

Book Reviews

Portraits of Doctors and Scientists in the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine. A Catalogue, by RENATE BURGESS, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1973, pp. xxiv, 459, illus., £12.50.

This splendid catalogue is worthy of the great collection it records: some twelve thousand engraved portraits of about 3,300 doctors and scientists. Once again the world-wide community of medical historians, librarians and collectors will be indebted to the Wellcome Institute for a work of reference valuable and interesting far beyond its primary purpose of making accessible another section of the riches of its Museum and Library. It will become at once an indispensable tool for anyone who wants to arrange a collection or identify a single impression.

Many of the worthies portrayed, whether famous or forgotten, are represented by a single image each, while the appearance of others is recorded in numerous portraits. Isaac Newton seems to top the list with fifty-seven, followed by Edward Jenner with forty-five; but random sampling suggests that general interest encouraged the multiplication of versions of a portrait more readily than solid scientific worth. Benjamin Franklin treads on Jenner's heels, but Tobias Smollett is as well represented as William Harvey, John Locke and Captain Cook better than John Hunter or Thomas Sydenham.

Even the largest collection is never complete: it is surprising for instance to find no portrait of Robert Bridges and only one of William Rothenstein's printed drawings which were so well known fifty years ago; but Dr. Poynter, formerly Director of the Wellcome Institute, indicates in his preface that the Catalogue 'does not include a number of portraits pasted down or attached in volumes of manuscripts housed in the Wellcome Library', nor presumably examples of all the engraved author-portraits in its printed books, though many such are here as separate prints. For this is essentially a catalogue of engravings, though it includes some extremely interesting original drawings. Its interest is enhanced by some 330 reproductions selected for 'their comparative rarity and their quality'. The scope of the Catalogue is of course international, and one must notice among these reproductions the beauty of the seventeenth-century line engravings from many countries; English mezzotints, so characteristic of the eighteenth century, lose more of their special tone in small reproduction, yet attention will be at once attracted by such portraits as the early mezzotints of Dr. William Barrowby and Sir William Petty or the later plates of the Byronic R. L. Lander or Dr. John Mudge of Plymouth.

These selected reproductions raise the question of what we value most in a portrait: likeness to the sitter, aesthetic expression by the artist, or technical accomplishment in the engraver? Here, for instance, is reproduced a farouche portrait of René Descartes 'from the life', evidently rarer and probably truer than any of the fourteen versions dating from 1649 to 1800 which represent the more familiar and more pleasing painting by Frans Hals; on the other hand the reproduced portrait of Michael Faraday is completely unlike the familiar open-visaged, shock-headed image which is usually accepted as his likeness.

Where there are several engravings of one man they are listed in chronological order, but it is sometimes difficult for the user to decide if this is an order of engravings

Book Reviews

or of their painted sources. For William Harvey nine engravings from 1738 onwards, deriving from the Glasgow painting here dated 'about 1657', precede Faithorne's well-known line-engraving published in 1653; while for Newton, though the type-portraits are differentiated, clear sub-headings in the long list would have been helpful. The present location of original paintings is often indicated, most helpfully, though this is a research impossible to complete. The description of the individual prints is admirably concise, yet provides all necessary identifications: pose, artists, publisher and date, with a note, where apposite, of variant states in the collection. The approximate date of an undated engraving can usually be ascertained by turning up the engraver's entry in the index; but it would have been helpful if the century of all anonymous engravings could have been suggested, since the authenticity of likeness decreases with the passage of time. The separate indexes of painters and engravers are clear and informative.

Dr. Poynter's preface draws attention to some special treasures, such as Rembrandt's etching of J. A. Van der Linden, which Dr. Burgess's catalogue-entry tells us was refused as unworthy by Van der Linden's publishers, and the much less known, masterly etching of P. F. Gachet by Van Gogh; both these etchings are reproduced, as are several original drawings. Notable among the latter are a pencil drawing of Jenner and the engraver's preliminary sketch of Dalton; the catalogue records many others from among which one would particularly like to see the pen drawing, dated from Scutari in November 1854, of Florence Nightingale in her wards. The catalogue is very fully supplied with references to publications concerning individual portraits, and there is also a bibliography in two sections: general and individual; the reader must note, however, that this second section lists books and articles referring to individual engravings, while monographs on the oeuvre of individual artists occur in both lists.

Such slight inconsistencies as have been noticed detract very little from the immense usefulness and interest of this major catalogue. Dr. Burgess's deep knowledge and appreciation of the Wellcome Art Collections of which she has long been Keeper, and her generous sharing of her expertise with everyone who consults her, are well known. Her charge includes, besides this wealth of engravings and drawings, 'hundreds of portraits in oils, even more numerous sculptured and medallion portraits, and original photographs' providing material, Dr. Poynter promises, for a later volume. Whoever uses the present volume will eagerly await its successor (covering perhaps the medals first?), but only those who have attempted similar work, even on a small scale, can visualize the hours running into years in which knowledge, judgment and mere drudgery must have been expended to achieve this monumental catalogue in all its wealth of accurate detail.

Les Démoniaques dans l'Art, and Les Diffformes et les Malades dans l'Art, by J. M. CHARCOT and P. RICHER, reprint of the original editions, Paris, 1887, 1889, Amsterdam, B. M. Israël, 1972, Dfl. 80 and Dfl. 90 (or, bound together, Dfl. 150).

The story of medicine in art has now exerted its increasing fascination for over a century. It was inaugurated by Marx, and Virchow's investigations of medieval leprosy (1861) extended to a detailed description of Holbein's picture of St. Elizabeth of