

Book Reviews

Woodall, whose *Surgeons Mate*, appearing in 1617, was addressed primarily to surgeons serving in East Indiamen. In 1678, two years after his association with the Navy, he published *The Viaticum*. The contributions of these great men, executive officers and surgeons, are dealt with fully and in delightful prose.

The second volume deals with the Commonwealth and Protectorate period and with that of the later Stuarts. In the preface the author insists that by the beginning of the eighteenth century many surgeons were beginning to serve in H.M. ships almost continuously and to discover a pride in that service which remains traditional. In the reigns of William III and Anne the need for hospital ships was fully recognized, and not only did they serve for the care of the sick but they constituted a meeting-place where sea-surgeons could come together, and where projects for the advancement of the service could be discussed.

The period with which this volume deals contained many famous names of admirals and surgeons: Admiral Robert Blake, who though beyond contemporary surgical aid with a renal calculus, yet put to sea again and died from nephritis two hours before the flagship anchored in Plymouth Sound on 7 August, 1657. We are introduced to his fleet-surgeon, Haselock, to Richard Wiseman, surgeon to Charles II, sometimes called 'The father of English surgery', to James Yonge, often credited with the priority in the flap method of amputation, for which he himself acknowledged his indebtedness to Lowdham, of Exeter.

The putative relationship between scurvy and air-pollution and other causes is dwelt upon, and even when Cockburn cured a scorbutic patient with an electuary flavoured with lemon juice and noted that the man 'recovered apace and came to his perfect health', he made no deduction from this, and was clearly unfamiliar with all that had been recorded by travellers on the use of this fruit in scurvy.

A valuable feature of this volume, as of its predecessor, is the 'Chronology' at the end, enumerating many of the important occasions of the period under consideration. There is frequent mention of St. Thomas's Hospital by its distinguished alumnus. The waxing and waning of the influence of the Barber-Surgeons Company and the Society of Apothecaries in the sphere of naval medicine find frequent mention. The English is impeccable, and the reader is carried happily along amidst all the detail which must have demanded great industry and patience. When it is remembered that the writing of this volume took place when the author's life was already menaced, admiration can know no bounds.

The illustrations are excellent and numerous, and the volume is produced in the manner that one has come to expect from the famous publishing firm that is responsible. This is a volume that should be in every library, and there will be few surgeons who have belonged to the Senior Service and who will not desire to possess it.

GORDON GORDON-TAYLOR

Charles Dickens and His Family. A Sympathetic Study. By W. H. BOWEN. Privately printed by W. Heffer and Sons, Limited, Cambridge, 1956; pp. 182. 21s.

Some writers inspire a devotion in their readers which leads to the formation of societies to keep their memory green and to researches into their private lives, about the details of which there is an insatiable curiosity. Dickens is one such writer, and Mr. Bowen is evidently one of his devotees. As he says in his foreword, the idea originally contemplated in this study was to review Dickens's medical history, but in

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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