

POEMS FROM THE MEDICAL WORLD

Howard Sergeant (Ed)

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The Editor of this *Journal* enjoins its reviewers to reserve their critical appreciation for books which are either essential, or at least of special interest to general practice. *Poems from the Medical World* could scarcely be expected to belong to the first category, but might be expected to belong to the second. In my view the book does not.

My quarrel is not with the poets but with the anthologist. Howard Sergeant clearly believes that the connection with medicine which his chosen poets can claim in some way amounts to a common background, which gives their poetry either some sort of shared language or way of looking at the world, or perhaps even some shared insights into the human experience. But I can detect no such links in this

anthology. The poems share neither style nor preoccupation, such as one might look for in anthologies of the French Romantic poets or the Augustans. Nor are the poems about a particular sort of experience, like anthologies of war poetry or love poetry, nor are they even poems linked by the strong threads of culture and society, like anthologies of Welsh poetry or Border ballads.

There are some superb poems in this book, by which I mean of course poems that I like very much. Gael Turnbull has two wonderfully disturbing and moving poems, 'An Accident' and 'Learning to Breathe'. However, their beauty is in no way enhanced by knowledge of the fact that Gael Turnbull is a Worcester general practitioner or that at a surface level his first poem deals with the heart, and his second with the lungs. Dannie Abse is well represented, but I find him least appealing when he is being a self-conscious doctor poet. Contrast the strained effects in 'The Doctor' with his 'Pantomime Diseases', which uncovers the sinister side of what we used to think of as innocent amusements.

There is a most perceptive short poem called 'Emily Dickinson—in appreciation', by Roy Batt, which manifestly has nothing to do with medicine—one is left to look at the notes on contributors to discover that the poet graduated as a veterinary surgeon and is at present Lecturer in Anatomy at the Royal Veterinary College, London.

And then, of course, there is Keats. His sonnet "To Sleep" is one of the most beautiful in the English language. To suggest that his imagery, or even his prediscovery of things dreamed up by Freud a century later, is in any way connected with his training as a surgeon, is patently silly.

No one wrote better about illness and death than John Donne. Why not include him? He may not have been a lecturer in veterinary anatomy but he must have been a formidable patient in the medical world of his time.

Many of the poems in this book are much to my taste. The bringing together of the poets in a so-called medical framework was not. Does anyone care?

MARSHALL MARINKER

OBITUARY

Richard Anthony Pereira Gray, TD, K.ST.J., MA, MB, B.CHIR, MRCP

DR Richard Anthony Pereira Gray died at the Argyll Nursing Home, Exeter, on 18 April 1980.

He was born on 26 February 1902, the second son of the late Dr J. A. W. Pereira Gray, and went to Exeter School, where he was Head Boy. He went on to St John's College, Cambridge, where he was awarded first class honours in Natural Sciences in 1923, and later qualified from St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, in 1928. He returned to Exeter in 1931 to work with his father in general practice.

During the second World War he was a Major in the RAMC and served in Italy. On his return he practised single-handed for many years and was later joined by two partners. Like his father, he was for many years police surgeon to the City of Exeter and active with the St John's Ambulance Brigade. In the latter he became Area Commissioner and later County Surgeon, and was invested Knight of St John.

Between 1947 and 1974 he was Medical Officer to his old school and also to the Exeter School for the Visually Handicapped and the Southern Railways (later British Railways). He retired from general practice in October 1974 at the age of 72. At that time he and his father and

brother, the late Dr Sydney Pereira Gray, had between them completed over 100 years of family doctoring in the City of Exeter, and his nephew continues to practise there.

Richard Gray had a wide variety of interests and was very popular. He was president of many organizations, including the Exeter Drama League, the Exeter Little Theatre Company, the Devon and Exeter Medical Society, the Catenian Association, and the Exeter Rotary Club. He served as Chairman of the Exeter Division of the British Medical Association and the Cancer Relief Association. He was a founder member of the Royal College of General Practitioners and attended the inaugural meeting of the South-West England Faculty.

Richard Gray was a distinguished family doctor who worked extremely hard and cared deeply about his patients. He knew them all individually and always took great trouble on their behalf. His kindly manner, sense of humour, and constant courtesy became the hallmarks of his reputation. Richard Gray was a family doctor of the old school and believed firmly in personal and continuing medical care.

He is survived by his wife, Mavis, son Christopher and daughter Angela, and six grandchildren.