

Book Reviews

DENYS HAY, *Annalists and historians. Western historiography from the eighth to the eighteenth century*, London, Methuen, 1977, 8vo, pp. viii, 215, £2.95 (paperback).

For very nearly forty years the distinguished Professor of Medieval History in the University of Edinburgh has planned to write a history of European historiography. He now does so with a brilliant survey, ranging from the historians of Greece and Rome to those of the late eighteenth century. As he points out, there is a great need for such a book and it will no doubt receive a warm reception and wide audience. As a continuation, we now need an account of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography, including the appearance of specialist craftsmen, such as historians of science and medicine.

JULIUS H. COMROE, *Retrospectroscope: insights into medical discovery*, California, Von Gehr Press, 1977, large 8vo, pp. 186, illus., \$5 (paperback).

Reviewed by Christopher Lawrence, M.B., Ch.B., M.Sc., Medical Historian to the Wellcome Museum at the Science Museum, London SW7 2DD.

Dr. Comroe is the Director of the Cardiovascular Research Institute at the University of California. A former President of the American Physiological Society, he has a knowledge of the history of the basic sciences in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that would put most historians of medicine to shame. His book is an account of discoveries in various areas which later, often years later, found a medical or specifically clinical application. His erudite tales of serendipity, precocious scientists, precursors, and missed opportunities abound in entertaining anecdote. This seemingly harmless routine does not obscure the author's tendentious exercise. His retrospectroscope (a barbarous neologism for history) is not the finely honed tool he thinks, but a blunt instrument for bludgeoning the doubtful into believing science should be untrammelled by the encumbrances of Government supervision, financial control, and, I suspect, social accountability. What is disturbing is not Dr. Comroe's implicit assertion that scientists know best, (he may be right), but his failure explicitly to acknowledge and defend this view at a time when the nature of scientific thought and practice is widely acknowledged by scientists themselves to be deeply problematic.

HARRY F. DOWLING, *Fighting infection. Conquests of the twentieth century*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1977, 8vo, pp. vii, 339, £10.25.

The author is a physician who has collected together some of the outstanding therapeutic advances made during the last seventy-five years. Public health measures, immunization, serum treatment, sulphonamides, antibiotics, and new vaccines are discussed in detail, and the triumphs in the treatment of streptococcal infections, tuberculosis, and venereal diseases are described. The social forces deriving from changed patterns of health and disease are also part of the story. The material is well documented and most of the more recent historical researches are referred to. In all this is a competent account of a remarkable period of medical history, and it can be recommended to physician, student, and layman.