

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 There is nothing new in 'The Saints and Epidemic Diseases' and only out-of-date literature is cited; although Sigerist is mentioned, his classical account of the plague saints ('Sebastian—Apollo', *Arch.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