

Book Reviews

Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim which is permissible on one occasion, but unnecessary in its repetition on p. 111 as Phillipus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus Paracelsus von Hohenheim. Again Dr. Copeman quotes Simpson's recent book about the seven physicians whom Shakespeare introduces into his plays as 'learned, dignified and on occasion beneficent [*sic*] and generous characters'. Yet surely Dr. Caius in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' cuts a very poor figure in the play—undignified, reviled and bullied.

Many other minor criticisms might be made, but these do not detract from the value of this book, which is a pleasure to read, and serves admirably to illustrate the medicine of the Tudor period.

COHEN OF BIRKENHEAD

Pages in the History of Chest Surgery. RUDOLF NISSEN, M.D., and ROGER H. L. WILSON, M.B., B.CHIR. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1960; pp. 166. Illustrated. (No price given.)

This small book is based on a lecture on 'The Romance of Thoracic Surgery' given by the senior author in 1953. In spite of its 166 pages it can be read comfortably within the hour usually allotted for a lecture. This is because the text is short and concise and the illustrations predominate; each section is also followed by abundant and important references.

The illustrations comprise photographs or portraits of many of the pioneers of thoracic surgery and reproductions of the title page or first pages of many of the important original articles. These alone constitute an additional and separate text and are interesting, informative and valuable for reference.

Inevitably, in such a short work, the subject is treated briefly even though the abundant illustrations pack more into it. The presentation of the historical development of thoracic surgery is well done and it is of special interest in that Professor Nissen himself has played such an important part in this study: partly through his earlier associations with the Sauerbruch School of Surgery at the Charité in Berlin and partly because of his own practical contributions, chief among which is the first pneumonectomy, done as a two-stage procedure in 1931.

Particularly interesting is his comment on page 13 that Sauerbruch actually delayed the development in Germany of thoracic surgical techniques that were coming into use in other countries. This, of course, was always one of the great dangers of the earlier organization of the German professorial system if the chief had fixed erroneous views. In this instance Sauerbruch erred in resisting the development of intratracheal anaesthesia when his own low pressure and positive pressure techniques failed. 'There was complete lack of any type of organization of anaesthesia. Sauerbruch opposed subspecialization within the main speciality of surgery.'

The story quickly embraces the basic problems such as open pneumothorax, anaesthesia and then the various sections such as pulmonary resection, surgery in pulmonary tuberculosis, surgery of the oesophagus and, of course, the very recent and dramatically swift development of the surgery of the heart; the authors allude to this as 'explosive' in its rapidity.

In addition to the straightforward presentation of the historic facts an attempt is made to present the philosophic and other features behind the rather late development of thoracic surgery and their relation to the basic approach to the whole of medicine and surgery. This in itself is an interesting presentation.

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The merits of this book are considerable. It is a pity that it is in part marred by a number of printing and grammatical errors and, at times, rather poor English. For instance on page 130 we read 'the invention of the X-ray . . . by Wilhelm Roentgen'.

This is the third book on the history of thoracic surgery to appear during the last few months. Its brevity and concise presentation ensure that it will be widely read, just as much as its soundness will justify it. It is also a very useful book of reference.

RUSSELL BROCK

Laennec. His Life and Times. ROGER KERVRAN, M.D., translated from the French by D. C. ABRAHAMS-CURIEL. London: Pergamon Press, 1960; pp. 213, 215.

Rene-Théophile-Hyacinthe Laennec, in his short life of forty-five years, has captivated the interest and imagination of students throughout the world and by his contributions to medicine has joined the immortals. His statue has been cast in metal and his portrait painted in oils, carved in wood, medallioned in bronze and his name given to one of the most famous hospitals in the world. Books have been written about him and his theses reprinted many times, but until now the intimate details of his life have not been given to us. Laennec remained in our minds as a great physician, a professor of medicine, one of the pioneers in the study of consumption, a student who made remarkable contributions to medicine in his undergraduate years or the inventor of the stethoscope.

Laennec was a Breton and only another Breton could have described the local colour and intimacy of his home life as is presented in this book. Its author has the added qualification of having made a life study of tuberculosis.

Laennec was born in 1781. He had a difficult home life being brought up by an uncle though his father was alive. He experienced the blood bath that took place when the Revolution hit the town of Nantes. His life was throughout beset by poverty and disappointment. His brilliance caused jealousy in high circles and only when dying did he receive any real recognition or financial help.

The book ends with the last pathetic journey back to his native heath. It is a pity it lacks a portrait, a simple map of Brittany and an index, and there is an error on page 90 where Cosmas and Damian are stated to have been martyred in the fourteenth century. The emperor Diocletian was responsible a thousand years earlier. But these are small points. This fine biography makes remarkably good reading.

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