

## Book Reviews

We assume that this reference book will be a necessity for every medical and many general libraries for it provides ready access to information which would otherwise be very difficult or impossible to obtain. In a fairly thorough search we found only one or two typographical errors. The book is well printed in clear type, stoutly and tastefully bound, and of handy size so that it should be a pleasure to handle.

ZACHARY COPE

*The Collected Letters of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek.* Edited, illustrated and annotated by a Commission of Dutch Scientists. Vol. VI. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger Ltd., 1961; pp. 12, 425; 34 plates. £8 15s. od.

The great project of publishing the collected letters of the celebrated Dutch microscopist, Leeuwenhoek, was launched as long ago as 1931, largely through the initiative of Dr. A. Schierbeek, whose last editorial work appears in the sixth volume just published. The preceding volumes—the first came out in 1939—have made us familiar with the high standard of scholarship which makes this monumental work an indispensable guide, not only to Leeuwenhoek's life and work, but also to the early history of microscopy and to one of the most eventful and formative periods in the history of modern science. Leeuwenhoek's intimate contacts with the Royal Society and its founders, and the interest which his work aroused in England and among scientists all over Europe give these volumes a more than specialized value. The letters throughout are printed in the original Dutch with English translations facing and with most useful notes. The admirable plates give an excellent idea of the very wide range and the high quality (considering the instrument) of Leeuwenhoek's microscopical work.

F. N. L. P.

*The Famous Pathologist, or, The Noble Mountebank.* THOMAS ALCOCK and JOHN WILMOT, Earl of Rochester. Ed. V. de Sola Pinto. Nottingham University Miscellany No. 1. Nottingham: Sisson & Parker, 1961, pp. 42: port., front. 5s.

This little book tells of an amusing episode in the life of the famous Earl of Rochester when, some time in 1675–6, he was in trouble at Court and hid himself in the City, where he masqueraded as an Italian quack by the name of Alexander Bendo. He had a bill printed to advertise his skill. In 1687 Rochester's daughter, Lady Ann Baynton, apparently asked her father's former servant Thomas Alcock for a copy of his bill. Alcock had only one, and that almost obliterated, which he kept as a relic and did not wish to lose. He therefore transcribed the text carefully and prefaced it with his own account of what seems to have been a highly successful masquerade, writing it out in a little book which he sent to Lady Baynton. It is this MS. copy which was purchased for the University of Nottingham Library in 1949 and which is edited here by Professor de Sola Pinto. It gives a revealing glimpse of medicine in seventeenth-century England and should not be overlooked by anybody interested in the subject.

F. N. L. P.

*Toward the Conquest of Beriberi.* ROBERT R. WILLIAMS. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1961; pp. xxii, 338.

Dr. Williams has divided the story he has to tell into three main parts. He deals first with beriberi as a deficiency disease and gives a fascinating account of early inquiries into the aetiology of the condition, and the accumulation over the years of data regarding its effects on the adult and the child. In his preface he says that his book

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will not be comprehensive. However, in this section his references cover all the important early work and also include interesting and important data relative to the experience of prisoners of war in the hands of the Japanese twenty years ago.

The next section deals with the chemistry of thiamine and its biochemical action. Dr. Williams describes in some detail the work entailed in isolating and ultimately synthesizing thiamine. Here he is most modest in his references to the long years of hard work which he and his team endured before they achieved, in 1933, a practical method of synthesizing the vitamin. Due acknowledgment is made to the efforts of those who succeeded in isolating thiamine and those who evolved other methods than his own for its synthetization.

In Part III he gives his personal views on the practical application of the findings which have accumulated over the years in respect of this important disease. He is well known as an ardent supporter of the rice-enrichment school, and makes out a good case for his method of choice for preventing this disease, for use, at any rate, in the Philippines, the area in which his interest in the problem was first aroused in the early part of this century. The arguments are advanced clearly and with due regard to rival theories, and the possibility of other methods working at least as well, if not better, in other areas.

This book is most attractively written and commands the interest of the reader from the first page to the last. It can be warmly recommended.

C. A. BOZMAN

*America's pre-Pharmacopoeial Literature.* DAVID L. COWEN. American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, Madison, Wisconsin, 1961; pp. 40; *illus. fascim.* \$1.00

This monograph is preceded by an interesting analysis of pharmaceutical literature in the U.S.A. by Dr. G. Sonnedecker. Professor Cowen offers a careful survey of the pharmacopoeias and dispensaries imported from Europe to be found in the institutions and private libraries of the Colonial period up to 1820, when the first United States' Pharmacopoeia was published. There is a special chapter devoted to American publications, 1720-1820, whether veterinary, popular or of a more professional nature. The subject is thoroughly covered and shows once more the considerable benefit received in medical history by the contributions from professional historians. The importance of the outlines for the courses of chemistry prepared by Benjamin Rush is not sufficiently emphasized. In spite of their title these were the first publications printed in the U.S.A., at the turning point of the Revolution, to discuss the training of physicians in materia medica and to lay down a systematic method that was followed by every subsequent pharmaceutical text. This study gives us reason to believe that the half-century delay between the declaration of independence and the publication of the first official pharmacopoeia is an immediate reflection of the American resistance to centralized political power.

FRANCISCO GUERRA