

## BOOK REVIEW

ARROWS OF MERCY. By PHILIP SMITH. New York and Toronto: Doubleday. 1969. Pp. 236, with index. \$6.95.

To QUOTE the dust jacket, this is "the story of curare – from the 'flying death' of the Amazon jungle, to the wonder drug of modern anaesthesiology." Actually, this book attempts to give to the general lay reader a broad historical background to the development of the field of anaesthesia up to the present day – the climax of this epic being the introduction of curare into clinical anaesthetic practice by Dr. Harold R. Griffith of Montreal in 1942.

Dr. Griffith's contribution, which, as we know, really ushered in a great many present-day anaesthetic and surgical advances, is too little known and acclaimed. Dr. Griffith, who has long been one of my personal heroes in anaesthesia, had as his criterion for the introduction of any new development this simple question: "Does it fill a real need?" Curare did, and to the everlasting credit of this great Canadian, he had the courage to try it, and thus gave to the medical world a new tool, without the sacrifice of a single life.

Philip Smith has done his homework thoroughly. The book is well researched, bringing to light some little known and little appreciated facets of a genuinely fascinating story. He seems to have tackled his subject with enthusiasm; his style is easy and readable; and his personal profiles become live human beings. Thus, my criticisms are minor; the narrative seems occasionally to ramble on rather protractedly, at times the American flavour becomes rather heavy, and there are several minor inaccuracies – which should not really distract the professional reader too much.

I would recommend this volume to the anaesthetist who would enjoy bedside reading that will give him some interesting historical sidelights about his speciality, as well as something to recommend to all our friends, acquaintances, and relatives who would dare ask the question, "What is anaesthesia all about?"

M.H.