

Book Reviews

The Medical World of the 18th Century. LESTER S. KING, M.D. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (London: Cambridge University Press), 1958; pp. xvii, 346. Illustrated. 43s. 6d.

A number of excellent studies of leading individuals and special topics in the medical world of the eighteenth century were already in print a generation ago. There was something about the Augustan age which had a special attraction for the old-type scholar physician; its classicism, its order and urbanity persisted in some circles until the First World War, so that it was with something like nostalgia that an older school of medical historians sought the company of Johnson or Gibbon or Voltaire in order to meet their medical contemporaries. In recent years the turmoil, both political and intellectual, of the seventeenth century, so similar in many ways to our own, has been the major preoccupation of the historians. The classicism of the eighteenth century now seems a little artificial, the order and urbanity a thin veneer laid over fearful cracks in the social structure. For this very reason it is a period which should offer perennial interest to those who seek to discover what is going on beneath the surface of things.

It is quite clear that Dr. Lester S. King has the type of penetrating intellect to carry out a most successful investigation into the medical world of the period. With a special interest in philosophy and history since his days at Harvard, Dr. King is now professor of pathology at the University of Illinois College of Medicine and director of the laboratories at the Illinois Masonic Hospital, both in Chicago. His publisher describes his book as 'Sprightly essays on the intellectual, social, economic, moral, and technical problems which beset the eighteenth-century medical man and are still relevant to medicine today'. Dr. King modestly declares in his preface that 'Utilizing whatever insight and technique I possess, I reproduce a few scenes, trying to capture certain facets which appear to me both interesting and significant'. This is indeed a diffident introduction to a work which I regard as the finest introduction to medical thought and practice of the eighteenth century yet written. The statements of both publisher and author are apposite enough, although the essays are far too well written to be called 'sprightly', a coy epithet which would deter many serious readers, especially in Britain.

It is, of course, a selective study. Dr. King has rightly used the historian's prerogative of selecting the significant features, and the result is so fresh, so comprehensive in spite of the selection, that it forms a well-composed and balanced picture of the whole. The book opens with a masterly summary of the controversy between the apothecary and physician at the beginning of the century, an episode unpleasant to recall for many physicians but indispensable to an understanding of the professional structure of the time. So too is the brief study of quack and empiric which follows, where special mention is made of Bishop Berkeley and his 'tar-water' and John Wesley's *Primitive Physick*. The long and detailed account of Boerhaave, regarded as both systematist and scientist, is one of the most brilliant analyses of Boerhaave's theories and methods that I have read anywhere, and the amount of thoughtful reading of the original texts which was a prerequisite for such a summary can be appreciated only by those who have tried to understand Boerhaave's ideas for themselves. The long essay on 'fevers' is equally stimulating, and homoeopathy, nosology, pathology, medical ethics and practice are all discussed in the same easy and authoritative style which illuminates all it touches upon.

Dr. Ilza Veith, who is Associate Professor in the History of Medicine at the University of Chicago, has contributed an introduction which is as thoughtful and modest

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as the book itself. This concludes with the statement that, 'With the clarity of his thought and his fortunate literary style he has created a book which is not only enlightening as a historical document but also a pleasure to read'. It should be added that Dr. King has given us an excellent example of one of the best ways of studying and writing medical history. More than 90 per cent of his references are original texts of the period; he is more concerned with what his subjects thought and wrote than with what later (and particularly modern) commentators think about them. There is scarcely a platitude in the whole volume. The perspective is remarkably faithful. There is valid criticism, no condescension, no empty or conventional praise and no tendency to condemn from our own superior standpoint. Dr. King's work is, in fact, genuine history and genuine medicine, and can be warmly recommended not only to those interested in medical history but to the many who are interested in medical thought and practice today.

F. N. L. POYNTER

The Story Behind the Word: Some Interesting Origins of Medical Terms. HARRY WAIN, M.D. Springfield, Illinois: C. C. Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1958; pp. viii, 342. 63s.

Several good books on the origin of medical terms have been published within recent years, but the extent and complexity of the language of medicine are such as to provide ample scope for further research and for differing methods of approach to the subject. Dr. Wain's book gives in alphabetical sequence the origin and history of over five thousand seven hundred medical terms, including the principal eponyms. Many recently coined words are included and the overall coverage is sufficient to make this a most valuable contribution to medical lexicography. Typography and layout are excellent and greatly facilitate quick reference. The explanations are very clear and some of them are little masterpieces of concise exposition. The range of factual information is so great that a full evaluation in this respect must be based on long and regular use. The reviewer has noticed few major errors of fact, and these are longstanding ones which have been perpetuated by almost every existing dictionary of medical terms. The description of Harrison's sulcus, for example, is attributed to Edward Harrison (1766–1838), whereas it has been shown by Naish and Wallis (*Brit. med. J.*, 1948, 1, 541) that the deformity was first described by Edwin Harrison (1789–1845), physician to the St. Marylebone Infirmary, London. Similarly, the description of Hartmann's pouch is credited to the German anatomist and anthropologist Robert Hartmann (1831–93), but it was actually described in 1893 by the famous French surgeon Henri Hartmann (1860–1952), as shown by Davies and Harding (*Lancet*, 1942, 1, 193). It is also interesting to note that Henri Hartmann acknowledged that the structure was described and illustrated by Paul Broca as early as 1850. Broca's name, incidentally, is misspelt 'Brocca' in the main entry under his name in the present work. One or two further misprints have been noticed, e.g. William Bogg Leishman for William Boog Leishman and Edwardo Bassini for Edoardo Bassini. The complexities of British titles present an almost insoluble mystery to American authors, and one is not therefore surprised to find the Hon. Henry Cavendish knighted. On the other hand, a great many knights are deprived of their 'Sirs' and Thomas Bryant is credited (s.v. Ilio-femoral triangle) with one which he did not possess. Sir Charles Bell is described as a physician and John Elliotson