

## Book Reviews

of real merit. Naturally the growing recognition of dermatology as a genuine medical specialty was a contributing factor, too.

The story of this struggle for recognition, frequently for continued existence, and finally a more placid development, edited by Dr. Brian Russell and in considerable part presented through excerpts from contemporary publications, is an interesting one which will naturally appeal to all those concerned with the development of dermatology and, additionally, to all with an interest more generally in the growth of British medicine during the last hundred years. The book is concluded by a series of chronologically arranged appendices providing the sequence of annual orations, various individual facts of interest, important dates, statistics, and staff members.

FRANCES KEDDIE

*The Plague of the Philistines*, by J. F. D. SHREWSBURY, London, Gollancz, 1964, pp. 189, 25s.

This is a collection of seven essays, the first five of which have appeared elsewhere in some form or other. The longest is yet another discussion of Henry VIII and his ailments. Until some new or well-documented evidence concerning Henry's case becomes available, it would be wiser to avoid more speculation. In the essay, which gives the book its title, Professor Shrewsbury suggests that the disease afflicting the Philistines was bacillary dysentery rather than bubonic plague as often thought. But his main evidence comes partly from the corrupt Vulgate and it is not included in the more accurate versions of the Old Testament. To work only with translations where the whole interpretation may hang on the meaning of one or two words is to court disaster.

The 'Folklore of Pertussis' is an interesting collection of local medical superstitions, and the 'Scourge of St. Kilda' describes tetanus neonatorum in an isolated community. It is curious that in the latter the author makes no mention of Fuller's earth which, as an umbilical dressing, was a frequent cause of the disease. There is nothing new in 'The Saints and Epidemic Diseases' and only out-of-date literature is cited; although Sigerist is mentioned, his classical account of the plague saints ('Sebastian—Apollo', *Arch. Gesch. Med.*, 1927, 19, 301–17) is not acknowledged. 'The Terror by Night' is a slight piece which merely amasses information about bed bugs. This and the final essay, 'Epidemic Diseases and the Colonization of the West Indies', which deals mainly with smallpox and yellow fever, are the only wholly original portions of the book.

EDWIN CLARKE

*Curare: Its History and Usage*, by K. BRYN THOMAS, London, Pitman Medical Publishing Co., 1964, illus., pp. 144, 30s.

The writing of medical history is beset with the problems of where to start and where to leave off, and the difficulty is not only chronological. Dr. Bryn Thomas's book is a fascinating mixture of social anthropology, exploration history, South American botany, organic chemistry, neuro-physiology and pharmacology, clinical medicine and anaesthesia; his references cover several centuries and extend to 1962. For a total of 96 full pages of text this is pretty good value for money: it goes without saying that the treatment is not excessively detailed, but an excellent balance is maintained and the overall impression is of a useful and enjoyable review. There is an introductory chapter on the earliest 'traveller's tales' from the Amazon and the Orinoco, followed by chapters dealing with early investigators, the botanical problem, the chemical question, the myoneural junction, curare in disease, and twenty-one years of curare in anaesthesia. Finally, there is a brief presentation of early references relating to

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other relaxant drugs. Inevitably, each reader will be tempted to think that he might have selected differently from the wealth of legend and fact surrounding the strange story of curare; but there is none who will fail to be grateful to the author for the meticulous care with which he has gathered his material, and the charm of its presentation. There are some good pictures, and a useful index.

JAMES PARKHOUSE

*Things for the Surgeon: A History of the body-snatchers*, by HUBERT COLE, London, Heinemann, 1964, pp. 174, 1964, illus., 30s.

The author has presented a sensational account of the trade of resurrectionists, the men who, in the years before the passing of the Anatomy Acts, supplied the human material requisite for the training of anatomists and surgeons. The gaps left by lack of authentic details have been filled with commendable ingenuity; it is a pity, however, that in some cases where the facts were readily available, they have been misrepresented or ignored. It was, for instance, William and not John Hunter who founded the Windmill School of Anatomy. But this is a book that will undoubtedly have a strong appeal for those who are fascinated by this somewhat unsavoury but necessary aspect of the anatomists' and surgeons' craft.

JESSIE DOBSON

*Footprints on the Sands of Time, The Story of the House of Livingstone 1863-1963*, Edinburgh, E. and S. Livingstone, 1963, pp. 71 [no price given].

This little book was issued at the time of the centenary in 1963 of the publishing firm of Messrs. E. and S. Livingstone, and it unfolds a story as exciting as any to be found in human achievement.

The business was started in May 1863 by Edward Livingstone, who chose a shop exactly opposite the entrance to the university, where he proposed to trade as a new and second-hand bookseller. Two years later his brother, Stuart Moodie Livingstone, joined him in partnership. The strategic position of the shop brought the staff in contact with students and their problems and it was with precise knowledge of the needs to be fulfilled that they were able to select the books they undertook to publish, an aim that has been maintained throughout the years. From these early times there grew a tradition of generous support for university and civic activities and assistance and encouragement for young students. Among the many distinguished students known to them was Robert Louis Stevenson, whose first literary venture was supported by the Livingstone brothers; *The Edinburgh University Magazine* first appeared in January 1871 and Stevenson wrote in his *Memories and Portraits*: 'I went home that morning walking upon air.'

Soon after the new Medical Buildings opened in 1881, a 'medical branch' was opened in Teviot Place and Messrs. E. and S. Livingstone came to be recognized as the leading medical booksellers and printers in the capital.

This is a story of devotion, loyalty and industry, delightfully told and plentifully illustrated, an inspiration to all, whatever their activities. It has been produced with the high standard of printing, arrangement and accuracy that is the hall-mark of this fine firm.

JESSIE DOBSON

*Contraception Through the Ages*, by B. E. FINCH and H. GREEN, London, Peter Owen, 1963, pp. 174, 25s.

This interesting book reviews the history of the folklore, beliefs and methods of birth control from prehistoric days to the 'pill'. Though intended for the lay public it can