

Book Reviews

Only three of the essays are taken from *Aequanimitas*, which is still readily available. The value of the collection is greatly enhanced by the commentaries of the fourteen distinguished American medical specialists and librarians, which puts each essay critically in perspective. In the sum of its parts, it is a book which may be read and enjoyed by those who are interested in medical education and its destination.

A Way of Life has been described as 'a lay sermon which an archbishop might not be ashamed to have written'. The way of life that it preaches is the practice of living for the day only, and for the day's work, *Life in day-tight compartments*. It is an elegantly produced volume, which arrives from the publisher unopened. Part of the preparation for its reading is the leisurely opening of the leaves with your silver-bladed knife. If you like a sermon, this is a good one.

JOHN CULE

Simpson and Syme of Edinburgh, by JOHN A. SHEPHERD, Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone, 1969, pp. xvi, 288, illus., £2.10.

This account of the lives of James Syme and James Young Simpson provides the opportunity for Mr. Shepherd to give a fascinating impression of Edinburgh and its medical school during the nineteenth century. Syme and Simpson were born in 1799 and 1811 respectively and both died in 1870. Except for Syme's brief appointment to University College Hospital, London, both spent their professional lives in Edinburgh. The characters of the two men are assessed and it is remarkable how different they were. Syme's personality demands sympathetic study and considerable insight, and this the author shows throughout. Simpson's dynamic drive is evident and so is his relentless pursuit of knowledge. A lesser character might have made Simpson's discoveries; but it needed the great Simpson to publicize them and develop them so that in no time medicine had been transformed.

Some writers have suggested that Simpson does not deserve the credit for the striking advance made when chloroform anaesthesia was introduced. This is the continuation of opposition he encountered all his life. His revelation of his discovery was perhaps the quickest in medical history. John Burton, John Leake, Charles White and Alexander Gordon showed that puerperal fever is contagious, but it needed Oliver Wendell Holmes to make the world accept the fact. Simpson discovered and publicized as well. Advances and discoveries have had to be presented to the profession in a convincing manner or there is no progress.

Mr. Shepherd's description of Acupressure explains why the theory of Simpson was such an important concept in the surgery of the time.

So many biographies are eulogistic to the point of nausea, but this one not at all. It is a book which the most critical will enjoy and read to the end. In fact, it is just the birthday present for the doctor, young or old, particularly the one who has no liking for fiction and whose dislikes make him hard to please.

The references make the book a work for the medical historian; but they do not impinge on the reader because they and the associated notes are given at the end of the book.

ALISTAIR GUNN