

### Book Reviews

suspicious and sceptical of Mundinus' work, banned it in some places. Furthermore, it is of interest that most of the few extant copies of the *Commentaria* have clean, un-fingered pages, that there was only one edition, and that Gesner does not mention it in his *Universal Library* of 1545. Could it be, therefore, that the *Commentaria*, unlike the *Isagogae breves*, was rarely consulted by medical men of the sixteenth century and that it thus had less influence on the advance of medicine than the contents deserved?

EDWIN CLARKE

*Le Choléra. La Première Epidémie du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle.* Etude collective par LOUIS CHEVALIER.

La Roche-sur-Yon: Imprimerie Centrale de l'Ouest, 1958; pp. xvii, 188. 750 francs.

Cholera to nineteenth-century Europe was what plague had been to it in earlier periods. Although much has been written on the medical aspects of the several epidemics which swept across the continent as part of more extensive pandemics, few serious attempts have been made to place them accurately against their historical background. It is the object of this book to do so with the 1831-2 outbreak, and to show that in the life of a nation a biological catastrophe is just as important as a major upheaval such as a war, because of the social and political disturbances which invariably accompany it.

The disease in Paris, Lille, Normandy, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Russia and England is discussed by ten collaborators, the last-named being dealt with by Professor D. E. C. Eversley of Birmingham. Each section has adequate reference to the literature, and maps and charts are included; there is, however, no index. An interesting introduction deals with demographical, historical, social and political aspects of the subject and then each locality is considered in turn. In Paris, as elsewhere, the lower classes were principally affected so it is natural that the government and *bourgeoisie* were blamed. The industrial city of Lille was attacked very severely by cholera and the authors, in this excellent section, trace social, industrial, sanitary, nutritional and economic factors which probably contributed to this. In Russia, the epidemic led to demands for a more progressive governing body, whilst in England it coincided with the 1832 Reform Act unrest. But of equal importance in Britain was the attention it drew to the need for better sanitary conditions and for adequate control of them. It soon became clear that the State must shoulder these and other national responsibilities, many of which were by-products of industrialization.

The importance of discussing medical events in relationship with other factors controlling or influencing man's existence is obvious enough, yet the approach is not employed with the frequency it deserves. This monograph is a commendable effort to do so and should prove to be of great interest and value to workers in several disciplines.

EDWIN CLARKE

*Essays on the First Hundred Years of Anaesthesia* (Vol. 1). W. STANLEY SYKES. Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1960; pp. 171. Illustrated. 30s.

This book presents us with a series of essays, connected chiefly by Dr. Sykes's enthusiasm and perseverance in card-indexing hundreds of references from the early journals, which he has ransacked for details of anaesthetic processes.

Dr. Sykes has also made a collection of over five thousand photographs of anaesthetic and other apparatus. Unfortunately, he has reproduced very few of these in his book, merely enough to whet the appetite for more. In this connexion, it would

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surely have been justifiable to exclude some of the plates shown (for instance, Queen Victoria, whose appearance is well known) in favour of some specimens from his collection.

The author has been led away from his primary object of telling us about these specimens by the many exciting stories which he has discovered (though not all are new) on the way.

The priority of Dr. William Scott's administration of ether at Dumfries on 19 December 1847 (two days before Liston's amputation at University College Hospital) has led Dr. Sykes up a tortuous path of research. It is a pity that he was unable to discover more about the Dr. Fraser who is supposed to have carried the news of ether across the Atlantic.

In following the story of Morton's first use of ether, Dr. Sykes has brought to light the little-known facts that Morton had used ether in thirty-seven cases before the historic operation at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and that he used to give large doses of laudanum as pre-medication. It is strange that this interesting reference has not been quoted before.

The essay on curare is misleading. No mention is made of the liana, the *Chondrodendron tomentosum*, from which our modern d-tubocurarine is prepared. The impression is given that the important plant is the *Strychnos toxifera*, which is certainly used in the preparation of the native arrow-poisons, but which does not contain tubocurarine among its alkaloids.

Dr. Sykes writes in a lively, if rather jerky, and sometimes, too casual style. This reviewer may be old-fashioned, but he does like to see a verb in a sentence (*vide* pp. 71, 124).

The book is produced in the careful manner which characterizes the house of Livingstone, but the index is too selective. This is a book which anaesthetists should read for its many pieces of information upon their speciality. The medical historian will require more cohesion and co-ordination.

K. BRYN THOMAS

*A Catalogue of the Portraits and other Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture in the Royal College of Surgeons of England.* W. R. LE FANU. Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1960; pp. xii, 301. Plates (4 coloured). 30s.

This magnificent catalogue records 245 portraits of surgeons and 113 other works of art which are in the possession of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The medical corporations are great repositories of art, and the Surgeons' collection, containing as it does pictures inherited from the old Company of Surgeons, items commissioned by John Hunter, and examples of the work of many modern portrait painters, ranks among the most important of its kind. Considered solely as examples of portraiture, not all the pictures come up to the standard of Romney's 'Percivall Pott' or Reynolds's 'John Hunter', but the great majority are works of the finest quality. As a portrait gallery of the makers of British surgery the collection is unrivalled; as a collection representative of the work of leading portrait painters and sculptors, from Holbein to Epstein, it will be valued by all lovers of art. Mr. W. R. Le Fanu, the Librarian of the College and the compiler of this catalogue, has catered both for the medical historian and the art lover. Full descriptions of the pictures and busts are provided, together with notes on copies, derivative works and engravings, published reproductions, provenance, and many other interesting details.