

Book Reviews

view of the importance of heredity Mr. Bowen was led to write a series of essays dealing with the principal family characters. Dickensians will not here find a great deal which they do not already know, but those who have not themselves read widely in books about Dickens will find conveniently assembled the known facts about Dickens's paternal grandparents, his parents, his courtship, marriage and the separation in which it ended, and his children. In the affair of Ellen Ternan, Mr. Bowen returns a verdict of not guilty. In the end only one chapter is devoted to Dickens's medical history. As is well known, Dickens died of a stroke of which he had had previous warnings. Even today it is often difficult to decide what is the relationship between a patient's temperament and his blood pressure. Mr. Bowen wisely draws no very definite conclusion about this in Dickens's case. There is, however, some evidence that his readings at any rate hastened his end, though probably not by a great deal. Mr. Bowen mentions his alternations of exhilaration and depression dating from his earliest working years, but he does not let this clue lead him to what would have been a fascinating addition to this chapter, namely, the relationship between Dickens's obviously cyclothymic temperament and the character of his writings. Fortunately we can enjoy the writings of authors without knowing anything about either their health or their private lives, but doctors will usually find that such knowledge adds to their interest and for that reason this book can be recommended to devotees of Dickens.

RUSSELL BRAIN

Human Dissection. Its Drama and Struggle. A. M. LASSEK, M.D., PH.D. Department of Anatomy, Boston University School of Medicine, Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1958; pp. x, 310. Illustrated. 50s.

This loosely written and oddly arranged history of human dissection seems to be written for both lay and medical readers. The author has collected together much material that is widely scattered. It is divided into three main sections. Beginning with concepts regarding the dead in the various ancient civilizations it passes through the Alexandrian school to Galen and the Middle Ages. Then follows an account of anatomy during the Renaissance with special reference to Vesalius. Finally there is an account of dissection in European and Asiatic countries, the British Isles and various parts of the United States.

There are interesting sections on Herophilus who in the fourth century B.C. was said to have dissected six hundred bodies, some while they were alive, and on the body snatchers and those who committed murder to gain the price for the body.

This is a book that deserves a place in medical libraries even though there are numerous errors of fact. Dealing with Padua we read 'A magnificent anatomical theatre which became widely known was built in 1446 at the personal expense of Fabricius (1537-1617)'. The date of the first dissection at Montpellier is also incorrect and does not agree with the text. There is a misleading suggestion that the first anatomical theatre in the British Isles was constructed in Dublin in 1711. The Barber-Surgeons had built a theatre in London in 1638. The first editor of the *Lancet* looks strange as 'Sir Thomas Wakley' and it is hard to believe that one of the body snatchers consumed sixteen pints of whisky a day.

WILLIAM BROCKBANK