professor of Surgery, University of Oxford*, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. xviii, 296, illus., £35.00 (019-26095-9).

Any number of medical figures would make good biographical candidates for someone studying twentieth-century history. Hugh Cairns's life would suggest he was high on the list. Rhodes Scholar, Gallipoli veteran, Harvey Cushing student, Nuffield Professor, Balliol man and eminent neurosurgeon are but a few of the features which distinguished him. This biography is unashamedly a tribute by a former pupil of Cairns. As befits the Cushing-Cairns tradition it is as meticulous and thorough as a neurosurgical operation. Also, like the neurosurgical operation, the book does not concentrate on anything but the local details of the task in hand. Nor are there footnotes. It is, however, extremely informative, especially on such matters as the formation of the Oxford Clinical School, medical training and, more subtly, the values and personal connections of the mid-twentieth-century medical elite. It is a good read too, full of material from Cairns's diaries. Among the delights for the historian of the historiography of medicine is the appearance of Francis Schiller at Cairns's side in the operating theatre.

CLAUDE QUÉTEL, *History of syphilis*, transl. Judith Braddock and Brian Pike, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press, 1990, pp. vii, 342, illus., £35.00 (0-7456-0490-0).

Syphilis has generated a large number of historical studies, but, until now, there has not been an adequate, accessible, full-length study of the pox. This book, which runs from the fifteenth century to the present, fills that space. The survey covers the origins and spread of the disorder, medical theories, therapeutics, lay and literary opinion and the social history of campaigns to eradicate the disease. The study is refreshingly broad and the author illustrates his themes from a variety of sources, not only medical texts but plays, posters and propaganda material. Occasionally the drama conveyed by this highly readable narrative substitutes for more careful appraisal. Thus we are told that even though, by 1905, there was "no more doubt: the spirochaete was undeniably the syphilis microbe", we are then informed that "the news of the discovery was greeted with scepticism in Germany" (p. 140). Notwithstanding such infelicities the volume can be highly recommended as a stimulating introduction to the subject.

G. E. BERRIOS and H. L. FREEMAN (eds), *Alzheimer and the dementias*, Eponymists in Medicine, London, Royal Society of Medicine Services Ltd., 1991, pp. vi, 149, illus., £12.95 (hardback, 1-85315-157-3), £7.95 (paperback, 1-85315-156-4).

Alzheimer's is a disease which has attracted substantial medical concern only in the last twenty years. Epidemiologically, its history is thus obscure. None the less, it occupies an important position in the history of the development of concepts of dementia, and in the identification of different types of this distressing disorder. In this excellent short monograph, Germaine Berrios and Hugh Freeman have brought together a collection of essays which will be an essential handbook for anyone interested in exploring the history of this increasingly publicized—and in view of ageing Western populations, increasingly important—type of illness. The editors' own essay, on dementia before the twentieth century, which places Alzheimer's ideas within the broad context of contemporary and preceding European views on dementia, is especially valuable. All the essays are clearly and comprehensibly written. There is no bibliography, but the extensive footnote references furnish a most useful guide to the current medical and historical literature.

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FRANÇOIS DELAPORTE, *The history of yellow fever: an essay on the birth of tropical medicine*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 1991, pp. xvi, 181, £19.95.

The history of the American south and of the Spanish Main would have been far less painful had it not been for yellow fever, a disease whose causation and epidemiology for centuries eluded medical observers. Responsibility for the eventual discovery, in 1900, that the disease was transmitted by a mosquito has been a source of competition and conflict between Cuban and American historians. In this book, a Frenchman takes up a judicial position to sort out the truth in this primacy issue, and determines, essentially, in favour of the English, who put both the Cubans and the Americans on the right track. This is a very French book, intricately argued, constructed like a detective story and embellished by descriptive vignettes; its focus is a rather small point in the wider history of tropical medicine; but at least we may now hope that this particular primacy issue has been settled.

RICHARD OLSON, *Science deified and science defied: the historical significance of science in Western culture*, vol. 2, *From the early modern age through the early romantic era, ca. 1640 to ca. 1820*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, University of California Press, 1990, pp. xi, 445, illus., \$45.00 (0-520-06846-7).

This is the second volume that Richard Olson has devoted to a project of very ambitious scope: nothing less than tracing “the historical significance of science in western culture”. The first volume, covering the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance periods, was published in 1982. We are told that a third will complete the work. The project takes for granted the integrity of “western civilization”, as it has traditionally been taught in American universities, and the continuity of a tradition of “science” within it.

Soranus' gynecology, transl. Owsei Temkin, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. xlix, 258, £13.50 (paperback, 0-8018-4320-0).

Soranus of Ephesus, the Greek doctor who lived in the second century AD, is known to historians of medicine for his work on gynaecology and obstetrics, the only surviving complete Greek work on that topic since Hippocrates, and secondly, for being a representative of the Methodist school which differentiated itself from both the Dogmatists and the Empiricists in its attitude towards disease causation.

Johns Hopkins has re-published in a paperback edition Temkin's English translation of Soranus' *Gynecology* which first appeared in hardback in 1956. Though Temkin, in the introduction to the translation, announces that his aim is to address the non-classicist reader, this book is extremely valuable for historians of ancient medicine as it addresses some of the problems they face in finding correct translations for Greek words, especially in materia medica. A demanding reader would expect from a reissue more notes and a longer introduction. Yet the value of having a reprint in paperback is definitely great.

BOOK ALSO RECEIVED

(The inclusion of a title does not preclude the possibility of subsequent review. Items received, other than those assigned for review, are ultimately incorporated into the collection of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.)

Bibliography of the history of medicine, National Library of Medicine, no. 26, Bethesda, MD, US Department of Health and Human Services, 1991, pp. x, 384, \$22.50 (worldwide), \$18.00 (USA).

Questions d'Histoire de la Médecine, Actes du 113^e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes, Paris, Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, 1991, pp. 115, 110 Frs (2-7355-0224-4).

Report of proceedings of the Scottish Society of the History of Medicine, Session 1984-1985, pp. 42, Session 1985-1986, pp. 44.