

BOOK REVIEW

David K. Wiecking,¹ M.D.

A Review of Taylor's Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence

REFERENCE: Mant, A. K., Eds., *Taylor's Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence*, 13th ed., Churchill Livingstone, 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, \$59.00, 1985.

To produce a condensed version of a great work is a constant struggle between faithfulness to the original and an awareness of what the new reader needs to know. In this 13th edition of *Taylor*, Professor Mant as editor has striven mightily to reduce the two-volume 12th edition into a new one-volume compendium of English forensic medicine, to present the pertinent materials for the present-day practitioner, and also apparently to keep the purchase price within range of its intended readers. To a considerable degree he has succeeded, eliminating virtually all of the sections on toxicology and much of the previous extensive discussion described as "sexual medical jurisprudence." These deletions make the 13th edition much more ready-reference for the practicing coroner or barrister, although it is a shame to leave out such titillating chapters as "virginity and defloration," and "masturbation, indecent exposure, and gross indecency"! Of course anyone interested in those subjects could always refer to the previous edition.

This new 1985 edition includes most of the pertinent points of medical jurisprudence of importance to the British practitioner. As usual, the chapters on historical developments in the Anglo-American legal systems are classics. There are also chapters concerning the handling of living patients, which subjects are always interesting but not usually pertinent to the American forensic pathologist. The chapter on "Medico-Legal Examination of the Living" is the longest chapter in the book, presenting in minute detail the mechanics of the examination of virtually every orifice of the human body, capped off by a discussion of the diagnosis of pregnancy! Other chapters present the laws concerning medical practice in Great Britain and the workings of the British mental health system, along with some generalities about psychiatry. The orientation of these chapters to medical practice in Great Britain severely limits their applicability in the former colonies. The discussion, for instance, of criminal responsibility carries a considerable discussion of the McNaghten rules but nary a mention of the admittedly controversial Durham rule.

The portion of this book devoted to classic forensic pathology is obviously its backbone and the material that will be of greatest interest to practicing forensic pathologists. All the usual topics are covered in greater or lesser detail. The discussions of unexpected natural death, asphyxia, starvation and neglect, electrical injuries, and infant deaths are quite in-

¹Chief medical examiner, Commonwealth of Virginia, 9 N. 14th St., Richmond, VA 23219.

formative, as are those about personal identification and forensic odontology. The critical chapter on "Wounds and Their Interpretation," which is usually the centerpiece of any work on forensic pathology, is understated, and the illustrations are few and of poor quality. Much of the material is devoted to anecdotal references to British cases, which are interesting but do not do much for the reader looking for a specific answer to a pathological finding. A total of six pages and one photograph are devoted to firearm injuries. One must wonder if the 14th edition will not devote considerably more space to this subject, given developments in Britain these days.

This 13th edition of *Taylor*—contributed to by numerous distinguished British practitioners of both law and medicine and edited by an eminent retired British forensic pathologist—succeeds in reducing the classic work to a single volume to be used by practitioners of forensic medicine and pathology and lawyers who dabble in such subjects. Its orientation to the British experience means that large portions of it are inapplicable to the American system, although the portions dealing exclusively with medical subjects are of course international in scope. This 13th edition of *Taylor* is a worthy addition to any medical or legal library. It should be shelved next to the 12th edition so that the discriminating reader can refer to the previous edition for more extensive discussions and more informative photographs.