Finally some progress has been made towards the establishment of a chair for medical history at the University of Oslo.

BERNHARD GETZ (*Secretary*)

SECTION OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

DURING the session 1963–4 Mr. T. G. Wilson delivered a Presidential Address, 'Swift and the Doctors'.* Mr. J. McAuliffe Curtin read a paper on *James Quinlan, formerly Surgeon General to the Csar of Russia 1812–1846*. A guest speaker, Mr. W. R. Lefanu, read a paper on *Two Irish Doctors in England in the Seventeenth Century*.

J. B. LYONS

Book Reviews

A History of Chemistry, vol. IV, by J. R. PARTINGTON, London, Macmillan, 1964, pp. xxxii, 1007, illus. £10 10*s*.

In the narration and documentation of its history, chemistry has been one of the more fortunate sciences. Many of its most able practitioners have displayed an intense interest in the origins of their subject, and the history of science has often been enriched by their contributions. Few of them, however, have attempted to paint on so vast a canvas as Professor Partington has done in his *History of Chemistry*. This magnificent work has been ambitiously conceived, and executed with the meticulous care that chemists have come to expect from the author. Although new ground is broken in several ways it stands in the great tradition of Gmelin, Kopp, and other masters of chemical historiography.

The fourth and latest volume of this work deals with the history of chemistry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recent developments receive only brief treatment as information on these is freely available elsewhere. There are five parts. The first part is untitled and by far the longest, comprising over half the book. It deals, in roughly chronological order, with the development of general chemical theory from 1800 to the time of Kekulé. The remaining parts are the histories of, respectively, Physical, Organic, and Inorganic Chemistry, and Radioactivity and Atomic Structure. Broadly speaking, they cover the growth of the subject after the period in Part I, though there is inevitably a good deal of reference to earlier work.

The method of treatment in the first Part is to group a series of related developments into a chapter entitled with the name of the worker chiefly associated with them. This plan involves inclusion of much incidental biographical material which is of great interest but is sometimes a distraction from the main theme. It works well with a giant like Berzelius (Ch. V) but is less successful with others, Laurent for example (Ch. XII). The dangers of the 'great man' approach to the history of science are accentuated by this method of treatment, but the author is clearly aware of this, and does his best to avoid them. Chapters on early electrochemistry, atomic weights, early organic chemistry and the theory of types enable these topics to be discussed more

* Published in *Medical History*, 1964, **8**, 199–216.

coherently than a strictly biographical approach would permit. Yet there does remain throughout this part a noticeable lack of thematic connection, for which even the very full index is not a completely adequate substitute. One looks in vain, for instance, for a continuous account of the varied fortunes of atomism, though plenty of scattered references to the topic may be found (Dalton's enunciation of the theory does not appear in this volume).

Part II, the History of Physical Chemistry, is a mine of compressed information on the development of six main branches of the subject, each having one chapter. The two chapters of the organic Part revert to the more biographical approach of Part I and richly repay examination by any whose work involves the chemistry of living things. Inorganic chemistry is handled in a similar way, and the final Part deals briefly with the birth of nuclear science and the events leading up to the quantum theory.

Strictly medical topics receive little attention. Even chemotherapy is not discussed, and anaesthetics receive a single paragraph. However, excellent accounts are given of the changing views on fermentation, Liebig's physiological chemistry, early work on osmosis and colloids, and the attack on structural problems presented by carbohydrates, proteins, fats, alkaloids and other natural products. And the chemical contributions of medical men like Carlisle, Crum Brown, Odling, Wurtz, and many others are a reminder that medicine's debt to chemistry is not entirely one-sided.

Inevitably, some misprints have been observed (a surprisingly high proportion of which are in the index). The author's reluctance to relate his narrative to contemporary social and philosophical outlooks will not meet with universal approval, nor will the precise selection of the subject-matter with its emphasis so strongly on 'pure' chemistry. Yet these deficiencies (if so they be) are largely a result of the need to compress so vast a quantity of information into a manageable number of pages. To those whose interests in the history of recent medicine prompt further inquiries into the chemical origins of their subject, this book may be warmly commended as the most useful single reference work of its kind that has yet appeared.

C. A. RUSSELL

De Heelkunde in de Vroege Middeleeuwen, by D. De Moulin, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1964, pp. 166, 23 plates, 25 fl.

This is a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Catholic University of Nijmegen in July of this year, dealing with medicine in the early Middle Ages. It divides the matter into seven main sections, physicians, literature, surgical texts, medical illustrations, surgical anaesthesia, instruments and bandages, with a final section on the healing of various wounds, fractures and so on. A summary of the contents of the book written in English, followed by a comprehensive bibliography, concludes the study.

The subject chosen by the author is a wide one, covering as it does the seventh to the eleventh centuries, and one not easily digested because previous studies dealing with it are dispersed over a great number of journals, authors and countries, or because the texts on which our knowledge depends are unpublished, or if published, have been presented in haphazard fashion. Great credit is due to the author for having gathered all these threads together and woven them into a logical, readable and interesting synthesis. This does not mean that it is a mere compilation, a regurgitation of other peoples' ideas. Far from it. It is a critical appraisal of all the evidence, enlivened here and there by an independence of thought rarely found in doctoral theses, and more rarely still in books on the history of medicine generally. For this the author deserves high praise.