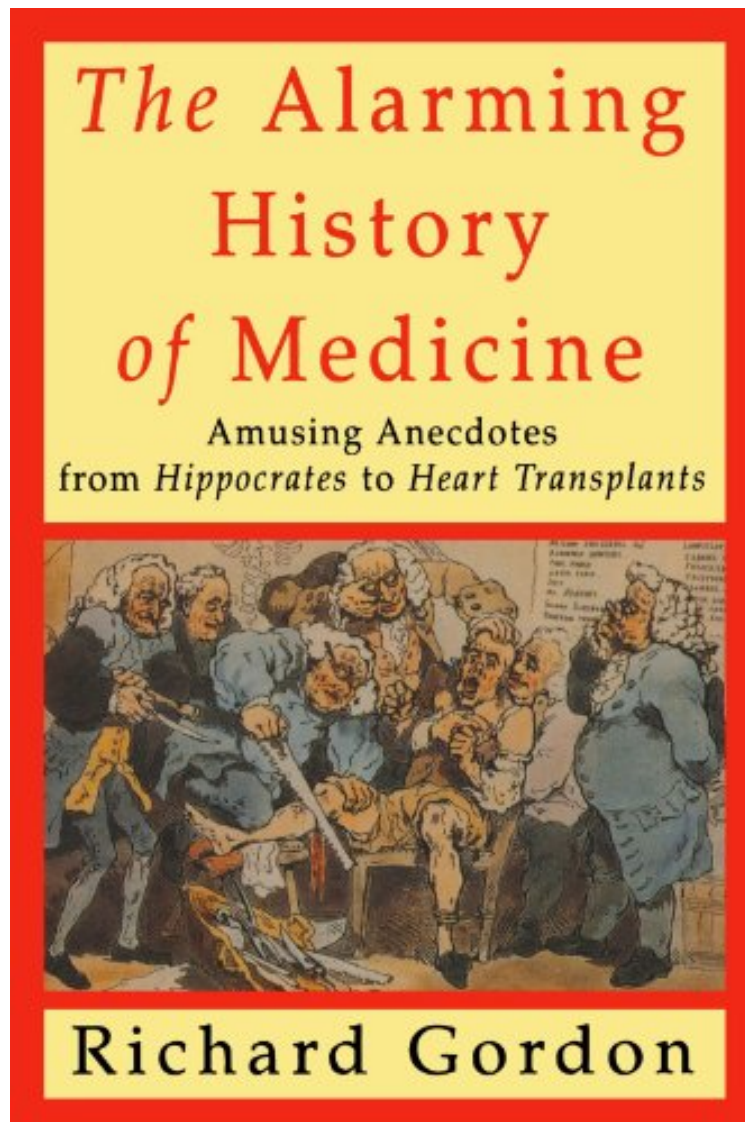


[Mobile book] The Alarming History of Medicine: Amusing Anecdotes from Hippocrates to Heart Transplants

The Alarming History of Medicine: Amusing Anecdotes from Hippocrates to Heart Transplants

Richard Gordon

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Richard Gordon : The Alarming History of Medicine: Amusing Anecdotes from Hippocrates to Heart Transplants before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Alarming History of Medicine: Amusing Anecdotes from Hippocrates to Heart Transplants:

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Delightfully witty and richly informative, *The Alarming History of Medicine* is a collection of anecdotes describing how the historical breakthroughs in medicine were really made. Using hilarious stories, based on actual facts, Richard Gordon shows that most of the monumental discoveries were originally accidents. A must-read for hypochondriacs, doctors, medical students, and anyone fascinated by the world of medicine, *The Alarming History of Medicine* is clever, revealing--and all true.

From Publishers Weekly Best known for his novels, particularly *Doctor in the House*, Gordon here presents unusual insights into medical advances. Although noting that "Religion is of course a Good Thing, offering the valuable incidentals of saddling assertive man with someone more important than himself . . . it scuppered healing for fifteen centuries." That being the case, Gordon's irreverent, witty and rich florilegium of medical milestones is largely confined to the last couple of centuries. He demonstrates that many medical milestones resulted from fallacies, luck or serendipity--citing the role of barbers and warfare in promoting surgery--and that forgotten laboratory bacterial specimens led to a cholera vaccine and the discovery of penicillin. According to Gordon, Darwin, a non-doctor, "founded genetics knowing nothing about DNA," and industrial chemist Pasteur stumbled on the microbes leading to pasteurization and vaccination while investigating adulterated wine and beer. The instructive, entertaining lode of superstitions and facts includes hilarious suggested origins for the word condom and an apt takeoff on Freud treating a patient. Illustrations. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Gordon--author of a successfully filmed series of British comic novels that began with *Doctor in the House*; of many delightful articles in *Punch*; and of books on fishing, cricket, and gardening besides medical topics--has hit the mark again. He deals wittily and informatively with the past as well as the present in this set of anecdotes on some of medicine's great achievements and achievers. Regarding the former, he points out that "among the greatest discoveries of medicine are the generally belated ones that some treatments are utterly useless." As for the latter, Gordon takes up such well-known individuals as Joseph Lister, discoverer and champion of the antiseptic method, who once cut into an abscess in Queen Victoria's left armpit, thereby allowing him to observe upon her death (not from the lancing) that "I am the only man who has ever stuck a knife into the Queen." He notes that Thomas Bowdler, more famous for cleaning up Shakespeare, was a physician. The book is not, however, just trivial anecdote and humor, since Gordon knows enough about the field to realize that Villemin showed that tuberculosis was infectious 14 years before Koch did. The occasional Britishism may cause a momentary stumble for the American reader but in no way lessens the pleasures of this text. ^IWilliam Beatty From Kirkus sIdiosyncratic, crotchety--and very funny--history of medicine by the British author of *Doctor in the House* (which launched the popular 1950's-60's film and TV series) and a slew of other novels with a medical theme. Gordon express no awe for those who practice medicine--he calls them "a rum lot"--and he numbers at only 12 the "masterly discoveries" of the discipline: The history of medicine, he says, is "largely the substitution of ignorance by fallacies." One-liners abound throughout the text: "The seventeenth-century physician was useless but decorative"; "Victorian physicians were brilliant at identifying all the diseases that they had no idea how to cure." Pasteur, Jenner, Lister, Nightingale, Florey, and other familiar names crop up as Gordon reveals how medical advances like the discovery of microbes, the prevention and treatment of various diseases and infections, and the discovery of anaesthesia (which permitted the development of surgery) actually came about. The author categorizes these achievements as "good, but limited. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, if the cancer don't get us the arteriosclerosis must." Although Gordon starts his pin-pricking report with the ancient Greeks, his approach isn't strictly chronological: Surgery is treated separately--as are sex, the British health system, and Freud--and there's an entertaining chapter on odd practices and wondrous cures: for whooping cough, "drink water from the skull of a bishop." A delightful and informative survey that puts medicine into perspective as just another endeavor fraught with all the usual human frailties. (Thirty-nine illustrations) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.