

## Book Reviews

Credit for the discovery of penicillin and its antibacterial effects has been ascribed in varying degrees in the past either to Fleming or to Florey and Chain, all recipients of a Nobel Prize in 1945. Sheehan certainly makes no secret of his support of Fleming, and his facts and arguments are presented to this end. There will be many readers who disagree. The exploitation of the drug in the early and mid-forties makes fascinating reading, especially the correspondence and agreements between the US and UK governments and the involvement of so many of the major pharmaceutical companies. The account of the determination of the beta-lactam, as against the oxazolone, structure will also revive old controversies, but it is the description of Sheehan's personal contributions that will arouse most argument. No one doubts the elegance or the importance of his rational synthesis of penicillin V, which, of course, is presented in considerable detail although one would have preferred so many accolades to have come from others. The story of the patent litigation (Beecham Laboratories and Sheehan) consequent on the discovery of the semi-synthetic penicillins is again a one-sided presentation, and it is a pity that personal animosities figure so prominently. One is bound to ask whom the author really believes he will convince with his book. Publication of much hitherto unrecorded documentation from the Office of Scientific Research and Development is indeed of great interest, but the presentation of so much material with strong personal prejudice invites contributions from those with opposing views. It would have been useful to have all this information assembled in one book.

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PAULE DUMAÎTRE, *La curieuse destinée des planches anatomiques de Gérard de Lairesse, peintre en Hollande. Lairesse, Bidloo, Cowper*, (Nieuwe Nederlandse Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde en der Natuurwetenschappen no. 6), Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1982, 8vo, pp. xvii, 107, illus., Dfl. 25.00 (paperback).

This book is a joint biography of three men: the painter Gérard de Lairesse (1641–1711), the anatomist Govaert Bidloo (1649–1713), and the surgeon William Cowper (1666–1709). Bidloo wrote the text to an anatomical atlas which was illustrated with engravings after drawings by de Lairesse. It was published in Amsterdam in 1685. In 1698, a new edition was issued in England with new letterpress by Cowper and some new plates but with inadequate acknowledgement of Bidloo. Unfortunately, Bidloo was a contentious character, and the plagiarism (as he not unreasonably regarded it) led to a bitter controversy. Although the story has been told before, Mlle Dumaitre is the first to narrate it in detail and to place it within the otherwise separate careers of Bidloo, Cowper, and de Lairesse both before and after the *affaire*.

It makes a good read, but the biographical mode adopted here slides over some obvious questions. What were the roles of Bidloo and de Lairesse in the production of the book? Did the artist merely illustrate the dissections, or did he design them as well? Do his designs depict dissections that cannot be made in reality? Are the dissections traditional or original? Were the designs influential? Above all, how did the extraordinary drawing-style adopted by Gérard de Lairesse come into being? Are his non-anatomical drawings in the same style? Should we accept Herrlinger's idea (*Gesnerus* 1966) that it was a fusion of "French academicism" and the Dutch still-life? If so, what Dutch paintings or drawings resemble de Lairesse's anatomical illustrations? These problems require a more analytical treatment.

What is new in the present account is that it is founded not merely on the engravings published in 1685 but on de Lairesse's original drawings, which still exist, known to few, in the Réserve de la Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Médecine de Paris. They were acquired by Théodore Tronchin in Amsterdam, auctioned in Paris after his death, and bought in 1796 for the new École de Santé. The procedure of purchase has been recovered from the original minutes of the school. The final chapter tells how, in a scene worthy of René Clair, the drawings were ordered up for the admiration of the Minister of Public Instruction on a visit in 1903 but were found to be missing. They were later discovered in the possession of the widow of a certain Monsieur D., who had also "obtained" from the library an atlas-folio of Cheselden, probably

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one of the library's largest books. While admitting culpability, she demanded F700 for their return!

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JOHN A. ROSS, *A medical student in Paris in 1832: an eyewitness account of the year of the cholera pandemic*, Stamford, Lincs., Scientific Era Publications, 1981, 4to, pp. iv, 114, illus., £5.25 + 75p postage.

In late 1831, a young English medical student who had previously studied in Cambridge and Edinburgh arrived in Paris to further his education. During his stay of about seven months, this student – J. R. W. Vose – kept a notebook in which he recorded notes from lectures (including those of Cruveilhier and Andral) and clinical cases and autopsy findings from his hospital instruction, especially on Théophile Mayer's ward at La Charité. Vose's stay coincided with the cholera epidemic of 1832, and he devoted considerable attention to the symptoms, pathology, and therapy of cholera. The notebook is preserved in Liverpool, where Vose subsequently became a successful physician. It has been transcribed by Dr Ross, who also provides an introductory sketch of early nineteenth-century French medicine, details of Vose's career, and explanatory notes and references. The volume is profusely illustrated with portraits, maps, graphs, old medical and topographical engravings, and contemporary photographs. It is decently printed and reasonably priced.

Although the notebook itself contains no monumental insights, it is of interest for several reasons. It shows the young Vose learning the art of physical diagnosis, especially the percussion and auscultation so central to French "hospital medicine". The case histories reflect the continuing concern with therapeutics, despite the relative therapeutic pessimism that can also be discerned. The breadth of Vose's interests is also evident: pathology, medicine, pharmacy, obstetrics, gynaecology, and surgery all come within his ken. Finally, his notebook bears vivid testimony to the appalling mortality among young adults in the Paris where he studied: "A woman of unhealthy appearance, about 34 years of age"; "A female about 35 years of age was admitted . . ."; "A man about 36 years of age and said to have been of intemperate habits died at La Charité . . .". These and similar unfortunates frequent Vose's notebook, sombre reminders not just of the world we have lost, but of the years we have won.

We might wish that Vose's record of his months in Paris had been more reflective, but even as a simple narrative of facts learned, lectures attended, and patients examined, it is worth publishing. Dr Ross's editorial apparatus is full and, while there are a fair number of misprints and factual slips (e.g. Thomas Hodgkin once appears as Hodgkinson, Brunonianism comes out as "Bruonism", and Humphry Davy inevitably appears as "Humphrey"), they do not seriously mar the value of this pleasant little volume.

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*An explanation of the fashion and use of three and fifty instruments of chirurgery, gathered out of Ambrosius Pareus, the famous French chirurgion, and done into English, for the behoofe of young practitioners in chirurgery*, by H[elkiah] C[rooke], London, printed [by Thomas Cotes] for Michael Sparke, 1634. A facsimile, Edinburgh, West Port Books, 1982, 8vo, pp. ii, 118, woodcuts, £6.50.

The unnamed editor(s) of this reduced-size facsimile reprint have left it for the reviewer to supply an important piece of information not in the introduction. The first (and more complete) edition of this work, printed in 1631, has already been reproduced, as number 141 in the well-known series *The English Experience*, Amsterdam and New York, Da Capo Press, 1969. What is in the introduction does nothing to redeem the book's superfluous nature, as it owes a total and unacknowledged debt to Janet Doe's *Ambroise Paré: A bibliography*, and to the *Dictionary of national biography*, whose errors, for example, in placing the publication of Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* in 1616 instead of 1615, are here faithfully reproduced. In the