

### Recent Literature.

#### *Text-Book of Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology.*

By JOHN J. REESE, M. D., Professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology in the University of Pennsylvania, etc. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co. 1884.

Professor Reese sets forth the scope and aim of his book with sufficient clearness in his preface. Having become convinced by an "experience of over twenty years as a public teacher of this branch of science, that students who desire to acquire a knowledge of medical jurisprudence are too often deterred from their purpose by being confronted by the ponderous works of recognized masters," he has "endeavored to condense in a handy volume all the *essentials* of the science and to present the topics in a simple and familiar style." Under these limitations, deliberately established, the author has produced an excellent book. All the subjects usually included in a treatise on legal medicine are considered with more or less fullness and always attractively. But it is a fair question whether, in thus confining himself, the author has done himself or his themes the fullest credit. The main defect of the volume seems to us to be this intended leanness; in the steady purpose to "condense," the author has trimmed his composition too often to an extent that suggests unpleasant emaciation. It is as if one of a class of bright students taking well-written notes of the professor's own lectures had published those notes and called the product a text-book. In other words, the book is suggestive rather than exhaustive. One would hardly seek these pages first of all in the list of works on medical jurisprudence, if occasion demanded of him a preparation for creditable appearance in a medico-legal case; he would naturally turn to other authorities whose writings are the substance of which this volume is a thin shadow. Both the lawyer and the doctor, when "compelled to cram for the occasion" of an impending trial (as the author expresses it), would scarcely rest satisfied if limited to the "essentials" here provided. And we meet repeatedly in the book such clauses as, "These [topics] cannot be farther enlarged upon here;" and "In a work like the present it would be impossible to enter into a full discussion of the subject;" as if the author himself felt hampered by his self-imposed barriers.

Nevertheless, within the limits described, an attractive and instructive volume is the result. The phenomena and signs of death, the details of the medico-legal autopsy, the means of identification of the living and the dead, deaths from wounds, burns and the various forms of asphyxia, by lightning, heat, cold, and starvation,—these are discussed in the first third of the book. In an introductory chapter on the relations of medicine and law, the author describes the "coroner's inquest" without a word of comment on its uselessness or a single reference to the successful measures which have been taken to supersede it with something better. "In all civilized countries," he writes, "a special officer, named the *coroner*, is appointed to investigate" deaths occurring under suspicious circumstances; there is no hint that uncivilized communities, like Scotland, France, Germany, and even benighted Massachusetts, get on very well without the services of the coroner.

The section on poisons, as might be expected from

the author's enviable reputation as a toxicologist, is admirably written. Statements have occasionally crept into the text, however, which invite criticism. It is declared that "poisoning is the most frequent of all the causes of violent death (the casualties of war excepted)," and that the statistics of various countries show this to be true; this seems a most extraordinary declaration, and we hope that in future editions the statistics will be given in a foot-note. A poison is defined as "a substance which, when introduced into the body by swallowing, or by any other method, occasions disease or death; and this, as an ordinary result, in a state of health, and not by a mechanical action." We cannot but believe that a medical witness, using this definition in court, would find himself in trouble, if cross-examination were faithfully conducted.

In the sections relating to the vegetable poisons there is sometimes a want of definiteness; thus, the fatal dose of strychnia is given as from half a grain to a grain; that of tincture of aconite, from half a drachm to a drachm; while of aconitia it is stated that "used hypodermically even in doses of one fiftieth to one tenth of a grain it occasions, at times, violent symptoms." Greater preciseness might have been expected.

Fœticide and infanticide, pregnancy, impotence, and rape receive clear and able treatment. The chapter on infanticide is particularly good.

Insanity, malpractice, and life insurance comprise the concluding portions of the book, and their medico-legal relations are well described. The author has no words of comfort for those who believe in "emotional insanity," and he analyzes with much skill the shortcomings of the legal doctrines and distinctions concerning mental disease and criminal responsibility.

A word of cordial praise should be bestowed upon the volume as a specimen of fine book-making; its typographical excellences impress the reader continually. The text is without the usual wood-cut illustrations, but these are scarcely missed in the presence of such clear type and tasteful execution. We heartily second the author's hope that his treatise may "encourage an increasing interest in the students of both medicine and law for that most important, but too much neglected, subject, forensic medicine." D.

*Shakespeare as a Physician.* Comprising every Word which in any Way Relates to Medicine, Surgery, or Obstetrics found in the Complete Works of that Writer, with Criticisms and Comparison of the Same with the Medical Thoughts of To-Day. By J. PORTMAN CHESNEY, M. D., etc., etc. St. Louis: J. H. Chambers & Co. 1884.

Dr. Chesney's book may be classed under the head of the "Anatomizing of William Shakespeare." He has endeavored to present "truly and faithfully every line and precept in Shakespeare's complete works which in the remotest sense bears upon the science and practice of medicine." The value of the conception seems to us more fairly open to criticism than the manner of execution. We think it would be better for Shakespeare and for the world of letters if the Shakespeare literature had never reached its present proportions, and were to receive no further additions other than

such as might drive into complete obscurity much of that already in existence.

The following passage from the pen of Richard Grant White, with which, in the abstract, we coincide, may be not inappropriately quoted in this connection:—

“More inflated nonsense, more pompous platitude, more misleading speculation, has been uttered upon Shakespeare and his plays than upon any other subject but music and religion. The occasion of which calamity is that of all subjects which are of general interest these are the most remote from reason, the most incomprehensible. Wherefore it is that certain men wish to show the world that they are the high-priests of this mystery, and can prophesy of it, and utter fine sayings about it, apocalyptically, by way of revelation. And there be literary scribes and pharisees whose function it is to stone prophets, and, by a sort of reverse action of nature, to build their tombs when they are dead and buried. Of which the result in this case is a mountain cairn of rubbish above the poet's remains, which tells little but of the multitude who have thrown their missiles there. Each, however, has written his name upon his stone, as who should say, Lo, it is I who have glorified the name and perpetuated the memory of this prophet.

“Besides these critics, and beside them, there arose enthusiasts who began to found a new literary religion, and to proclaim, Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and I am his prophet. Unlike the prophets of other religions, however, they did not accept and proclaim their divinity pure and simple, but set themselves to dissecting and anatomizing him, and telling the world what a marvelous mystery they had discovered this Shakespeare to be: how he saw more than eyes could see, and said more than words could mean; how wise he was, how great, how good; how grand in purpose, how absolute in execution; how perfect, how blemishless, because what would be blemish in others in him was beauty.”

Nine chapters, under the following headings, make the volume: Obstetrics, Psychology, Neurology, Pharmacologia, Ætiology, Dermatology, Organology, Chirurgery, Miscellaneous. There are no separate chapters on gynæcology, laryngology, or otology.

The most that can be said of a book of this sort is that it may divert the compiler, and prove curious to some of those who consult it.

*Practical Manual of Diseases of Women and Uterine Therapeutics*, for Students and Practitioners. By H. McNAUGHTON JONES, M. D., etc. New York: D. Appleton & Co., Bond Street. 1884.

Dr. Jones can hardly be said to have written a great work, nor does he profess to have done so. He has, however, given to the profession a useful little manual which will undoubtedly fulfill the purpose for which it was written. It will, we think, be of more value to the student than to the practitioner, for as it is necessarily so condensed as to contain only the most important facts, the points about which a practitioner would be in doubt would need a more extended treatise for their solution.

The author treats the subject of gynæcology from the stand-point of the general practitioner, and it is for

him, and not for the specialist, that he writes. The result is a book more practical than technical. The first chapter, which treats of “anatomical facts bearing on gynæcological practice,” is filled with practical hints which have suggested themselves to the writer, and which are very interestingly interspersed among the necessary anatomical descriptions.

The pathology, differential diagnosis, and treatment of the various diseases are very satisfactorily given, and on the whole there is very little to object to. The author figures Sims' semi-prone position drawn from life fairly well as regards the patient, but lying in the middle of a couch in such a way as to render a satisfactory examination impossible. The book is neatly bound, but the plates are often poorly executed. Not a few of them have nothing but their antiquity to recommend them.

*The Theory and Practice of Medicine*. By FREDERICK T. ROBERTS, M. D., etc., etc. With Illustrations. Fifth American Edition. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co. 1884.

The present edition of Robert's Practice of Medicine is in a single octavo volume of 1000 pages. The work has been revised and enlarged by the incorporation of new material upon many of the subjects treated.

Especial attention has been devoted to the chapters upon diseases of the nervous system.

In one respect this edition is illustrative of the continued and rapid march of study and debate in the sphere with which it occupies itself. The author congratulates himself upon being able to lay before his readers the results of the discussions of the International Medical Congress of 1881, and the readers are already estimating the value and effect of the transactions of its successor, the International Congress at Copenhagen of 1884.

*Medical Diagnosis with Special Reference to Practical Medicine*. A Guide to the Knowledge and Discrimination of Diseases. By J. M. DaCOSTA, M. D., LL. D., etc., etc. Illustrated with Engravings on Wood. Sixth Edition, Revised. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1884.

The appearance of the sixth edition of this valuable and popular hand-book of medical diagnosis is coincident with the twentieth anniversary of the first year of its publication. The volume combines those qualities which have been reflected in an eminent degree in the career of the author as at once a successful teacher and practitioner of medicine. It has been translated into German, and issued in Berlin, where its reception has been a flattering one, and a translation into Spanish is projected.

To the American student and practitioner Dr. DaCosta's book requires no further recommendation than the statement that the chapters have been revised, and new matter introduced, with additional wood-cuts, wherever the advances of recent investigations indicated this in order to place the present edition on a level with progress in medical knowledge.

— M. Charcot has been elected a member of the French Academy of Sciences in the place of the late Baron Cloquet.