Bernard on le pancréas

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"I dismiss those who reproach me for the conclusions of my earlier work; the matter is clear enough, and should appear so to anyone who is not tormented with the desire to produce trivial objections." Not the kind of remark that the editor of the *BMJ* can be used to seeing nowadays but fairly typical of Bernard's style.

This is a fascinating book for those interested in Claude Bernard, the pancreas, the history of physiology, and the development of scientific method. It has been lovingly translated into English for the first time by Professor Henderson and allows us access to what has previously been a very rare book indeed—even in the original French. The book is a review of about eight years' research on the digestive properties of the pancreas. The work was prompted by a single simple observation. The bile duct in rabbits enters the duodenum adjacent to the pylorus, but the pancreatic duct enters 30 cm distally. Bernard killed rabbits shortly after they had been given a meat meal and noted that the lymphatics draining the proximal 30 cm of the duodenum were devoid of absorbed fat but that lymphatics distal to the entrance of the pancreatic duct were distended with white fat—ergo the pancreas aids digestion of fat.

From this the reader is treated to studies ranging from the comparative anatomy of the pancreas in ostriches and snakes, the effect of pancreatectomy on pigeons and the obliteration of the pancreatic ducts in dogs with candle grease, the sequelae of chronic pancreatic insufficiency in man, and many in vitro studies on the role of pancreatic juice in digestion. All this was done with great attention to experimental detail and considerable scorn for those who did not agree with him, particularly if they were German.

Professor Henderson is at pains to make minimal comment on the experiments and conclusions that Bernard reached. Personally, I would have appreciated a more detailed introduction to the book to identify exactly what Bernard's contribution was. This, however, is a minor complaint when one considers the pleasure that many will have now that this book is more generally available.

Monographs of the Physiological Society. No 42. "Memoir on the Pancreas and on the Role of Pancreatic Juice in the Digestive Processes, Particularly in the Digestion of Neutral Fat." C Bernard. Translated by J Henderson. (Pp 142; figs and colour plates; £36.) Academic Press. 1985. ISBN 0-12-092880-9.

Lonely without "her men"

"Her lifelong mission was to care for her men and make their lives pleasant." But Grace Revere's mission met with tragedy: she was twice widowed, and her only son was killed in the great war. Although as Lady Osler, widow of the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, she was a celebrated hostess with a busy life, she became increasingly lonely without "her men" and lavished affection on a young Canadian family friend, Dr Archie Malloch, whom she treated as a substitute son. Her long, intimate letters to him have now been edited by Dr Frederick B Wagner, Jr (*The Twilight Years of Lady Osler: Letters of a Doctor's Wife*; Watson Publishing, PO Box 493 Canton, Ma 02021, \$20).

They are mostly about the cataloguing of Osler's library, which he had bequeathed to McGill University. A fairly soporific theme, it might be supposed, but the cause of much grinding of the teeth at 13 Norham Gardens, Oxford, where for several years Dr W W Francis (Osler's nephew) struggled to catalogue the 8000 volumes under the watchful and increasingly jaundiced eye of Lady O. It is hard to know who had the more trying time. Francis may perhaps have been exasperatingly dilatory and meticulous, but certainly from this correspondence Lady Osler emerges as a woman whose beer one would definitely not like to knock over: bossy, self centred, snobbish ("men deteriorate under the influence of women of ordinary birth..."), and singularly unsympathetic to other people's misfor-

tunes ("Hilda distinguished herself by having a miscarriage in the midst of their visit...quite bad...she weeps most of the time...I hardly thought they would pester me with this kind of business"); Francis's wife is a "fool," his daughter a "brat". Their author would have been horrified to see these unguarded remarks in print, but Oslerians and inveterate eavesdroppers will savour them.

A tropical tribute

How would you react to winning a Nobel prize? Punch the air and kiss all and sundry in true first division style? Gasp with incredulity? Or just take it as your due, sit back, and let your head swell? Thomas Weller, who, at the age of 38, shared the prize for his poliovirus tissue culture work, merely "slumped into a chair and remarked to no one in particular, in his quiet, uninflected voice, 'Now, I guess we'll have to show them it wasn't a flash in the pan.'"

With that kind of commitment it is not surprising that Weller should dominate the department of tropical public health at Harvard, where he was professor and chairman. The department flourished under his guidance, and, in an affectionate personal memoir, *Tropical Medicine at Harvard: the Weller Years, 1954-1981*, Eli Chernin recalls the achievements and personalities of Weller and his associates, many of whom became highly distinguished in their