

### Book Reviews

R. THEODORE BECK, *The cutting edge. Early history of the surgeons of London*, London, Lund Humphries, 1974, 8vo, pp. xvi, 216, illus., £6.00.

Mr. Beck, an architect by profession and a past Master of the Worshipful Company of Barber-Surgeons, has produced an interesting book. It arose from an investigation of the first Barbers' Hall and from the examination of fifteenth-century material. It has grown into a consideration of surgeons and surgery in medieval London, ranging from the Conquest to the union of the surgeons and barbers in 1540. A vast amount of data mainly concerning individuals has been gleaned from Close and Patent Rolls, the Husting Roll and other documents, and from manuscripts of the works of such surgeons as Arderne, Thomas Morstede, Vicary, and others; in the case of Morstede the author cites extensively from his *Fair book of surgery* (1446) which he claims to have found in the British Museum, but which is already known to scholars. Other priority claims may also be disputed. The conflict and co-existence of the surgeons and barbers is dealt with, and again wherever possible original manuscripts are quoted from.

However, the paradox of this book is that although there is considerable documentation of the primary material, often this is inadequate, and in some cases it is impossible to determine the precise origins of a citation. Moreover, there is almost no reference to the secondary literature, large amounts of which the author must have used. Thus in the case of the biographical references most of them are to be found in Talbot and Hammond's *Medical practitioners of mediaeval England*, to which no reference seems to be made. Whether the author was unaware of this and other secondary material or chose not to cite it is the enigma. Where portions of manuscripts have been copied there are many errors. Another defect, and perhaps a more serious one, is that although Mr. Beck demonstrates a great deal of knowledge of medieval British surgery, his grasp of general principles of medical practice, and of medical concepts is less sure, and he is not so much at home with events outside of Britain, or even London.

But as the author states in the last sentence (p. 211), his hope is that his book "... at least, provides a sure foundation for other writers to build on". It certainly will lead future historians to a considerable amount of new data and they without doubt will be most grateful to Mr. Beck for his inspired, amateur excavations.

PIERRE HUARD, ZENSETSON OHYA and MING WONG, *La médecine japonaise des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Roger Dacosta, 1974, 4to, pp. [413], illus., Fr. 180.00.

Whereas a great deal has been published on the history of Chinese medicine, much less on that of the Japanese has so far appeared. This exquisite book by a French, a Japanese, and a Chinese author is sumptuously produced, with wide margins, a large type-face and ninety-nine illustrations, twenty in colour, as well as smaller sketches scattered amongst the text.

The latter is equally impressive. The first chapter deals with the earliest period in Japanese medicine, from pre-history to the fourteenth century, and the second carries the account up to 1868 when for the first time Japan made full contact with the West, until that time the medical influences being mainly from Holland. Chapter three