radiograph is unexcelled, certainly in England, probably in the world. Even at its price it is worth buying. This fifth edition will doubtless be followed by a sixth, from which it is hoped the author will ruthlessly delete all indistinct, and therefore useless, pictures (Figs. 288a and 288b for example).—George PERKINS.

JOHN ABERNETHY: A BIOGRAPHY. By John L. THORNTON, A.L.A., Librarian, St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College. $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ in. Pp. 184, with 8 plates and 5 figures. Bibliography. Appendices. Index. 1953. London: Simpkin Marshall Ltd. Price 25s.

Abernethy is remembered as the virtual founder of the medical school of St Bartholomew's Hospital and as a picturesque but rude eccentric. His real personality is elusive, and his biographical material is small, but Mr Thornton has been able to find some new sources and has pieced together impassionately a most readable narrative from which an unexpectedly pleasant picture of the man emerges.

Abernethy's masters were William Blizard of the London Hospital, Percivall Pott, to whom he was dresser at Bart's, and John Hunter of St George's. Abernethy served Bart's, not only as assistant surgeon for twenty-eight years and as surgeon for twelve, but also as lecturer in anatomy and in surgery. His ligation of the external iliac artery, probably his biggest contribution to surgery, was described in this Journal two years ago (Vol. 33-B, page 639). His emphasis on pathology and the constitutional causes of local affections, and on not merely local but general treatment, whose importance was then little recognised, is witnessed by "my book," *Surgical Observations on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases; and on Aneurisms*; patients seen at Bedford Row were enjoined to buy it and follow the directions on specified pages. He excelled at teaching, and put it before all else. He had a remarkable, almost freak, memory, and, in spite of early battles with nervousness, he became the greatest medical teacher of his time—clear, incisive, practical and arresting. He was impressive, though small of stature and droll in manner, and he held attention in spite of a comfortless amphitheatre in which "each ascending row of students received the knees of those above into their backs." His well known remark at the beginning of one session: "Good God! What will become of you all?" might well be uttered to-day. In 1795 he founded the Medical and Philosophical (now the Abernethian) Society, parent, through his energy, of the St Bartholomew's Medical College Library. In 1828 he and Edward Stanley gave their pathological teaching collection of several thousands of specimens to the Hospital for the students.

In spite of Abernethy's great influence upon students, he seems to have had few close disciples: Lawrence and Skey are well known; John Haddy James, Abernethy's house pupil for some years, is written about in this number by Mr Rocyn Jones; Richard Owen began as Abernethy's prosector and came to the Royal College of Surgeons through his recommendation.

When, at length, elected full surgeon to the Hospital, Abernethy most disinterestedly petitioned the Governors that surgeons should retire at sixty, a proposal in the cause of younger men that was postponed for two centuries. To the really ill he was kindness itself, to the needy most generous. He had sensibility, and it is hard to understand his proverbial rudeness, even allowing that this honest, disinterested man, scornful of riches and rank, bound up in his hospital and teaching, grudged time given to the pretentious and frivolous. Some light is shed by the assertion of a former school-fellow, who detected but one fault—"he was rather hasty and impetuous in his manner, but it was soon over and forgotten"—and in a letter to a daughter: "Why have all the legitimate children of John Bull an aversion to politeness? 'Tis because it so commonly covereth a multitude of sins; because, with honest simplicity, they have often caught hold of the garb and found that it concealed deformity and malice. I frankly acknowledge that I may have carried my detestation too far . . ."

When Abernethy retired from the post of surgeon at Bart's, the Governors, departing from custom, declined to make him a Governor, because he was still a Lecturer. After a battle, they withdrew handsomely, and ordered "that a green staff be sent him conformable to ancient custom." The "ancient custom" continues to this day, each new Governor being presented with a green staff of office emblazoned with the arms of the Hospital.

Abernethy was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and held many offices at the then Royal College of Surgeons in London, including that of President. He was instrumental in founding and became President of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, the parent of the Royal Society of Medicine. He declined a baronetcy. He was not of the party when Sir Astley Cooper, with six distinguished assistants, successfully removed a wen from the Royal scalp.

This book will attract others besides Bart's men.—H. Jackson BURROWS.