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lay compassion, the end of the eighteenth century, the hospital's ups and downs are faithfully recorded, and due praise is given to the long and varied procession of benefactors from John Radcliffe to Nuffield. Oxford, known as the home of lost causes, has certainly provided two wonderful exceptions in life-saving penicillin, first used on humans at the Radcliffe, and the life-preventing and life-enhancing contraceptive, Volpar. Dr. Robb-Smith writes that 'for the more recent period I have relied to some extent on my own memories and those of my friends'. Posterity, as well as contemporaries, will be grateful for the chance to have the contents of such excellent memories so industriously and happily recounted.

A. W. FRANKLIN

(1) *Volksmedizinisch-geburtshilfliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Lötschental*, by CARL MUELLER (Berner Beiträge zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften N. F. Band 3), Berne, H. Huber, 1969, pp. 144, map and plates, S.Fr. 1, DM. 18.–

(2) *Hundert Jahre Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie in Basel, 1868–1968*, edited by TH. KOLLER, H. STAMM and K. STAEUBLE, Basle, Schwabe, 1970, pp. 436, S.Fr. 60.

(1) The Lötschental is a valley in the Swiss district of Wallis. In 1950 it had 1,405 inhabitants, considerably less than in the past. Cut off by mountains from the rest of the world its medical practices are a law to themselves. There had not been a resident physician in the Lötschen valley until 1930, and there is only one today. The birth of babies was assisted by lay women. When complications were expected pregnant women were, shortly before giving birth, taken to the Rhone valley but often they had to walk there. In winter, with the constant threat of avalanches, all childbirths had to take place on the spot. Even caesarean sections were performed by unqualified and untrained persons.

The well-chosen photographs show such things as a rope hanging from the ceiling which the woman can hold on to while giving birth. Most of the information on actual practice, the same throughout the centuries, comes from conversations and visits to patients with Marjosa Tannast, the old midwife without a diploma but with a long memory and an amazing amount of common sense. Each incident is led up to by comparison with primitive customs in other parts of the world and parallels from 'civilized' obstetric history. The general picture is by no means idyllic. Yet the greatest happiness for every Lötschental woman is to have a large number of healthy children. This ethic can perhaps be understood when one considers that the punishment for artificially induced abortion (p. 25) has been (or still is?) between five and twelve years of penal servitude.

(2) This opulent volume is adorned with a number of illustrations of medico-historical interest, besides portraits and facsimiles. It begins with a historical section on the city of Basle, continues with a chapter on buildings and administration, and then follows the medico-historical section and a clinical section. Heinrich Buess is the author of the medico-historical part. He deals with the most important personalities: Felix Platter (1536–1614), who was not a mere theoretician, but practised in spite of the prevalent prejudice against male obstetricians; Johann Jakob Bischoff (1841–92), Hermann Fehling (1847–1925), Ernst Bumm (1858–1925), Otto von Herff (1856–1916) and Alfred Labhardt (1874–1949); the first five heads of the Bürgerspital

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which was built in the eighteen sixties. When Bischoff, in 1869, became head of the newly established Department of Obstetrics at the Bürgerspital, he based himself on what he had learned in England from Braxton Hicks, Sir Thomas Spencer Wells, Benjamin Ward Richardson, Sir James Young Simpson and James Matthew Duncan. In 1887 Bischoff's personal Chair at Basle University was converted into a regular Chair of Obstetrics. Gynaecology as a subject taught at the university was to follow only in 1893, and from that time onwards the department went from strength to strength.

There are extensive bibliographies of the works of the five chief doctors and the dissertations they supervised and influenced.

MARIANNE WINDER

Safeguarding the Public: Historical Aspects of Medicinal Drug Control, edited by JOHN B. BLAKE, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. xi, 200, £3.75.

This volume comprises twelve papers, commentaries and discussions on the History of Drug Control contributed at the second history of medicine conference organized in 1968 by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. Twenty-five distinguished historians, legal authorities and professors took part, all except four of them based in the U.S.A. While the participants confined themselves mainly to the subject of the conference, some papers were outside the strict confines of its aims, notably 'A Short Survey of Drug Therapy prior to 1900' (Prof. Ackerknecht, Zurich), and 'An Appraisal of Analgesics to 1900' (Prof. Becher, Harvard Medical School). In a paper on the 'Role of the Pharmaceutical Industry' Prof. Cowen (Rutgers) stressed the means of control and the consequent self-criticism applied by industrialists to their new discoveries and formulations. This aspect of the industry's part in setting up its own controls, ahead of legislation or alongside it, the policies open to and practised by the American Medical Association, highlighted the difficulties seen by some contributors who questioned whether the practising physician could properly distinguish between the new effective medications and those merely 'new'.

Wide-ranging papers on drug control in France and in Britain during the last two centuries led to pertinent questions: What is the effect of the standards laid down in modern pharmacopoeias on medical practice? How can these works be developed to assist pharmacy and medicine? Is a new drug always a clear advance over the old? In discussing the U.S. 1906 Pure Food & Drugs Act and the Regulations under the 1938 Act, Prof. J. H. Young (Emory University) and Prof. Cavers (Harvard Law School) respectively drew attention to enforcement problems. These had become tougher as drugs became more potent and as manufacturers proliferated. A host of scientists had now to be employed in the work of the F.D.A. if the public was to be adequately protected. In a final paper Associate Prof. Lasagna (Johns Hopkins) reviewed current problems and trends—could it be assumed that the established methods of control were wholly satisfactory?

The series of papers serves to point out the diffident approach by some countries and the nature of the problems still calling for solution. The difficulties of developing