

Book Reviews

to synthesize, the works of their contributors. They also attempt a useful, if somewhat narrowly conceived, taxonomy of ethers and discuss some of the interesting questions raised by and about the recent historiography of the subject.

On the whole, historians of science should welcome this book, which shows how far and in how many directions the discipline has travelled since E. T. Whittaker's work on the same subject. They will not, however, welcome the price.

C. B. Wilde

Laennec 1781–1826, Colloque organisé au Collège de France 1981, *Revue du Palais de la Découverte*, Special No. 22, August 1981, 8vo, pp. 343, illus., Fr. 45.00 (paperback).

This special number of the *Revue du Palais de la Découverte* presents the proceedings of an international colloquium organized by the Collège de France in 1981 to commemorate the bicentennial of the birth of R.-T.-H. Laennec. The thirty-five contributions brought together in this volume are mainly grouped in four categories that cover Laennec as a professor of the Collège de France, Laennec as a medical figure, Laennec as a Parisian humanist, and the influence of Laennec's work outside France. The papers, mostly by French authors and all in the French language, are generally rather brief and – as is to be expected in collections of this sort – the quality of scholarship varies considerably from one paper to the next.

A few of the contributions included are essentially pieces of ritual oratory (such as the sermon preached at a memorial mass after the close of the colloquium) and others have a somewhat peculiar focus (such as the characterological analysis of Laennec's handwriting). But in amongst these curiosities there are a number of sound historical studies by scholars of recognized stature in the field of medical history, including M.-J. Imbault-Huart, M. D. Grmek, Pierre Huard, Jean Théodoridès, Othmar Keel, and E. H. Ackerknecht. The papers by these scholars, and several of those by scientific and medical contributors, make this collection more than just a souvenir of Laennec's 200th birthday and give it real value for the professional historian of medicine.

The introduction to this volume notes that the commemoration of the Laennec bicentennial, of which the Collège de France colloquium formed only one component, was initiated and personally sponsored by President Giscard d'Estaing. If a government of the Right could go to such lengths to honour the royalist and militant Catholic Laennec in 1981, perhaps President Mitterrand's government of the Left should now take the opportunity to honour the republican and militant sceptic François Magendie, whose 200th birthday falls in 1983.

W. R. Albury

School of History and Philosophy of Science
University of New South Wales

V. C. MEDVEI, *A history of endocrinology*, London, Boston, and The Hague, MTP Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xviii, 913, illus., £49.95.

This volume on the history of endocrinology is packed with historical details about the development of this important special field of medicine. While it contains many fascinating accounts of momentous events, it also has severe flaws. The historical facts are often presented in detail without any sense of connexion and, as a result, the sequential development of knowledge in a particular field is at times difficult to follow. The presentation of the material, if better organized, would be more useful to the reader. The section on present trends is weak. For example, there is scant treatment of the exciting and important area of ectopic hormones, which has been a rapidly developing field in the past quarter-century. There is little discussion of the biosynthesis of protein and peptide hormones, and the information on the mechanism of hormones, a field of great current interest, is brief. The author might have done better to choose an earlier cut-off date for this history.

In general, the book is entertaining and informative. It will be useful for the endocrinologist to have it on his shelf.

A. McGehee Harvey
Johns Hopkins University