

Book Reviews

Selected Writings of Sir Arthur Hurst (1879–1944), ed. by THOMAS HUNT, London, British Society of Gastroenterology, 1970, pp. xiv, 218, illus., £2.00 (£1.50 to members of the Society).

Hurst was probably the most original thinker of his contemporary physicians. Indomitable in the face of deafness and chronic asthma he was an iconoclast, destroying long-held beliefs based on flimsy foundations. Thus his work on radiography of the alimentary tract exploded the fiction of various intra-abdominal ptoses as being capable of causing symptoms, and his contributions leading up to 'The Sins and Sorrows of the Colon', arrested the widespread and harmful indulgence in purgatives. The still more noxious belief in intestinal toxæmia, which led to colectomy for conditions ranging from thyrotoxicosis to backache, he likewise demonstrated as a myth.

His brilliant and versatile mind did not, however, include the power of critical appraisal of his sometimes hastily conceived theories. Recurrence of carcinoma in the remnant of the stomach he persistently asserted was a redevelopment of the disease arising from residual gastritis. His ingrained suspicion of surgery gave him an unduly optimistic view of the treatment of ulcerative colitis with anti-dysenteric serum, and of duodenal ulcer with medical care. He would not have been at home in the present climate of double-blind trials and statisticians.

Dr. Hunt has succeeded remarkably in presenting a picture of Hurst by the painstaking selection of some 41 papers from 250 contributions, many in French and German, written from 1901 to 1944. The war neuroses, radiography and the colon will probably be regarded as the most permanent of a series of outstanding achievements.

From those of us who knew and admired Hurst, and from all gastroenterologists a debt of gratitude is due to Dr. Hunt for a labour of love so efficiently completed.

A. H. DOUTHWAITE

Johann Jakob Wepfer (1620–1695) als klinischer Praktiker, by PIETRO EICHENBERGER, (Basler Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Biologie, Fasc. XXVI), Basle and Stuttgart, Schwabe, 1969, pp. 142, illus., S.Fr./DM. 24.

Zur Geschichte der Hämophilie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schweiz, by HANS HÄFLIGER (Basler Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Biologie, Fasc. XXVIII), Basle and Stuttgart, Schwabe, 1969, pp. 99, S.Fr./DM. 18.

These two volumes are Nos. 26 and 28 in the series of Basle historical monographs edited by Professor H. Buess, of the Institute of the History of Medicine, Basle University. The first is a biography of the life and work of the seventeenth-century Swiss physician Johann Jakob Wepfer. He was born in Schaffhausen in 1620 and died of severe aortic sclerosis, which he diagnosed himself, in 1695.

His family came from the Canton Thurgau where his ancestor Michael Wepfer had settled in 1529. The family contained many doctors, burgomasters, guildmasters and judges. Johann Jakob was the eldest son of a guildmaster. After studying in Strasburg he worked in Basle under Caspar Bauhin and the young Felix Platter, and in Padua with Thomas Bartholin. In 1647 he was chosen to be Stadtärzt of his native city.

In 1650 he married Barbara von Wildenberg by whom he had eight children—three