REVIEWs

Man Against Pain. HOWARD RILEY RAPER. pp. 236, illustrated. Price 10s. 6d. Victor Gollancz Ltd., Henrietta Street, Covent Garden.

This book is for the lay, not for the professional, reader. Though written in rather sensational style, it gives a reliable account of the discovery and development of anaesthesia, but is a little too long occupied with personal conflicts, such as that between Jackson and Morton, which however violent the animosity and discussion which they aroused at the time, have left little, if any, influence on the development and progress of anaesthetic practice. An interesting page is provided by the account, little known, of Mrs. Luhare's experience with plyote, a mild narcotic found at the top of a special variety of small cactus. It is chewed, the saliva then swallowed, when the narcotic effect is produced.

The author records that of 136 insane patients treated by operation 98 were greatly improved. Operation consisted in "disrupting the relationship between the animal and the intellectual centres of the brain".


This book gives an excellent and comprehensive account of the origin and development of man's effort to eliminate and defeat pain however derived. Starting with a discussion of drugs and dreams, it goes on to the control of pain in antiquity, anodynes in the Orient, and narcotics in the Middle Ages. Then comes an account of progress in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Humphry Davy is awarded a chapter for himself alone, and after one devoted to Henry Hill Hickman we come to mesmerism and then to the discovery of anaesthesia proper. Crawford Long (1815–78) is the subject
of the next chapter, and then Wells, Jackson, and Morton. The reception of the discovery in Europe of the action of Liston follows: then the reaction of Central Europe and Pirogoff's work. Chloroform supplies the subject of the ensuing chapter. John Snow (1813–58) and Benjamin Ward Richardson occupy the following pages, then Koller and Halstead. Chapters on twilight sleep and techniques, on endotracheal methods, spinal anaesthesia and refrigeration anaesthesia, precede one on curare. An epilogue and bibliography conclude this excellent volume.


This is a valuable book of reference for anyone interested in anthropological and social aspects of medical history, and its worth is enhanced by the full list of references given at the end of the book. Besides surgical anaesthesia by inhalation, physical methods, inebriants and hypnosis are also discussed. One of the most interesting chapters is that which deals with psychological anaesthesia. The writing of the book is a little disjointed, as though the author was slightly overwhelmed by the mass of information he had collected and had to put much down as it came to hand without finding time to correlate it with the rest of his matter and to fit it into its due place. His industry and learning, however, are astonishing and will supply many an inquirer with knowledge that he would have difficulty in acquiring elsewhere. Anaesthesia by known drugs is discussed in a series of chapters and such unsuspected agents as fish poisons, mushrooms and urine are given their due place. Unnamed and various drugs form the subject of another chapter, which provides some vastly entertaining stories from Boccaccio and other authors. The author shows by quotation that local anaesthesia was used from very early times, although it could by no means be regarded as scientific until the hypodermic needle came into use. Anaesthesia in