

Book Reviews

MICHAEL BLISS, *The discovery of insulin*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1987, 8vo, pp. 304, illus., £25.00.

Every medical student is taught that F. G. Banting, the would-be orthopaedic surgeon and part-time physiology teacher from London, Ontario and C. H. Best, the medical student, discovered insulin in 1921–22; and many know that Banting and J. J. R. MacLeod, the Professor of Physiology in Toronto, were awarded the Nobel Prize for its discovery. A few have heard that Banting shared his half of the prize with Best and that MacLeod shared his with J. B. Collip, Professor of Biochemistry at Edmonton. Whatever lies behind these different events? Michael Bliss, who is Professor of Canadian History at the University of Toronto, where all this history was made, has written a lively, scholarly, and credible account (first published in 1982) of the brief but momentous affair. It is based on published reports, new documents, and the recollections of many who were there. Four aspects are particularly interesting. First, several earlier workers, particularly the Roumanian, N. C. Paulesco, came very close to discovering insulin. Second, Banting's and Best's scientific credibility was ruthlessly attacked by F. Roberts, but Sir Henry Dale, who visited them, described this as "armchair criticism" and rose to the defence of "the two young enthusiasts in their unaided but heroic and successful attempts at research". Third, the clash of personalities, and especially Banting's paranoid reactions, made great difficulties for all concerned. MacLeod, director of the work and head of the department, behaved as a statesman throughout, but later knocked the soil of Canada from his feet when he returned home to Scotland. Fourth, Banting, Best, MacLeod, and Collip formed a team and all made distinct and vital contributions. The results were so outstanding that the Nobel award was made within a year, in 1923, unfortunately before all the credits could be assessed. Now, over sixty years later, Bliss provides a judgment which will remain valid for a very long time.

R. B. Welbourn

MICHAEL WARREN and HUW FRANCIS (editors), *Recalling the Medical Officer of Health. Writings by Sidney Chave*, London, King Edward's Hospital Fund [14 Palace Court, London W2 4HT], 1987, 8vo, pp. 200, £15.00.

Sidney Chave was one of the Grand Old Men of public health, whose career at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine exactly spanned that institution's first fifty years (1929–1979). His first interest was public health, his second its history. His articles on John Snow and the Broad Street Pump, and on Henry Whitehead and the cholera in Broad Street, are classics of their kind, demonstrating the significance of minute local inquiry to wider issues of health history and health policy. These articles are reprinted in this volume, together with the fragmentary and, it must be said, rather repetitive, draft chapters of the book he was working on at the time of his death in 1985, with an additional essay by Huw Francis on the decline and restoration of the public health tradition since 1945.

The intention of the book is to "honour an outstanding teacher and to contribute to the current debates". Sidney Chave wrote well, and the skeleton of his book as presented here provides a good general background for the student of public health history. The "current debates" in question are, however, purely medical ones—on the nature and function of public health, or community medicine. Chave does discuss the process by which the Medical Officer of Health became a specialist, but there is no analysis of questions which concern historians, such as the Medical Officer's role in relation to the nineteenth-century revolution in government, or his contribution to the century's mortality decline. Chave was essentially a medical man, although he had a scholarly interest in the history of his subject; he and his editors see history as an "aid to judgement" and do not participate in the preoccupations of professional historians.

Recalling the Medical Officer is a nicely printed, if amateurishly produced book. There are some odd misprints—Sir John Simon's successor as Medical Officer of Health for the City of London is twice referred to as "Letherby" on p. 53, although correctly named as Letheby elsewhere; the Local Government Board becomes the even clumsier Local Governmental Board in Appendix H. The appendices and bibliography were a good idea, and contribute to the book's usefulness as an introductory volume. There is no index, and the absence of footnotes to the draft

Book Reviews

chapters leaves the reader puzzling over the practicalities of historical writing. How many historians write text first and add footnotes afterwards? Is this less laborious than putting them in as one goes along?

Anne Hardy

HILARY MARLAND (translator and editor), *Mother and child were saved: the memoirs (1693–1740) of the Frisian midwife Catharina Schrader*, with introductory essays by M. J. van Lieburg and G. J. Kloosterman, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987, 8vo, pp. 88, illus., Dfl. 25.00 (paperback).

This slim paperback makes available, for the first time in English, material from the notebook of the Frisian midwife Vrouw Schrader, who lived from 1656 to 1746 and conducted her last case when well into her eighties. Widowed with six children to support, she took up midwifery in 1693, apparently without previous training, like many others at that time. After her second marriage in 1713, she conducted very few deliveries until, on her second widowhood, she again became active, this time taking on a higher proportion of complicated cases. The translator's introduction should be read before the notes by M. J. van Lieburg (on her biography and the social background), and G. J. Kloosterman (on the obstetric aspects of her work), since the relationship of the 'notebook' and 'memoir' then becomes clear. The 'memoir' as translated is a small selection, made by Vrouw Schrader herself, of over 3000 cases recorded in the original notebook. The Dutch edition contained more cases, but the entire MS has not been published. Many of its entries are brief and repetitive; its importance lies in its being a complete case record. Kloosterman has used evidence from the untranslated parts to make an assessment of her practice. By contemporary standards she seems to have been competent, losing only five to seven per cent of the mothers, although she manipulated and interfered a good deal, frequently stating she had to "make all the openings". Perhaps the secret of her success was that she had mastered podalic version; probably other Frisian midwives were as little acquainted with this manoeuvre as the English midwives mentioned in Percival Willughby's *Observations in midwifery*. Certainly she had no great opinion of her competitors, and when she herself needed help, she sent for a man-midwife. Her style is much more pedestrian than Willughby's but any addition to the minute corpus of original records of obstetric practice in this early period is much to be welcomed.

Audrey Eccles
Association of Anaesthetists
of Great Britain and Ireland

HORACE W. DAVENPORT, *Fifty years of medicine at the University of Michigan, 1891–1941*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Medical School, 1986, 8vo, pp. viii, 525, illus., [no price stated].

At the start of the twentieth century, the University of Michigan had one of the leading medical schools in the United States, and certainly among the finest rooted in a state university. It was at the forefront in curriculum reform, and upheld a research ideal at a time when some American medical schools were little more than diploma mills. Between 1891, when the physiological chemist Victor Vaughan became Dean, and the start of World War II, its faculty boasted such leading figures in American biomedical research as John Jacob Abel, Frederick Novy, Hugh Cabot, Arthur Cushny, and Udo Wile. A history of the school during these decades could be important both as a study of the operation and role of a state institution for medical education, research, and patient care within its local community, and as an exemplar of the transformation of academic medicine in America.

This volume is neither. It is instead principally a fragmented summary of the research and teaching of selected Michigan faculty members, organized with some attention to chronology into chapters that roughly correspond to academic departments. The study is proudly acontextual and makes little use of the available secondary literature; in the Preface the author