

BOOK REVIEW

Salpêtrière: The Story of a Hospital. From Tyranny and Horror to Caring and Renown

by Doug Addy

Paperback, 138 pages

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This is a chatty easy-read book written by a retired paediatrician with a special interest in neurology about the notable neurologists linked to the Salpêtrière. It is not a complete history of the Salpêtrière that includes its construction or much about the institution and patients. Apart from reciting a brief history of the founding of the hospital there is no account of the types of inpatients that were admitted or what were the predominant diseases treated in the 18th, 19th or 20th Centuries.

Brief biographies and anecdotes about the founders, Cardinal Mazarin and St Vincent de Paul, are set against the background of Louis XIV. This is followed by stories about the Revolution and then the acts of Pinel in famously striking the chains off the inpatients apparently to reconfine them in straitjackets. There is a brief interlude on Esquirol and Duchenne before the main act of Charcot and his trainees dominates the book with their caring and renown. Addy then devotes the second section of the book to writing about other neurologists of Charcot's time. The third part is entitled 'The Background' and concerns anecdotes and notes on France in the 19th Century concluding with the demise of the Belle Epoque in 1914. Digressions into the *Private Eye*, his own family and recent events leaven the text.

This book does not attempt to be an authoritative text or academic work. Do not expect any mention of recent revisionist views of the work of any of the medical characters. This is a good read for the non-medical on neurologists at the Salpêtrière and elsewhere. A medical person might find it a good way of reminding themselves about the many neurologists associated with the Salpêtrière. But this book reminds us that no detailed history of the Pitié-Salpêtrière has been written in English, other than the one included in Ackerknecht's 1967 publication *History of the Paris Hospital 1794-1848*. We still await translation of the detailed histories already written in French.

Peter Carpenter

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