

Book Reviews

The Evolution of Medical Practice in Britain. Edited by F. N. L. POYNTER. London: Pitman Medical Publishing Co. Ltd., 1961; pp. vi + 168. 25s.

The expanding interest in medical history in this country was reflected two years ago in the founding of the Faculty of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London. One of its earliest tasks was to organize the first British Congress of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy, and this volume presents the papers on its chosen theme—'The Evolution of Medical Practice in Britain'. They set a standard which augurs well for the success of the Faculty.

Dr. F. N. L. Poynter deserves warm congratulations not only for his impeccable editing, but also for the introductory brief but comprehensive paper on 'The Influence of Government Legislation on Medical Practice in Britain'. The earliest document he quotes is a petition by the Universities which was presented to, and approved by, Parliament in 1421. This was concerned with the dangers of allowing ignorant and unskilled persons to practise medicine and surgery. It is interesting to compare its purpose with that of the Medical Act of 1858, which, as its preamble lays down, was enacted to enable the public to differentiate between qualified and unqualified medical practitioners. The story Dr. Poynter relates of the evolution of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, of the triumph of the Apothecaries in 1703 over the College of Physicians, and of the exciting events which culminated in the Medical Act of 1858, and the establishing of the General Medical Council, is an integral part of the social history of this country. He pays due credit to the Council:

The medical profession and its institutions owe a great debt to the Council for its long and patient work in raising and standardizing the level of education as well as for its insistence on a high ethical code—[and emphasizes that] the Council's advice and influence has been extended to other countries of the Commonwealth, especially those which have recently won their independence.

There is one minor error; Dr. Poynter writes: 'But the Act of 1950 gave the Council the right to appoint visitors to Medical Schools and to inspect examinations.' Although this is true for visitors to Medical Schools, it was the Medical Act of 1886 which gave the Council the right to appoint inspectors of examinations, in order to ensure that standards were adequate.

The contribution from Dr. Charles Newman on the 'Influence of Medical Education on the Evolution of Medical Practice in Britain', is a singularly fascinating and penetrating assessment of the history and philosophy of medical education. He suggests that: 'Balance: proportion: the use of all methods for their proper purpose at the proper time' is the proper prescription for medical education. In the course of his contribution he contrives to introduce a brilliant miniature of the history of medical thought and practice. He sums up the difference between the single-handed clinician from Hippocrates to Osler, and the modern physician and surgeon dependent on the diagnostic pantechicon of X-rays, clinical pathology reports, electronic devices, radioactive isotopes and the like, in a pregnant sentence: 'No longer does the doctor rely on what he finds rather than on what the patient tells him; he depends on what

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other doctors tell him.' Sir Charles Dodds and Mr. L. Payne write engagingly on the 'Influence of the Royal College of Physicians', Sir Zachary Cope on the 'Influence of the Royal College of Surgeons of England' and Mr. H. J. Malkin on the 'Influence of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' on the evolution of medical practice in Britain. The older Colleges may well be criticized for their conservatism and monopolistic tendencies, but each made an invaluable contribution to specialist practice in this country. It was, no doubt, against formidable opposition that the R.C.P. succeeded in moving Parliament to restrict the manufacture of gin to reputable distillers, and to subject their products to inspection. But that: 'there can be little doubt that this was one of the most valuable activities of the College' is a judgment which will perhaps not be shared by many of its Fellows. The efforts of the R.C.S. in trying to bring about a single portal of entry to the medical profession is an example of well-intentioned endeavour which fortunately for British medicine failed.

The part played by medical societies in the development of medical practice in the nineteenth century in Britain is naturally entrusted to Dr. W. H. McMenemy, whose 'Life and Times of Sir Charles Hastings' dealt with this topic in detail. In the present paper Dr. McMenemy has skilfully distilled the essence of that remarkable biography.

There are some in this country who believe that clinical research began with Sir Thomas Lewis. Dr. K. D. Keele shows that clinical research has in fact its roots in the earliest history of medicine in this country. He deals in detail with the Hippocratic method practised in Britain so successfully by Sydenham; the physiological method, whose earliest exponent was William Harvey; the methods of clinical examination, and the discovery of new therapeutic agents. It is a little surprising that he attributes the idea of pathognomic signs to Laënnec, for over a century and a half earlier Sydenham had written of diseases as being

reduced to certain and determinate kinds with the same exactness as we see it done by botanic writers in their treatises on plants [and possessing] certain distinguishing signs which Nature has particularly affixed to every species.

At a time when the Pharmaceutical industry is under fire in this country, it is refreshing to read so balanced and objective an account of its influence on the evolution of British medical practice from the pen of Mr. Michael Perrin, Chairman of the Wellcome Foundation which sponsored the Congress, and encouraging to be assured that:

Responsible firms in the British pharmaceutical industry are confident that with a proper understanding and good will between them and the medical profession, codes of procedure can be evolved which will not only remove certain existing abuses but will ensure an even more satisfactory two-way partnership in the development of new drugs and the methods for their use.

Dr. Ffrangcon Roberts, in his paper on the 'Influence of Health and Insurance Schemes', discusses the evolution of Friendly Societies, Provident Dispensaries and Hospital Contributory Schemes, and notes that of the Friendly Societies established in the early nineteenth century, that at Aylsham, Norfolk, was founded by the President's great grandfather, Robert Copeman.

The longest paper in this collection is that on 'The History of Rural Medical Practice' by Dr. R. M. S. McConaghey. It is a fascinating record of the origins and persistence even today of rural customs, such as wart-charming, and of the influence of the Church on medical practice. Dr. McConaghey draws on many contemporary

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documents to illustrate his theme, and rightly attributes the improved status of the general practitioner to the Medical Act of 1858.

Dr. Guthrie opens his paper on 'Scottish Influence on the Evolution of British Medicine' with the characteristic sentence—'Medical knowledge has long been one of Scotland's principal exports.' His is an impressive and engrossing story of Scottish medicine, beginning with 'The Mediciner' (teacher of medicine) in Aberdeen University in 1494, and the Incorporation of Barbers and Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1505. He tells of the contribution of the remarkable King James IV, who took a deep interest in medicine, alchemy, dentistry and other technical activities, and records a weighty and remarkable list of Scottish graduates who have by their work in England engraved their names indelibly on the tablets of medical history.

This Congress volume conveys much valuable new information and conveniently summarizes for the discriminating reader what is well known but relevant to the general theme. It can be warmly recommended and should focus attention on a topic whose synoptic treatment has hitherto been somewhat neglected by the medical historian.

COHEN OF BIRKENHEAD

Unvollendete. PAUL DIEPGEN. Stuttgart: G. Theime Verlag, 1960; pp. 223.

The well-known medical historian Professor Paul Diepgen of Mainz has written an interesting account of the lives and labours of a number of distinguished medical men and scientists who died young, their work apparently incomplete, during the past 150 years, from 1800 to 1950.

The title of the book, *Unvollendete*, is inspired by the recollection of Franz Schubert, who died of typhus at the age of thirty-two before the completion of his great symphony.

A wide range of choice was open to the author, and it is not surprising that German names predominate, but the selection has been carefully made, and the result is a series of biographies of young men who, during their short lives, made valuable contributions to medicine and science.

Their work lay in many diverse fields; such names as Bilharz, Bichat, Finsen and von Graefe indicate the varied nature of their work. The chapter on tropical diseases includes the careers of J. E. Dutton and Walter Myers.

The introductory discussion regarding the best age for mental work is of much interest, as also is the account of the causes of the regrettable termination of so many promising careers.

A concluding chapter, however, leads the reader to wonder whether such lives are as 'unfinished' as they at first appear.

An unfinished task may prove all the stronger as a stimulus to subsequent workers. There are eleven plates, mainly portraits, and an adequate index.

DOUGLAS GUTHRIE

A Short History of Clinical Pathology. W. D. FOSTER. Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1961; pp. xii+154. Illustrated. 27s. 6d.

I do not propose entering into the controversies that flare up when busy hospital pathologists start talking about their everyday duties. Some of these, especially about status, I believe to be sterile and waste of time; others reflect the earnest consideration and devoted labours of men who can scarcely afford the encroachment this must mean upon their scanty hours of leisure. But so devoted and so patient have been