

Although classically trained at Oxford the author, a medical doctor, is not a historian, which means the book lacks critical analysis in some areas. While his rank identifies him as being a specialist in his subject, it also presages a lack of distance from his subject matter that causes Likeman to commit several errors of historiography. He makes a number of predictions or generalisations, which would be automatically precluded in historiography. Other assertions, for example that the demise of the field ambulance was founded in the availability of helicopters in the Vietnam conflict, are inadequately explained or supported. The use of the word 'now' throughout the text—with respect to ranks, appointments, and addresses—will also date the book quickly.

Likeman's detail of the men who served in the unit over two wars and subsequently until close to the end of the last century is detailed and fascinating. He neatly encapsulates the relevant tactical background in those periods of war or operations which set the scene for many of his chapters. But he jumps between past and present in the first chapter, and later there is some confusion between titles long outmoded, for example in his use of the terms 'militia' and 'CMF' for recent times. There are also unfounded (no sources are provided) assertions, such as Surgeon-Major Nisbet being the first individual to use x-rays in the Australian military. Medical terms are not always explained, for instance 'macular petechial rash', which will leave the lay reader uninformed. An appropriate glossary might have been a useful addition.

However, one does get a real sense of 'family' while reading the book and the author's pride in his unit is evident. *Men of the Ninth* is a most readable and welcome addition to the literature; and a timely one in this the centenary year of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps.

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*The Final Common Path: Muscle Action and the Evolution of Knowledge Concerning Neuromuscular Disease, Including some Vignettes of those who Contributed to its Understanding.* By John H. Pearn (Amphion Press, Royal Children's Hospital, University of Queensland, and the Meryon Society, UK, Brisbane, 2002, 1st edn, illus., \$19.95, ISBN 1-86499-561-0) 96 pp.

THE FIRST LIMITED EDITION OF THIS COPIOUSLY ILLUSTRATED BOOK, *THE Final Common Path*, has a frontispiece, which precedes a preface, acknowledgments, one main section dealing with the evolution of neu-

romuscular disease, references, an invaluable table giving the early milestones in the chronology of understanding of neuromuscular action, and a comprehensive index. It also includes nine illustrations and more than nineteen black and white photographs. The frontispiece is worthy of special mention as it depicts Dr Edward Meryon (1807–80), a British physician and surgeon, who in 1852 was the first to describe the clinico–pathological details of muscular dystrophy, referring to this fatal condition afflicting boys as ‘Granular Degeneration of the Voluntary Muscles’. Meryon contributed significantly to the teaching and research of neurological diseases and is remembered by the foundation of the Meryon Society to promote research and the heritage of knowledge concerning neuromuscular disease in all its forms. The book is easy to read and well researched, consistent and systematic in its presentation. Visual impact has been heightened by the incorporation of extensive and well-selected illustrations and photographs. The cover is a particular highlight and will attract the attention of the reader with its anatomical drawing from Vesalius on the back cover.

Although there are no table of contents or named chapters, there are discrete sections in the book. These include Muscular Force—Early Concepts, the Nerve–Muscle Link, the Spinal Reflex Arc, the Electric Impulse, a New Arrangement of the System, Nerve and Muscle and the Independence of Each, Clinical Research, Integrative Action, the Neuromuscular Junction, the Substance of Muscle, the Birth and Death of Muscle, and Genome and Proteome. The author, Professor John H. Pearn, AM, RFD, indicates that he was the 2001 Meryon Lecturer and, presumably, the research for this lecture is, at least in part, the basis of this present work. Pearn is also Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Queensland and, as Major General Pearn, a former Surgeon General of the Australian Defence Force.

*The Final Common Path* is a pleasure to read because of its diverse scientific and historical descriptions and superb presentation. The book will appeal to physicians, other health professionals and students who have an interest in the history of medicine, particularly those who would like to reminisce about the richness of the voyage of discovery associated with our current understanding of the action of nerves and muscles and neuromuscular diseases that cause weakness and paralysis. *The Final Common Path* is a worthy addition to the extensive portfolio of historical books and other works by the same author.

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