

### 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,