

Book Reviews

Otto Loewi: Ein Lebensbild in Dokumenten, by F. LEMBECK and W. GIERE, Berlin and New York, Springer Verlag, 1968, pp. xii, 241, illus., DM. 36, \$9.00

Otto Loewi was born in Frankfurt in 1873, became professor of pharmacology in Graz in 1909 and laid the foundation of the theory of neurochemical transmission in 1920. For this he shared a Nobel prize with Dale in 1936, and in 1938, for being Jewish, he was briefly imprisoned and then expelled from Australia. He then emigrated to the United States where he spent the rest of his life. Loewi wrote a brilliant autobiographical memoir for *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* which is reprinted here and in its original English version. Strangely, although Loewi mentions T. R. Elliott and his paper of 1905, this appears not to have influenced, at any rate consciously, the development of Loewi's own ideas about chemical transmission.

To anyone contemplating writing a biography of Loewi or a history of physiology in the first few decades of the century, this book will be an essential source. It can also be warmly recommended to anyone with even only a modest interest in Loewi—but also, of course, with at least a modest ability to read German. The structure of this book is somewhat unconventional: the autobiographical article together with a number of other short pieces by Loewi, also in English, make up about a quarter of the book. There is the usual bibliography but also a substantial section which classifies Loewi's output, and comments on the principal papers. There is ample evidence here that Loewi would have been a major figure even had he not been a founding father of the theory of neurochemical transmission. The remainder of the book is devoted to a fascinating sequence of footnotes which fill out the details and give one a sense of the reality of the events which made up Loewi's life. They are mainly in the form of quotations, many of which testify to the affection he attracted.

B. L. GINSBORG

Geschichte der Medizin: Einführung in ihre Grundzüge, by ALEXANDER METTE and IRENA WINTER, East Berlin, Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1968, pp. 553, illus., £3 6s. 6d.

This hardback on the history of medicine comes from the Humboldt University, East Berlin, where both editors are staff members. The blurb indicates that it is written from the standpoint of dialectical materialism. The chapter headings confirm this approach, starting with medicine in ancient times, following with medicine in the age of slavery, medicine and feudalism, medicine and the beginnings of capitalism, and finally, medicine and the rise of socialism.

The philosophy of the work is crystallized in the contribution on hygiene and microbiology by the Professor of Medical History, Dietrich Tutzke.

Here, although some grudging credit is given to the work of Chadwick, Southwood Smith, Simon and Farr, and to the English concept of Public Health, the author hails the 'revolutionary advances' of Virchow, Neumann and Leubuscher as the vanguard of social medicine in Germany and Austria.

Later on, no mention is made of the British National Health Service and the welfare state, but praise is given to the Russian hygienist Semaschko who died in 1949.

The book ends with a revealing chapter on military medicine, in which the role of the Soviet Army Medical Service during the 'Great Patriotic War' is given due

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prominence, not forgetting its contribution to the development of the present army of the German Democratic Republic!

Those who like their history slanted will find much to comfort them here. Others who prefer objectivity will have to look elsewhere.

I. M. LIBRACH

Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings, ed. by GEOFFREY KEYNES, London, Faber & Faber, 1968, pp. 416, illus., 50s.

Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Geoffrey Keynes have this in common, that both were and are devoted to medicine and literature. However, Sir Geoffrey would seem to have the edge on Sir Thomas in that he is distinguished in both, whereas Sir Thomas's medical contributions were of no great importance.

In 1964 Sir Geoffrey edited the complete works of Browne in four volumes. The increasing interest in his life and work made it desirable to publish a short single-volume selection of his writings—not only his shorter well-known contributions such as *Religio Medici* and *Urne-Burial*—but also a wider sample of his other writings and letters.

I confess to ignorance of the latter and was surprised at their variety, random examples being—*Of the causes of Common Errors*, *Of the Elephant*, *Of the Basilisk*, *Of Swimming and Floating*, *Of the Picture of the Pelecan*, *Of the Picture of the Serpent tempting Eve*, *Bibliotheca Abscondita*, letters to Thomas Browne (his son) to Henry Power and to Daniel King.

Keynes writes a full introduction to Browne's life. Although he had twelve children, only four survived. His elder son, Edward, became a doctor but did not inherit his father's literary gifts.

It would obviously be unwise of me to attempt a critical review of these essays and belles lettres except to say that at times they tend to be verbose and obscure, and even sanctimonious. One wonders whether he himself acted on the good advice he was wont to hand out to others! He seems to have been a kindly sensitive man, keenly aware of the limitations of this world, but rather more optimistic than one would expect.

The book is 416 pages long and elegantly produced. It is cheap at fifty shillings and will serve as an excellent comprehensive introduction to a fascinating subject.

I. M. LIBRACH

Histoire de la Médecine, by ROGER BOUISSOU, Paris, Larousse, 1967, pp. 383, illus., no price stated.

This semi-stiff backed addition to the 'Livre de Poche' series will attract many readers. It is profusely illustrated and racily, even dramatically, written. No medical historian will or should use it for reference, but this is not its purpose. It is incidentally the first book, to my knowledge, to describe Oribasius as the 'First Larousse Médical'.

E. GASKELL