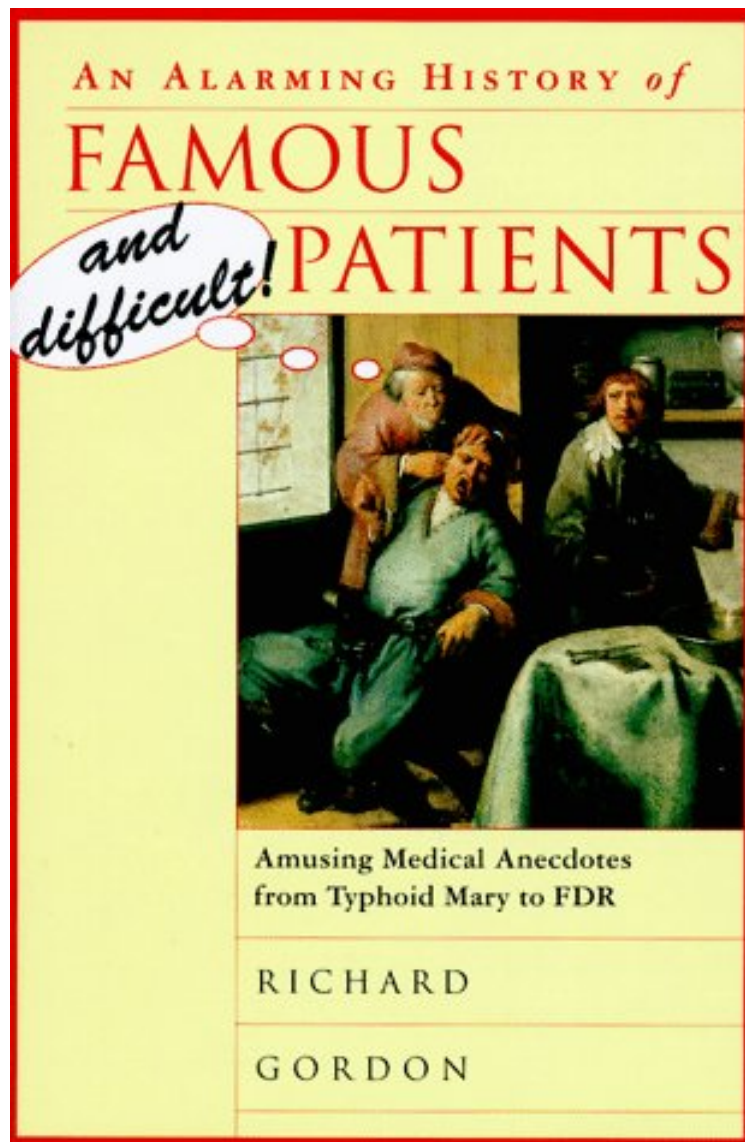


(Free) An Alarming History of Famous and Difficult Patients: Amusing Medical Anecdotes from Typhoid Mary to FDR

An Alarming History of Famous and Difficult Patients: Amusing Medical Anecdotes from Typhoid Mary to FDR

Richard Gordon

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Richard Gordon : An Alarming History of Famous and Difficult Patients: Amusing Medical Anecdotes from Typhoid Mary to FDR before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Alarming History of Famous and Difficult Patients: Amusing Medical Anecdotes from Typhoid Mary to FDR:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Customerinteresting0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Buy It Now!By Nancy T. TrimbleThis book is a winner! It is funny, informative, surprising (wait until you read about Boswell!) and written with great wit.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Confusing, annoying and just a little bit educationalBy Peter J. WardI had previously read Gordon's "Alarming History of Medicine" and was not too impressed but I decided to give his books another chance since I had found parts of the "alarming history" to be entertaining. I should not have tried. The book is more of a collection of off-the-cuff stories of the deaths of a few historical figures with some Freudian cliches scattered throughout. There are even some chapters that don't really have to do with the illnesses or medical conditions of people at all (or VERY peripherally) such as the Bernard Shaw chapter. More distressingly, he repeats the "glorified" versions of some events rather than the actual events that occurred throughout the history of medicine. For example: Ignaz Semmelweiss did not ironically die of the very condition he tried to stop - sepsis from a contaminated instrument; but died suffering from dementia in an asylum, likely beaten to death by "caretakers." If you are interested in Medical History, I've reviewed a few books on the topic and laid down my feelings about each work there. I'm no expert but just an enthusiastic amateur. The "fictional" sections at the end ranged from tedious (it is impressive that a story spanning 7 pages can qualify as tedious) with the MacBeth offering to the genuinely amusing section on Sherlock Holmes. Although the best bits of that are very reminiscent of Nicholas Meyer's "The Seven Per-cent Solution."

A compendium about the medical travails of famous people throughout history offers colorful anecdotes and intriguing observations about such difficult patients as Stalin, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, and King Charles II.

From BooklistQueen Victoria tended to plumpness, yet when one of her doctors suggested a reducing diet, she objected until she conceived a suitable compromise: adding the diet to her regular intake! Those already acquainted with Gordon's writing, in the venerable British humor magazine Punch or any of his 45 books, know his clever literary allusions, delightful wit, and amusing contradictions and ironies (e.g., this opening sentence: "Paganini became a difficult patient only when he was dead"). As in his other works, his historical knowledge herein proves solid, often surprising, and always pertinent. You may think that George Washington, Hitler, FDR, Boswell, Whitman, Shaw, and similar worthies have probably had their medical histories worked to death, so to speak, but such is not the case. Gordon consistently comes up with remarkable details and presents them in an enlightening and enjoyable manner, making of them one of those rare books to be gulped whole or consumed in bits and pieces with equal pleasure. William BeattyFrom Kirkus sFrom the prolific author of a long string of amusing doctor books (the Doctor in the House series) and quirky medical histories, an oddball assortment of chatty, impertinent anecdotes about the afflictions of 31 well-known people, real and fictional. This time, the doctor has his fun at the expense of such political figures as Washington, Napoleon, Hitler, and Churchill; royals such as Queen Victoria and Germany's Frederick III; literary luminaries from Boswell to Proust; and assorted others, including van Gogh, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes. Aware that Washington's ownership of false teeth is a familiar story, Gordon enlarges the retelling by informing us of 18th-century dental practice-- transplants from cadavers, dentures from walrus tusks--thereby making us value dentistry's advances in recent times. The notion of medicine's progress permeates Gordon's accounts, for the treatments that 17th- and 18th-century doctors inflicted on patients-- purgatives, enemas, bleedings, cuppings, and numerous foul concoctions--now seem not merely ineffective but downright death-promoting. Perhaps even more terrifying is the idea of surgery without anesthesia; Gordon's graphic description of the operation Pepys endured for removal of bladder stones sticks in the mind. Clever and gossipy, Gordon's brief anecdotes are full of name-dropping and sexual tittle-tattle: Boswell had gonorrhea, Carlyle was impotent, Florence Nightingale was a lesbian, and Hitler had only a right testicle. It is relief to come to the last chapter, where Gordon has the most fun of all with fictional figures. Dr. Watson's letter to Freud about his neurotic friend Holmes is a gem, as is Freud's reply. Discovering the human frailties of notable men and women (Byron had sclerosis of the liver, Proust suffered from mother-fixation, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was anorexic) does little to increase appreciation of their work but certainly cuts them down to size. For the most part, this is pretty low stuff, the National Enquirer for history buffs. (24 pages bw photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.