

Book Reviews

The History of Coronary Heart Disease, by J. O. LEIBOWITZ, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1970, pp. xvii, 227, illus., £3.00.

The cardiologist tends to envisage the history of coronary heart disease in terms of anatomy, physiology, pathology and clinical features, whereas the historian approaches it chronologically as Dr. Leibowitz has done, but by passing backwards and forwards in time in the text, he has succeeded in presenting a pleasantly readable account of the growth of our knowledge of arterial disease, angina pectoris and cardiac infarction.

Until Harvey described the third and separate coronary circulation (1649), and recognized the nutritive function of the arteries as opposed to veins, no conception of coronary disease was possible, and until Heberden identified angina pectoris over a century later, there was no reason to suspect its symptoms. Nevertheless, coronary disease existed before their time and the author takes a panoramic sweep through the medical texts of antiquity in search of symptoms suggestive of cardiac pain and heart disease. Starting in Pharaonic times, he passes to Hippocrates, Galen and the middle ages, seeking to build up some picture of heart disease in antiquity.

One difficulty encountered was the meaning of the term *Morbus Cardiacus* applied both to cardiac and gastric symptoms, and this diagnostic difficulty has persisted until quite recent times when Huchard described a pseudo-gastralgic form of angina pectoris, and even in my time cases of acute cardiac infarction were often admitted to surgical wards as acute abdominal emergencies. In the earliest treatises on heart disease appearing in the seventeenth century, palpitation and syncope or lipothymia were the recognized symptoms and sudden death was vaguely associated with cardialgia. Dr. Leibowitz's painstaking search of the primary sources of medical knowledge, however speculative some of his conclusions must be, makes a valuable contribution to cardiological history.

Historians, we are told, have been puzzled by the belated recognition of cardiac infarction, yet the reasons are not far to seek. Pathologists were at fault in not distinguishing acute infarction from fatty degeneration and softening, until Ziegler and others recognized myomalacia cordis at the end of the nineteenth century. Though angina pectoris was quickly linked with ossified coronary arteries by Jenner and Parry, rival theories soon started a controversy which lasted for 150 years and the author underestimates the strong opposition to the coronary theory which held up progress. The neuralgic or neuritic theory supported by Jurine, Desportes and later by Laënnec, Bouillaud, Peter and Von Dusch on the continent soon spread to this country where Sir John Forbes regarded half of all cases of angina pectoris as functional. Leading British cardiologists of the later nineteenth century recognized functional and organic varieties without accepting coronary disease as the only or main organic cause. In Dublin, Stokes and Bellingham, obsessed with fatty heart, were certainly not coronarians, and Allbutt, though familiar with cardiac infarction, remained a powerful and belligerent opponent of the coronary theory, explaining the pain of infarction as due to pericarditis, and enlisting the support of Wenckebach and Vaquez for his aortic theory. Little wonder that the papers of Von Leyden,

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René Marie and Huchard's lengthy review were regarded as no more than contributions to this seemingly endless dispute.

Physicians at this period were preoccupied with physical diagnosis by means of percussion and auscultation in which respect coronary disease was a sterile field. Herrick's paper of 1918 at last supplied the missing link, namely a physical sign in the form of an abnormal electrocardiogram, and once this had been confirmed, the diagnosis of cardiac infarction was no longer difficult and almost overnight the modern epidemic of coronary heart disease erupted.

Dr. Leibowitz's review covers most of the familiar landmarks and adds some which are less familiar such as Vulpian's case of cardiac infarction and Nicholls's account of the ruptured heart of King George II whose role in the history of cardiac infarction is comparable with that of King Edward VII in the history of appendicitis. The illustrations are specially well chosen to enhance the interest of the book. The bibliography of twenty-four pages adequately covers the British, American and German publications in the nineteenth century but those in French seem somewhat neglected and one misses the names of Germain Sée, Merklen, Peter and Daniélopou, but this is a minor criticism having regard to the wealth of historical information incorporated in this volume of modest size and reasonable cost. Any lacunae in the bibliography are probably covered by the historical surveys which are separately listed.

Professor Leibowitz's review of the twentieth century covers anticoagulants and intensive coronary care which are still subjudice and have as yet scarcely found a place in history, but a contemporary evaluation will doubtless interest future historians.

In a book likely to become a historical source book, the index plays an important role and great pains have obviously been taken to make it a reliable reference guide to the text. The general style and arrangement of the book is admirable as befits a publication by the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine.

In studying the motion of the heart, Harvey emphasized the imperative need first to know what has been thought of these things by others in their writings, and Dr. Leibowitz's book will enable all concerned with coronary disease to do so with pleasure and profit, and at relatively modest cost. By bringing together in a single volume information otherwise scattered over a vast literature, the book will also prove a useful reference guide to medical historians.

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Transactions of the British Society for the History of Pharmacy, ed. by M. P. EARLES, Vol. 1, no. 2, 1970, pp. 58, 80p.

Volume 1, Number 1 of anything carries with it an exciting ring of a birthday, an initiation, fresh fields of endeavour, and of a pioneering spirit. A happy birthday and a cordial welcome, then, to the first issue of this journal under the distinguished editorship of Dr. M. P. Earles, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London, W.C.1. The British Society for the History of Pharmacy held its first conference at the Welsh School of Pharmacy, Cardiff, in March 1967 when Dr. John Cule discussed the problem of leprosy in Wales in the middle ages. This is now printed as an authoritative twenty-nine page text with ninety-eight notes and references. The only feature missing from this fascinating account are the colour transparencies, prepared by Mr. E. D. Jones,