

Book Reviews

The merits of this book are considerable. It is a pity that it is in part marred by a number of printing and grammatical errors and, at times, rather poor English. For instance on page 130 we read 'the invention of the X-ray . . . by Wilhelm Roentgen'.

This is the third book on the history of thoracic surgery to appear during the last few months. Its brevity and concise presentation ensure that it will be widely read, just as much as its soundness will justify it. It is also a very useful book of reference.

RUSSELL BROCK

Laennec. His Life and Times. ROGER KERVRAN, M.D., translated from the French by D. C. ABRAHAMS-CURIEL. London: Pergamon Press, 1960; pp. 213, 215.

Rene-Théophile-Hyacinthe Laennec, in his short life of forty-five years, has captivated the interest and imagination of students throughout the world and by his contributions to medicine has joined the immortals. His statue has been cast in metal and his portrait painted in oils, carved in wood, medallioned in bronze and his name given to one of the most famous hospitals in the world. Books have been written about him and his theses reprinted many times, but until now the intimate details of his life have not been given to us. Laennec remained in our minds as a great physician, a professor of medicine, one of the pioneers in the study of consumption, a student who made remarkable contributions to medicine in his undergraduate years or the inventor of the stethoscope.

Laennec was a Breton and only another Breton could have described the local colour and intimacy of his home life as is presented in this book. Its author has the added qualification of having made a life study of tuberculosis.

Laennec was born in 1781. He had a difficult home life being brought up by an uncle though his father was alive. He experienced the blood bath that took place when the Revolution hit the town of Nantes. His life was throughout beset by poverty and disappointment. His brilliance caused jealousy in high circles and only when dying did he receive any real recognition or financial help.

The book ends with the last pathetic journey back to his native heath. It is a pity it lacks a portrait, a simple map of Brittany and an index, and there is an error on page 90 where Cosmas and Damian are stated to have been martyred in the fourteenth century. The emperor Diocletian was responsible a thousand years earlier. But these are small points. This fine biography makes remarkably good reading.

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