

## Book Reviews

for the Osler Club in 1951. Had this latter remained in print there would have been no necessity for the present collection, which is mainly an anthology compiled from *Aequanimitas*, *An Alabama Student*, and the *Selected Writings*. These are in fact the sources quoted (very inadequately) as references. The title invites confusion with the selection first published in 1928 with an introduction by H. H. Bashford; the book under review, however, does not have Osler's name on the spine.

Any anthology of Osler's writings is useful, and this selection is aimed mainly at students, who cannot fail to benefit from reading the words of wisdom presented. Footnotes elucidate some of the references in the text, but it is suggested that a biographical sketch of Sir William Osler would have made an invaluable introduction to this volume, intended chiefly for those who were born many years after his death. Osler inspired all with whom he came into contact, and almost forty years after his decease his words have a similar effect upon readers. If this anthology persuades students to investigate more fully the life and writings of Sir William Osler, it will have been worth while.

JOHN L. THORNTON

*George Birkbeck, Pioneer of Adult Education.* THOMAS KELLY. Liverpool University Press, 1957; pp. xiv+380. Illustrated. 45s.

George Birkbeck's primary interest was in science and invention, and a great part of his energies was devoted to the diffusion of knowledge on these subjects amongst adult workers, particularly through the agency of mechanics' institutes, of which he has a better claim than any other man to be the founder. He was also active in many good causes—social, political and above all educational.

Born on 10 January 1776 at Settle in Yorkshire, George Birkbeck was brought up as a member of the Society of Friends, and the Quaker spirit imbibed from his home background and early schooling remained with him all his life, being evident in his religious convictions, the simplicity of his mode of life, and his sense of social obligation. At that time science did not offer a career: medicine, on the other hand, was recognized as a safe and honourable profession which accorded well with Friends' ideas of service to the community. By the age of fifteen or sixteen Birkbeck had taken the decision and begun his medical studies. He took his M.D. degree at Edinburgh in 1799 and, after a period of uncertainty, established himself in practice in 1806 at Finsbury Square in London, then a fashionable quarter for doctors. Besides his general practice he carried out the arduous duties of a physician to the Aldersgate Dispensary. He also took an active part in the work of several medical societies and in medical journalism. The promise of a brilliant career in medicine, however, was not fulfilled. Although he played some part in the reform of medical education in the newly established University of London and in propaganda for the Anatomy Act of 1832, he allowed himself to be distracted by his interest in other branches of science and by his work for the London Mechanics' Institution, the name of which was later changed to the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution and, in 1907, to its present title of Birkbeck College.

Mr. Kelly's account of Birkbeck's life is complete and well documented, and it is also very well balanced. While giving full credit to his hero's many sterling qualities, he does not hesitate, where necessary, to indicate defects in his character, for this was not all sweetness and light. His judgement was sometimes coloured by personal likes and dislikes, and he could be ruthless or even vindictive to those who

## Book Reviews

opposed him. On essential points, however, subsequent events usually justified the attitude he took. The book is divided into two sections only, the first of which deals with the life and work of George Birkbeck, the second being an account of the general development of the mechanics' institutes movement. There are ten appendices, a comprehensive bibliography and a very good index. The nineteen illustrations, including five portraits of Birkbeck, are well produced. Altogether this is a fine piece of work, and a handsome example of book production, but its medical interest is somewhat slight for obvious reasons. The thoroughness of its documentation, with the copious footnotes and the exhaustiveness of its treatment, inevitably make the book somewhat heavy going for continuous reading, but there is no doubt about its great value as a work of reference, and it will probably remain the definitive authority on its subject for many years to come.

CYRIL G. BARNARD

*André Vésale Rénovateur de l'Anatomie Humaine 1515-1564. Documents conservés en Belgique et exposés à la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique à Bruxelles, du 22 juillet au 21 septembre 1957.*

Bruxelles, Editions Arscia, 1957; pp. 88. Illustrated.

In honour of the First International Congress of Neurological Science held in Brussels in July 1957, an exposition of Vesaliana was initiated by Dr. Ludo van Bogaert, Secretary-General of the Congress. The exposition which was brought together through the co-operation of Belgian librarians and archivists was sufficiently large and inclusive to warrant the present elaborate catalogue.

The exposition, as the catalogue indicates, was divided into several parts: anatomy before Vesalius, the more immediate precursors, the works of his teachers, Vesalius's own writings, and finally the works of supporters and successors and opponents. From an examination of the catalogue it appears that there are very few works of significance relative to the Vesalian theme which are not available in Belgian libraries. The *Commentaria* of Berengario da Carpi is notably absent as well as Niccolò Massa's small anatomical treatise of 1536 which was so influential upon Vesalius.

The various sections of the catalogue contain texts relative to the works listed in each and their relation to the Vesalian story. These are helpful in giving significance to the works, and the compilers of the catalogue are to be congratulated for their efforts to give explanation for what otherwise would have been an ordinary and dull listing of titles. Possibly the text was written under the pressure of time since a considerable number of legends and errors have crept into the text. Thus, for example, it is not true that Vesalius studied law at Louvain, nor did he study languages under the direction of Guinter of Andernach. At Paris he was primarily the student of Guintier of Andernach while his relations with Sylvius were extraordinary, in the academic sense, since Sylvius was not a member of the Paris faculty of medicine. There are many such errors which might have been avoided by reference to recent scholarship. A particularly curious error is to be found in reference to Guinter's *Institutiones anatomicae*, published in 1538 with Vesalius's emendations. In the catalogue this is described as a 'completely revised edition of the translation of Galen's *Institutiones anatomicae*' made by Guinter of Andernach. Of course, Guinter made no such translation, if for no other reason because Galen wrote no such book. The confusion has arisen because of the translation of Galen's *De administrandis anatomicis*, which Vesalius was later to revise for inclusion in the Giunta edition of Galen's works.

Despite such errors, and unfortunately many more scattered throughout the cata-