

Book Reviews

exasperating lengths. Another reviewer of this book describes the lengthy section dealing with the penicillin saga as “absolutely rivetting”, and one can only concur in this assessment.

In his final chapter Macfarlane discusses, among other things, whether Fleming was a “Great Scientist”. In the view of the present reviewer the answer must be No. His published work was carried out with very simple and elegant equipment, but with some exceptions, notably the work on wounds and on lysozyme, it was often of a technical nature and contributed little to the store of scientific knowledge. And his discovery of penicillin was not the result of patient research based on his own and others’ work, or on a reasoned search for the ideal antiseptic, or even on a random survey, but on a single experiment set up and completed by Nature herself. A brilliant and acute observer, which he undoubtedly was, is not the same as a scientific genius.

Luck has played a prominent part in the penicillin story, as both Fleming and Florey have freely admitted. On a different plane, Fleming would surely have considered himself fortunate to have so painstaking, perceptive and skilled an author for this, his latest biography.

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LESLIE T. MORTON, *A medical bibliography (Garrison and Morton): an annotated check-list of texts illustrating the history of medicine*, Aldershot, Hants, Gower Publishing Co., 1983, 8vo, pp. xii, 1000, £45.00.

If “Garrison and Morton” did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it, so indispensable have the successive editions of this “annotated check-list of texts illustrating the history of medicine” become. A “G–M” number immediately multiplies the price one would expect to pay for an old medical book, but inclusion has also become, by common consent, the equivalent of entry into the medico-historical Valhalla. To be sure, membership among the medical blessed need not be permanent, for items have been dropped as well as added, as Garrison’s original handlist of 1912 has grown into the present volume of precisely 1,000 pages.

Ironically, Fielding H. Garrison and Leslie T. Morton never actually co-operated in producing an edition of the bibliography. Garrison compiled two versions, the first in 1912 and an expanded one in 1933. Garrison died in 1936 and it was not until 1943 that Morton, then a young medical librarian, expanded Garrison’s final list, adding the valuable annotations that summarize the significance of the individual items. There were further editions in 1954 and 1970. About ten per cent of the 7,830 main entries in the present edition are new, and more than five per cent of the previous edition has not been included here, though many of the dropped entries are superseded secondary literature. The use of decimals and the acceptance of numerical gaps in the sequence allows numbers to be retained from earlier editions. The new primary references are concerned for the most part with medical and scientific discoveries and techniques of the present century. Undoubtedly, Mr Morton is wary of the recent past, and items like endorphins or monoclonal antibodies will have to await a further edition. A similar conservatism (perhaps less appropriate) also dictates Mr Morton’s choice of secondary works. There are several fine monographs on the history of plague since Shrewsbury’s (the most recent to be included), and out-dated surveys like Ralph Major’s *A history of medicine* and Alexander and Selesnick’s *The history of psychiatry* could be decently retired.

Inevitably, Garrison still casts a long shadow on his brain-child, and the positivism which permeated the original list still largely shapes its most recent incarnation. This is no bad thing unless it lulls its users into believing that the history of medicine is simply a series of discoveries inexorably leading to the present. Social aspects of medicine are under-represented when compared with scientific, and there is relatively little room for what sociologists are fond of calling “rejected knowledge”, even if such knowledge was important in its own time. There are, in addition, still too many modern authors without birth and/or death dates and occasional mistakes in the index. But “Garrison–Morton” remains an invaluable reference tool and, like Dr Johnson’s *Dictionary*, better for the fact that Mr Morton has chosen to produce it single-handedly. Its future will undoubtedly be as bright as its past.

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