

Book Reviews

Inventum Novum, by LEOPOLD AUENBRUGGER. A facsimile of the first edition with Corvisart's French translation (1808), Forbes's English translation (1824) Ungar's German translation (1843). Edited with a biographical account by MAX NEUBURGER, London, reprinted by Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968, £7.

This facsimile reprint of Auenbrugger's *Inventum Novum* is a very welcome addition to the series of classical medical works now being presented to the medical profession. This particular work is a reprint of that produced by Professor Max Neuburger in 1922. Its production is particularly welcome because the Latin facsimile is accompanied by Corvisart's French translation, the English translation made by Forbes, as well as Ungar's German translation; the book is completed by a biography of Auenbrugger by Professor Neuburger.

Medical classics, like their literary counterparts, tend to be honoured only in their titles, few trouble much with their text. For example, though almost every medical man knows that Auenbrugger introduced the method of percussion, only a very few will have read his book. Some of these classics contain a store of sound medical observations still relevant to clinicians today. This work of Auenbrugger is a case in point. The perusal of it will reveal syndromes of advanced tuberculosis of the lungs and lung abscess not now commonly seen in this country but still plentiful in other parts of the world; and Auenbrugger describes them well in relation to his findings on percussion. He also gives a good clinical picture of pericardial effusion and cardiac tamponade, although he fails to recognize the pathological significance of the signs of the latter.

Percussion nowadays receives relatively little attention in the teaching of clinical examination since the evidence it provides is so often more accurately presented by X-rays. There are however, many parts of the world, and many circumstances everywhere, in which X-rays are not available and then this old technique comes into its own and reveals its value. Those of us who still use the method would do well to read what Auenbrugger has to say about his technique in his chapter on the methods of percussion, for here he brings out valuable points often omitted today.

The fate of this little classic carries a message to us today. Though Auenbrugger expected it to be received with slander and abuse it suffered in fact a worse fate than any he envisaged, that of neglect for some fifty years, until Corvisart rescued it. Even in the eighteenth century there were evidently great difficulties in picking out a vitally important contribution from contemporary medical chatter. How much more difficult it is now. How many modest twentieth-century contributions from present-day Auenbrugger-equivalents are similarly slipping quietly down the drain of neglect?

KENNETH D. KEELE

Essays in the History of Embryology and Biology, by JANE M. OPPENHEIMER, Cambridge, Mass., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1967, pp. xi, 374, £5.

These thirteen essays, together with a postscript on recent publications, constitute a volume indispensable to all who are concerned in the history of ideas in biology, and in the history of philosophical edifices that have been built on them, often on