

The Anesthesiologist's Bookshelf

Edited by HUBERTA M. LIVINGSTONE, M.D.

The Discovery of Anaesthesia: The Strange Story of the Ether Controversy. By L. J. LUDOVICI. Cloth. \$5.00. Pp. 230. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1961.

This book, originally published in Great Britain under the title "Cone of Oblivion," is an exceedingly detailed exposé of William T. G. Morton's life, of events leading up to the public demonstration of ether anesthesia, and of the violent controversy that followed. Morton is cast as a hero who remains unrewarded during his lifetime. The Boston chemist, C. T. Jackson, is clearly the villain, cast as a psychopath, maligning all who stood in his way. Horace Wells, the Hartford dentist, intermittently passes through the scene, connected yet disconnected from the plot, and finally "used" by Jackson in degrading Morton. Crawford Long, the Georgia physician, is scarcely considered except as a vehicle for Jackson's venom.

While the book is obviously biased, it nevertheless contains a wealth of fact that has probably escaped most anesthetists. To one schooled in the modern development of new anesthetics, the preliminary experiments by Morton leave one aghast. In view of what we know of ether today, one is even more amazed that the original demonstration went so well. How many are aware of Jackson's feud with Samuel F. B. Morse claiming that the idea of the telegraph was his; or that Jackson did his best to discredit William Beaumont and his work with Alexis St. Martin, claiming he was the more important contributor to our knowledge of gastric physiology? Sad indeed it is to read of Morton's death in Central Park of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of forty-eight, to recall that Wells committed suicide in a paroxysm of insanity, and that Jackson was found a screaming maniac at Morton's grave, to be committed to an in-

sane asylum where he died at the age of seventy-five.

At times the reading becomes tedious and the reader tires of the author exonerating all of Morton's acts. Nonetheless, there is much valuable and little realized information. There is no reason to doubt that the facts as stated are true. The bibliography is excellent and the book is well indexed. All anesthesiologists interested in the origins of their specialty should possess a copy.

JAMES E. ECKENHOFF, M.D.

The Man Who Conquered Pain. By GRACE STEELE WOODWARD. Cloth. \$3.50. Pp. 175. Beacon Press, Boston, 1962.

This is the second biography of William Thomas Green Morton to appear within two years. Perhaps this book represents a more personalized account of Morton's life because the author has had the advantage of incorporating information from 500 unpublished Morton letters. This probably explains why the biography begins with the opening of a dental office in Boston by Morton together with Horace Wells, with little reference to earlier years. Morton was very concerned about the pain suffered by his patients during dental extractions in preparation for application of his newly devised suction dental plates. His efforts to investigate the effects of ether prior to his public demonstration of anesthesia are vividly portrayed. Many may be surprised to learn that Morton previously anesthetized with ether nearly one hundred dental patients before the engagement with John Collins Warren and his patient, Gilbert Abbott. The story of the bitter controversy with Jackson is clearly retold. The strenuous and repeated efforts of Morton to get Congressional approbation are especially well covered. Excerpts from letters written at this time emphasize the strain and physical exhaustion suffered by Morton as he