

a history of a living thing. Mr Longmate, however, has gone some way to avoid this criticism by titling his book *King Cholera*, implying at once that its epidemics were for those who lived through their ravages, the gifts of a cruel dictator. In just the same way as the state of a man's mind may colour his actions so does a great epidemic effect the body politic. This, to most of us who practise medicine, would appear to be a truism but it is one which has often been ignored by historians. Mr Longmate has woven a tale about the disease 'cholera' which is quite fascinating, but he recounts not fiction but stark facts. Round about the year 1817 cholera spread from the East, that hot bed of epidemic diseases. The habits of the Hindus of bathing in the holy waters of the River Ganges caused it to spread quickly and in a few years it had passed through Eastern Europe to the ports of the Western coasts and eventually arrived in England in 1831. It is strange that the disease had not previously been recorded in the British Isles. During the time that it was spreading there was ample warning of its advance and before its arrival in this country the Privy Council had sent medical men to places where it was prevalent to study and report on it, and a Board of Health had been set up to prepare for its appearance. England should, therefore, have been prepared for the disease when it did arrive, but this was not so; many events and the actions of many foolish people prevented adequate measures being taken to control it. In truth, very little could have been done. Its spread through the towns and later through the villages was hastened by the shocking state of sanitation; wells and cess-pits draining into each other were common, infected persons mingled with the uninfected, and very little effort was made to control them. When cholera arrived in a town, often those in a position in which they should have known better prevented its appearance from being notified. The second wave of cholera occurred at the time of the Chartist riots but it was not until the third invasion in 1853 that John Snow and William Budd published their evidence on water-spread of the disease. This was not the end; in 1866 further epidemics occurred in many parts of the country. Those who have seen an epidemic of cholera will read this book with some knowledge of the devastating effect which it can have. The suddenness of its onset, the excruciating cramps and the almost non-stop evacuations, ending so rapidly and so often in a fatal conclusion are beyond the powers of description. But here in this book a very skilful attempt has been made to portray it. Mr Longmate is to be congratulated not only on the mass of material he has gathered together but also on the beautiful collection of illustrations.

**Handbook on obstetrics and gynaecology.** Second edition. RALPH C. BENSON. Los Altos, California. Lange Medical Publications. Oxford. Blackwell Scientific Publications. 1966. Pp. 712. Price 42s.

The first edition was reviewed in this *Journal* in 1965 (Vol. X, p. 196). The gynaecological section has been expanded in this second edition and includes a chapter on gynaecological procedures such as cauterization of the cervix, conization, biopsy and culdoscopy. The style is similar to the first edition, with small print and thin pages. It is these features that make it a handbook rather than a textbook, for a considerable quantity of obstetrical and gynaecological information is compressed into its small compass. A useful reference book which will have more appeal in its own country or to intending emigrants than to general practitioners in the United Kingdom.