

Book Reviews

Selected Writings of Sir Arthur Hurst (1879–1944), ed. by THOMAS HUNT, London, British Society of Gastroenterology, 1970, pp. xiv, 218, illus., £2.00 (£1.50 to members of the Society).

Hurst was probably the most original thinker of his contemporary physicians. Indomitable in the face of deafness and chronic asthma he was an iconoclast, destroying long-held beliefs based on flimsy foundations. Thus his work on radiography of the alimentary tract exploded the fiction of various intra-abdominal ptoses as being capable of causing symptoms, and his contributions leading up to 'The Sins and Sorrows of the Colon', arrested the widespread and harmful indulgence in purgatives. The still more noxious belief in intestinal toxæmia, which led to colectomy for conditions ranging from thyrotoxicosis to backache, he likewise demonstrated as a myth.

His brilliant and versatile mind did not, however, include the power of critical appraisal of his sometimes hastily conceived theories. Recurrence of carcinoma in the remnant of the stomach he persistently asserted was a redevelopment of the disease arising from residual gastritis. His ingrained suspicion of surgery gave him an unduly optimistic view of the treatment of ulcerative colitis with anti-dysenteric serum, and of duodenal ulcer with medical care. He would not have been at home in the present climate of double-blind trials and statisticians.

Dr. Hunt has succeeded remarkably in presenting a picture of Hurst by the painstaking selection of some 41 papers from 250 contributions, many in French and German, written from 1901 to 1944. The war neuroses, radiography and the colon will probably be regarded as the most permanent of a series of outstanding achievements.

From those of us who knew and admired Hurst, and from all gastroenterologists a debt of gratitude is due to Dr. Hunt for a labour of love so efficiently completed.

A. H. DOUTHWAITE

Johann Jakob Wepfer (1620–1695) als klinischer Praktiker, by PIETRO EICHENBERGER, (Basler Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Biologie, Fasc. XXVI), Basle and Stuttgart, Schwabe, 1969, pp. 142, illus., S.Fr./DM. 24.

Zur Geschichte der Hämophilie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schweiz, by HANS HÄFLIGER (Basler Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Biologie, Fasc. XXVIII), Basle and Stuttgart, Schwabe, 1969, pp. 99, S.Fr./DM. 18.

These two volumes are Nos. 26 and 28 in the series of Basle historical monographs edited by Professor H. Buess, of the Institute of the History of Medicine, Basle University. The first is a biography of the life and work of the seventeenth-century Swiss physician Johann Jakob Wepfer. He was born in Schaffhausen in 1620 and died of severe aortic sclerosis, which he diagnosed himself, in 1695.

His family came from the Canton Thurgau where his ancestor Michael Wepfer had settled in 1529. The family contained many doctors, burgomasters, guildmasters and judges. Johann Jakob was the eldest son of a guildmaster. After studying in Strasburg he worked in Basle under Caspar Bauhin and the young Felix Platter, and in Padua with Thomas Bartholin. In 1647 he was chosen to be Stadtärzt of his native city.

In 1650 he married Barbara von Wildenberg by whom he had eight children—three

Book Reviews

sons and five daughters—five of whom survived. The youngest girl married a Dozent of Heidelberg, whilst the eldest married Johann Conrad Peyer—who described the ‘patches’ named after him.

Wepfer was a popular man who was consulted from far and wide in Switzerland and Germany—as a map on page 37 shows. The medico-literary memoirs of the Wepfer family were bought by the Medical Faculty of Leyden in 1774 for one hundred and twenty gold ducats—six hundred guilders. The writings show Wepfer’s interest in gastro-enterology of which he was an early pioneer. He was also concerned with toxicology, describing a case of ergotism in 1693, and with diseases of the chest.

The book is enlivened by pleasing illustrations and a useful bibliography. It can be recommended to those interested in the early Swiss contributions to medicine.

No. 28 in this series is a large paperback of ninety-nine pages and deals with the history of haemophilia from the Babylonian Talmud until 1965.

After defining haemophilia the author gives an account of the geographical areas where the disorder has been described. In Switzerland it was first mentioned by Felix Platter in 1559. Problems of hereditary transmission are then considered with special reference to the Swiss family trees of von Tenna and von Wald, this latter having been traced back to about 1550. The various theories on the cause of the disorder are then discussed together with a more general account of the major discoveries in the physiology of the blood, naturally with specific reference to Swiss workers—Sahli, Fonio, Feissly, Lenggenhager and Koller. The final chapter concerns itself with questions on clinical matters and prophylaxis.

This is a rather specialized monograph which will probably be of most interest to German-speaking haematologists.

I. M. LIBRACH

Edward Stevens, Gastric Physiologist, Physician and American Statesman, ed. by STACEY B. DAY, Cincinnati and Montreal, Cultural and Educational Productions, 1969, pp. 179, illus., £5.00.

In 1962 Dr. Day and the classicist, Dr. R. A. Swanson, translated the first twelve chapters of Stevens’ Edinburgh dissertation *De Alimentorium Concoctione* (1777) (i.e. the portion not translated by Beddoes in his edition of Spallanzani’s *Dissertationes*, 1784). (See *Surgery*, 1962, 52, 819–36). Since then the editor has partially uncovered new sources of information concerning Stevens’ life and youthful connexions with the American politician Alexander Hamilton. Stevens’ Réaumur-inspired, but brilliant, digestion essay is here translated completely; also printed for the first time are a group of letters concerning a dispute between Benjamin Rush and Stevens over the Philadelphia epidemic of yellow fever in 1793. Half the book, however, is occupied by some not particularly exciting correspondence connected with Stevens’ unsuccessful career as Consul-General to Santo-Domingo, 1799–1800.

Both editor and publisher are guilty of extremely slipshod production. Second-rate random notes stand for a commentary to the thesis; italic and roman type is used quite unsystematically; and footnotes are inconsistently and bewilderingly keyed or unkeyed to the texts, or are even, astonishingly, duplicated. Indeed, a reviewer is bound to suspect that Dr. Day’s rough library notes have been printed. The editor, a practising surgeon, has tried to forestall criticism by excusing himself from lack of