

Correspondence

The purpose of this letter is to inform those interested that these computing facilities exist and hopefully encourage offers of data for analysis at sites other than those already obtained.

Yours etc.,
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REFERENCE

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"Gray's Anatomy"

THE EDITOR—SIR,

The comparison, made by Dr. W. D. Jeans in your last issue*, of Gray's Anatomy with the latest revision of its American offspring is an interesting exercise; but his conclusion that the original is a 'better buy', though pleasing to the producers of the "British" Gray's Anatomy, a much larger and more up-to-date book, is based upon the false premise that a second version is necessary. Here a little history helps: the first edition, published by Parker and the copyright at once purchased by Longmans, was immediately popular and must have contributed much to the profits of the latter firm. Americans also have an acute 'nose' for a good thing, witness the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Sotheby's etc., and true to form they brought the American rights from Parker in 1859, since when American editions have appeared, at first drawing on the British original in its revisions, but more recently going their own way, a conservative way. This trend has resulted in two increasingly different books with the American version falling markedly behind in content and in its policy of clinging to many of the original and perhaps over-praised illustrations.

It seems more natural and indeed more just that books which achieve international demand should be imported from their country of origin; but, of course, where books of high commercial potential are concerned, such as Gray's Anatomy, Mammon is sure to intrude.

*British Journal of Radiology, 1985, 58, 838.

Dr. Jeans presumably likes his structure and function separated, even though they must be integrated finally for most purposes. Cadaveric anatomy may suffice at times, as in some aspects of radiology; but no function occurs outside structure, and structure divorced from its function is meaningless. In its last two editions Gray's Anatomy was deliberately and most extensively revised in this conviction. Previously, like the American version, Gray's Anatomy was largely in the old tradition of human anatomy—"descriptive and applied". We, the present editors, were convinced of the necessity to break away from the static vogue of Vesalian anatomy favoured in the past and still apparent in most modern texts. We desired to inspire cadaveric anatomy with the intelligibility only revealed by simultaneous considerations of function.

The 35th edition was perhaps the first modern anatomical text to reject the hide-bound habits of descriptive anatomy, by which perhaps most texts, including current publications, are still characterised. We rejected the usual uncritical repetition of facts and theories from text to text, deliberately seeking to transform the subject from stultifying repetition towards the critical attitudes of true science. Whenever new work, especially experimental work, was available, we replaced unquestioning dogma by quotation, discussion and critical assessment, as any scientific text should do. Judging by the increase in circulation, the greatest in the book's long history, this has proved a popular change; and, by the way, the new illustrations in the 35th and 36th editions, some of which Dr. Jeans dubs 'garish', have received wide acclaim and several awards.

It seems absurd that Henry Gray's masterpiece should be available in so many forms, for there are also several "versions" of Gray currently purveyed to an unsuspecting public on both sides of the Atlantic. But of course this is clearly a pointer to the commercial 'pull' of the name 'Gray', however used or abused. In this morass of unnecessary duplication and dubious catchpenny publications the only possible advice is to 'but British'. That way you will get the lot, and, as Dr. Jeans says, at the best price. One must add, however, that Professor Carmine Clemente has produced a handsome and superb updating of the American "Gray".

Yours etc.,
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