

### Book Reviews

JOHN C. KRANTZ, jr., *Historical medical classics involving new drugs*, Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins Co., 1974, 8vo., pp. x, 129, illus., \$8.50.

Reviewed by Edwin Clarke, M.D., F.R.C.P., Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP

In times of financial stringencies, it is natural to wonder why books of this kind should be published.

The author has gathered together the histories of digitalis, morphine, nitroglycerin, aspirin, adrenaline, arsphenamine, insulin, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, sulphonamides, penicillin, streptomycin, LSD, and fluorinated anaesthetics. He includes biographical accounts of the pioneers, and illustrates their discoveries by presenting excerpts from their classic papers or books.

The work is intended “. . . as an ancillary text for the training of the student in the multifaceted field of the health sciences . . .” (p. vii), but unfortunately it is most unsuitable for this purpose. In the first place it is packed with errors, both factual and interpretative. Some are minor, but some are not, as for example when it is claimed that both Van Helmont and Beaumont discovered hydrochloric acid in the stomach! Why in the first place Beaumont’s investigations are included is not clear. The analysis of historical developments are frequently in error and much of the vital secondary literature is omitted. Thus the section on penicillin contains the usual panegyric to Fleming, with Florey and Chain dismissed in a sentence. It is based on the distorted and unreliable Maurois biography, with no reference to Sir Ernst Chain’s recent account of the true sequence of events, or to the remarkable “practical history” of Ronald Hare. The last “classic” in the book concerns the discovery of fluorinated anaesthetics, and the main reason for its inclusion seems to be that the author and one of his students were involved. The extracts from primary sources contain many errors, especially in those translated into English. Identification is often faulty or absent. Documentation is minimal and occasionally erroneous.

If, in addition, it is pointed out that most of this material has been presented before in an excellent book by B. Holmstedt and A. Liljestrand (*Readings in pharmacology*, Oxford, etc., Pergamon Press, 1963), there is even more justification for exclaiming, “why, oh why?”

MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The birth of the clinic. An archaeology of medical perception*, translated from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith, London, Tavistock Publications, 1973, 8vo., pp. xix, 212, £5.00.

This book first appeared in 1963 under the title *Naissance de la Clinique*. It deals, however, not so much with the clinic, but with the factors influencing the origins of medicine as a clinical science over the period from about 1790 to 1835, during which time the eighteenth-century systems of disease gave way to our medicine, clinico-pathological correlation based on anatomy; by “clinic” the author means both clinical medicine and the teaching hospital. But the book is primarily concerned with the techniques of observation in medicine and with their evolution, as suggested by the book’s sub-title. Foucault is attempting to establish a deeper understanding of exactly what happened during this crucial and formative era. In so doing he is purveying intellectual history by dealing with the interplay of medical technology,

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political ideology and the theoretical advances achieved by the Revolution, as well as with problems of morals, authority and finance.

The importance of Foucault's book is that in it he attempts to create a new method of historical analysis and a new framework for the investigation of the human sciences as a whole. With brilliant and original insights he emphasizes the rapid and total transformation of the epistemological basis of thought during the period under review, and the consequent changes in medical theory and practice. There is full documentation throughout, but it is a pity that perusal of the text is made difficult by obscurities of expression; there is a bibliography, pp. 201–209.

A significant development in the medical revolution at the turn of the eighteenth century was the whole reorganization of hospital services and in this regard some reference to Ackerknecht's work on the Paris hospital during the same period should have been made in this English version as it appeared since the French original was published. Foucault's book is a much deeper analysis but less easy to read. It nevertheless must be studied carefully by all those investigating eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine. The effort will be more than adequately repayed.

DANIEL GASMAN, *The scientific origins of national socialism. Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*, London, Macdonald, 1971, 8vo., pp. xxxii, 208, illus., £4.

This has proved to be an important and controversial book. Its sub-title describes its contents better than the title; it is the author's thesis that Nazi ideology owed much more to science than has hitherto been admitted. It was Ernst Haeckel, with the Monist League that he founded, who, with the support of social Darwinism as propounded in his *Die Welträtsel* of 1899, produced a romantic vision of science which had a direct influence on Hitler himself. Science was, of course, distorted by the Nazis, and yet biology in particular played an important role in the origin and development of their cult. Until Professor Gasman's scholarly work appeared, it was usually thought that the reverse was the case and that fascism opposed science and most of modern culture. However, he drew upon material not previously examined and presented a convincing case that has not been seriously challenged.

His book is essential, therefore, for the understanding of modern Germany. But in addition it has also a general message derived from the events in Germany, where scientific, biological ideas were permitted to take on a mystical significance. This danger and its ghastly consequences should be widely recognized and a comparable situation hopefully avoided. It is the subtle, insidious growth and manipulation of scientific concepts that will interest the historian of science and medicine, and for a well-written, accurate and impeccably documented presentation of this type of malignancy Professor Gasman's book can be strongly recommended. Consideration of the influence of pseudo-science, and of the way in which Haeckel extracted from Darwinism the pieces that suited his own theories, which concerned his own advancement and that of his country and race, are salutary indeed. Thus the historian can also benefit from this book in matters concerning the socio-intellectual make-up of the scientist. Altogether this is a challenging and highly stimulating work on the history of scientific ideas.