

Book Reviews

to the splendid Lawrence Reynolds Historical Library in the Birmingham Medical Centre and the cordiality of its custodian, Mrs. Martha Lou Thomas.

This volume traces the life of Osler through this refreshing and friendly correspondence. The first letter, when Osler was fifteen years of age, is dated 10 January 1865. It was written from Dundas to Milburn at Oakville because the Christmas vacation had separated them. The last, written from 13 Norham Gardens on 25 November 1919, also carried Christmas greetings. It reached Ned Milburn together with a cheque two or three days before Christmas—a fateful Christmas since Osler died on the afternoon of 29 December 1919.

This lifetime span enables us to retread Osler's triumphant progress from Barrie Grammar School to Trinity College Grammar School, Weston, where he became head prefect and excelled in the school sports; to a Dickson Scholarship at Trinity College, Toronto in 1867; and thereafter to the Toronto Medical School for a short spell. He entered McGill in 1870, graduated in 1872, and joined the medical faculty in 1874, first as a lecturer and soon as professor. Then came letters in turn from 131 South 15th Street, Philadelphia, 1 West Franklin Street, Baltimore, and finally Norham Gardens, Oxford. The earliest Oxford letters came from 7 Norham Gardens, a temporary abode until the Oslers moved into No. 13, which became known as 'The Open Arms'. Along the road, there are holiday letters from Llandulas, North Wales, and picture postcards from Cairo, the Upper Nile and Sorrento.

This is a treasure-house of Osleriana—his letters, examples of his handwriting and photographs of him—so there is something for everyone, whether he loves the aura or detests the myth surrounding this great personality.

D. GERAINT JAMES

Milestones in Midwifery, by WALTER RADCLIFFE, Bristol, John Wright, 1967, pp. x, 110, illus., 25s. 0d.

Milestones in Midwifery is a history of obstetrics from the earliest times up to the nineteenth century. It is full of accurate details, but not so full that the absorbing narrative is lost. It will help most people who have a smattering of knowledge of the subject to piece their mental pictures together and correct their chronology.

After summarizing the history of midwifery before the first printed textbook on the subject appeared in 1513, the author takes us through the succeeding centuries and traces progress by reference to the printed books as they appeared, and to teachers who were outstanding. The descriptions are of people, and what they did and wrote, and the whole makes up a fascinating story.

Here and there the author compares or contrasts the methods described with those accepted at the present time, and it is evident that he is an experienced obstetrician, a fact which adds to the value of the book and puts him in sympathy with the modern reader.

I have only found two historical errors; James Young Simpson's other assistant when he tried chloroform with Matthews Duncan was George Skene Keith, not his younger brother Thomas, as stated on page 81; and of course in the British Isles the first maternity hospitals were the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin and the British Lying-in Hospital in Brownlow Street, London.

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This is the kind of book which is given to a doctor, whether he is a gynaecologist or not, or to a midwife, particularly a midwifery teacher, for a birthday or Christmas present, and so it should have had a richer binding and more illustrations. An additional five or seven shillings on the price would not have deterred this class of purchaser and it would have made a much more attractive and durable volume.

Such a book should have a large circulation. It is very likely to cause the reader to become keen on obstetric history and in any case it is a convenient reference book for one not too deeply involved in medical history. The index is quite good.

ALISTAIR GUNN

Boec van Medicinen in Dietsche: een Middelnederlandse Compilatie van medisch-farmaceutische Literatuur, ed. by W. F. DAEMS (*Janus*, supplements, vol. vii), Leiden, Brill, 1967, pp. 361, 60 guilders.

The reading of this excellent edition of a Middle Netherlandish medical text makes one wish that we had in England a few comparable scholars to deal with vernacular English texts that contain similar material. Dr. Daems elicits so much information from this apparently anonymous compilation that one feels how valuable would be the results from the application of the same techniques to our own medieval books.

The book is concerned, apart from editing the text, with a discussion of the author and copyist of the manuscript, the sources from which the material has been derived, the pharmacy and materia medica, and a glossary of plant names. Although a Brother Thomas and Brother Aernt, both connected with the Franciscans, are mentioned in the first half of the manuscript, the exact identification of either cannot be fixed owing to the lack of documentary evidence, though Dr. Daems suggests some possibilities. On the sources of the book we are on firmer ground and it is in this section of his study that the editor shows his undoubted expertise, analysing systematically the teaching on uroscopy, herbals, diseases, Galenic pharmacy, gynaecological and obstetrical matters, Platearius' glosses on the *antidotarium* and regimen. This section is extremely valuable. The next part on pharmacy deals with the raw materials (animal, mineral and vegetable,) their preparation and the different forms in which they were administered. This is followed by an examination of the plant names and their possible identification, with a list of synonyms gathered from manuscript and published material, a difficult but important contribution. The work closes with various indexes, biographical notices and an extensive bibliography, a model of its kind and a tribute to its author.

In such a book, containing a wealth of detail, some misprints are to be expected, but it is surprising how few there are, and I mention the following, not as a criticism, but for the sake of completeness: p. 32, *propositum*; p. 36, *simplicia*; p. 40, *prope*; p. 43, *consueuerunt*; p. 43, *comburatur odor*; p. 47, *Petri hyspani*; p. 52, *prospera*; p. 63, *Index Sermonum*.

Dr. Daems is to be congratulated on his achievement, which should be an encouragement and stimulus to others to engage in the same kind of studies. This is the kind of book we need if our knowledge of medieval medicine is to be enlarged.

C. H. TALBOT