BOOK REVIEWS

ENGLISH HIPPOCRATES

Dr Thomas Sydenham (1624–1689)

His Life and Original Writings. By Kenneth Dewhurst. Pp. viii + 191 + 8 plates. (London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1966.) 35*s*.

DR DEWHURST has continued his researches into medical biography. He made good use of the Lovelace Collection of John Locke's papers in the Bodleian Library for his admirable life of that physician and philosopher; and now has found them of value, together with other original material, for a study of Sydenham's life and writings. Sydenham called Locke from chemical research to study the natural history of disease at the bedside.

The first part of this book is devoted to the life of Sydenham, and the second part contains the original drafts of his writings which were penned in English. Medical works were expected to be published in Latin in the seventeenth century, and so several persons (identified by Dr Dewhurst) translated them. The translations were not always accurate, and we are now able to appreciate fully the teaching of Sydenham as he set it down in his mother tongue. He wrote some of his later works in Latin; for instance, his *Treatise on Gout and Dropsy*, translated by Dr John Drake into English in 1683, and his *Processus integri*, published posthumously in 1693. The concluding pages of the book contain correspondence including some letters from Sydenham to Locke.

This remarkable man of genius seems to have been born a physician, for he owed little to academic training in medicine, and, indeed, despised it: "Physic," he said, "is not learned by going to universities."

Thomas Sydenham was born at the manor of Wynford Eagle in Dorset. He came of a well-to-do Puritan family. His father, William Sydenham, Thomas himself and his three brothers served in the parliamentary army in the civil war. Two of the brothers were killed, while the eldest brother, William, a staunch adherent of Cromwell, became Governor of Weybridge and the Isle of Wight, and a member of parliament. Much new information is given on Sydenham's early life and war experience.

He was educated at Dorchester Grammar School. In 1643 he entered Magdalen Hall, Oxford, but soon left to become a trooper in the parliamentary cavalry, rising to the rank of captain. After the war he returned to Magdalen Hall in 1647, to migrate a few months later to Wadham College. Being on the winning side he did not undergo the frustrations that Locke afterwards experienced in obtaining the M.B.Oxon. The Earl of Pembroke, the Chancellor, conferred this degree on him in 1648; he was then made a fellow of All Souls' in place of an ejected royalist.

Sydenham resided for a few years at Oxford. He returned to the army for a brief period and was at the Battle of Worcester. Robert Boyle became his friend, but otherwise he seems to have held aloof from the experimental scientists, the precursors of the Royal Society in the University. He never mentions Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood. In 1655 he resigned his fellowship to marry Mary Gee. Soon afterwards he settled in practice in King Street, Westminster, removing to Pall Mall in 1664. He was a licentiate of the College of Physicians from 1663 (never a fellow) and later M.D.Cantab. (1676). Dr Dewhurst considers that he never studied clinical medicine under Professor Barbeyrac at Montpellier as is often stated.

Sydenham's abiding fame as a physician rests on his study of fevers in which he well and truly laid the foundations of epidemiology. He accepted the Hippocratic theory of "humours", but ignored the erroneous beliefs and disputations of many seventeenth century physicians. He went back to Hippocrates, the source of clinical medicine, and investigated the natural history of disease. Studying prevailing fevers at the bedside of his private patients and in the wards of London hospitals, he found that diseases can be identified as clinical entities, that they pursued a regular course, and that their prognosis could be estimated from their characteristic symptoms. He was able to define a number of diseases, for example scarlet fever, measles, smallpox and gout; and described their "constitutions" as due to inexplicable changes within the Earth, climatic, atmospheric and seasonal variations. "The Epidemic Constitution" of any year determined its endemic or stationary fever, and this fever had an effect on any epidemics in that year. He also studied plague in the great plague of London.

Sydenham's treatment of disease was simple and enlightened; it comprised riding in suitable cases, living in the open air, little purgation and bleeding, rest and sleep. He also prescribed opium and other drugs, but mainly relied on the *vis medicatrix Naturae*. Curiously for so careful an observer he did not believe that smallpox was contagious. His "cooling treatment" of that disease under which his patients did well was criticized by the physicians of the day, who alleged that his therapy consisted in doing nothing. But his teaching and fame became world wide.

Thanks to Dr Dewhurst we now know much more about Thomas Sydenham, "the English Hippocrates".

ARTHUR MACNALTY

WITTGENSTEIN MISCELLANY

Zettel

By Ludwig Wittgenstein. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Pp. x + 248. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.) 37*s*. 6*d*. net.

THE late provost of Queen's College, Oxford (Canon B. H. Streeter), once remarked on the value of having at hand an intellectual workshop, where ideas could be left lying about, and there was no need to tidy them up. When the right moment for assembly arrived, any number of stray thoughts could be brought to life, and thus become significant. Such a collection is sometimes of unique value, even if the author is dead. This is, in outline, the situation before us in the notes left in a box-file by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), and now published by his literary executors. In fact, these 717 clippings (or *Zettel*) are fragments of typescripts on which, it seems, the philosopher intended to work at length when the mood occurred and the opportunity offered. Evidently, he considered some of them at least to be capable of extension and possibly of systematization. A portion of the material, however, is largely repetitious: Wittgenstein wrote a vast amount, too, in both these respects a little like Newton. The editors have tried to follow a plan, according to the subject matter. It might have rendered the reader's task a little less difficult if divisions could have been indicated in the text by a horizontal line, or some such device. The whole is simply a bundle of thoughts. Without comment and without criticism—some of them fairly loose and likely to fall out, others tightly bound and most intractable. Nobody could read these pages effectively who did not venerate Wittgenstein,