

Book Reviews

Medical Dissertations of Psychiatric Interest Printed before 1750, by OSKAR DIETHELM, Basle, Karger, 1971, pp. viii, 211, £4.45.

The author is known to students of the history of psychiatry particularly for the historical collection at Cornell University Medical College which he founded when he became its professor of psychiatry in 1936 and which bears his name. In retirement he has used its resources and those of many other libraries in America and Europe to put on the map a hitherto neglected area of scholarship. He has gathered a list of some 1,100 dissertations and disputations beginning with the earliest printed at Basle in 1575 and ending in the middle of the eighteenth century when the custom had become widespread on the Continent. The first 160 pages are introductory. They give accounts of early university medical schools, the development of medical thinking about psychiatric disorders, and there are chapters dealing with special topics such as mania, melancholia, hysteria and hypochondriasis. They contain liberal cross references and free quotations in translations by Professor Thomas F. Heffernan of Adelphi University. The book ends with a list of presiding professors arranged alphabetically as is the list of dissertations by author. Unfortunately there is no index: a subject index would have been particularly useful. Most dissertations are given locations in one or more of the twenty-four public libraries consulted, but there are a number without. Now that the value of what has been regarded as a rather ephemeral form of medical literature has been shown so convincingly, omissions will doubtless also come to light. And there are many areas in which the former distinction between the 'psychiatric' and the 'neurological' is in process of being found to be untenable clinically and therefore also historically. In other words the net will have to be cast more widely to include dissertations dealing with nervous diseases in general. This is quite evident from, for example, the case history of a patient with 'catatonia' from a dissertation of 1741, given at length at pp. 77-80 and allotted a certain pride of place in the history of psychiatric phenomenology. It could almost have graced von Economo's monograph on lethargic encephalitis. And the descriptions of 'hysteria' would fit equally well into a history of epilepsy as showing how minor temporal lobe attacks appeared to doctors before Hughlings Jackson.

RICHARD HUNTER

X-rays: their Discovery and Applications, by BRIAN BOWERS, London, H.M.S.O., 1970, pp. 36, illus., 22½p.

This useful booklet presents a history of X-rays and reviews their present-day applications in medicine, industry and art. The text is supported by excellent photographs of equipment in the Science Museum and by copies of cartoons from the lay press (e.g. *Punch*). There are also diagrams and X-ray photographs of two paintings.

The author deserves praise for conveying so many facts in so few pages, though it must be said that one unwelcome and almost inevitable result of this compression is a certain flatness in the style. It does seem a pity, too, that no mention is made of Professor Arthur Schuster's important role in introducing Röntgen's ideas to England (cf. *Brit. med. J.*, 1962, *ii*, 1164-66). These are the only criticisms one can fairly make of a very creditable and worthwhile undertaking.

E. GASKELL