

Book Reviews

JOHN C. ECCLES and WILLIAM C. GIBSON, *Sherrington. His life and thought*, Berlin, Heidelberg, and New York, Springer International, 1979, 8vo, pp. xv, 269, illus., \$18.70.

Reviewed by William F. Bynum, M.D., Ph.D., Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP.

Of twentieth-century physiologists, probably only Pavlov has been subjected to as much historical attention as Sir Charles Scott Sherrington (1857-1952). In addition to a large number of articles and obituaries, Lord Cohen of Birkenhead, Ragnar Granit, and Judith Swazey have written monographs on Sherrington, and E. G. T. Liddell's *Discovery of the reflexes* (1960) devoted a great deal of space to Sherrington's contribution to this central problem of modern neurophysiology. Anyone familiar with this literature might feel it superfluous to open yet another volume on the physiologist. Nevertheless, *Sherrington: his life and thought* is a pleasant read, affectionately written by two men who obviously revere the memory of their subject.

Gibson and Eccles have identified their respective contributions to the book: roughly, Gibson is concerned with the life and Eccles with the thought. Gibson chronicles Sherrington's Cambridge days, his years as Professor at Liverpool (1895-1913), and his first decade at Oxford. Eccles then uses Sherrington's last decade at Oxford (1925-35) as a vehicle for placing his later research into perspective. Gibson then examines some of Sherrington's personal and professional relationships as revealed in his private correspondence, much of it now preserved in the University of British Columbia. Correspondents include Sir William Osler, A. V. Hill, Lord Adrian, John F. Fulton, Howard Florey, and John Eccles. Eccles then turns to the philosophical and historical writings, particularly Sherrington's Gifford Lectures *Man On his Nature* (1940). Final short chapters consider Sherrington as a book collector, poet, and public servant. Seventeen appendices assemble some of Sherrington's general writings and a moving memoir by his son, Carr Sherrington.

This book will appeal primarily to those who share the authors' fascination with Sherrington's personality. They make relatively little attempt to place either Sherrington or his work into any broad historical context, and the absence of footnotes will irritate scholars. There are a few inaccuracies, e.g., Michael Foster, not J. N. Langley, founded *The Journal of Physiology* (p. 2); and A. V. Hill received his Nobel Prize in 1922, not 1926 (p. 81).

WESLEY D. SMITH, *The Hippocratic tradition*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. 264, £7.75.

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The name of Hippocrates has deeply influenced the whole Western tradition of medicine. In this detective story, Professor Smith looks for and locates an appropriate body, interrogates a crowd of witnesses, ancient and modern, and finally pronounces

Book Reviews

that scholars and medical men alike have been fooled by a series of attributions devised by Dioscorides and Artemidorus Capito c. A.D. 125 and given greater and almost unshakeable authority by the verbose, argumentative, and persuasive Galen. The main thesis, that the interest in "the true doctrines of Hippocrates" postdates Erasistratus and is the result of the cataloguing in the Alexandrian library of a miscellaneous assemblage of early medical writings; that the commitment to certain "Hippocratic" texts brought with it a desire to explain away divergent tracts and to reassign authorship; and that this process was canonized by Galen and accepted by Western writers from Mercurialis to Deichgräber, all this is provocative and convincing. Almost half the book is devoted to a careful and justly sceptical examination of Galen's Hippocratism, which is shown to rest on a combination of fallible learning and tendentious prejudice. Rightly, we are reminded that Galen's arguments are often *ad hominem*, and that his methods in both scholarship and polemic became more and more refined. The divine Galen is at last revealed as human, and what he saw as his greatest achievement, the completion of the unfinished work of Hippocrates, is exposed to much-needed scrutiny.

English readers familiar with the recent work of Lloyd and Lonie will not be surprised at the demonstrable fragility of the "true Hippocrates" thesis, and they may not be convinced by Professor Smith's attempt, perhaps forced on him by the same academic tradition he criticizes, to find in *Regimen* the one surviving authentic work of the historical Hippocrates. They may also look in vain for a more detailed confrontation of the literary evidence with the epigraphic and archaeological tradition of Cos as expounded by Susan Sherwin-White in *Ancient Cos*, 1978, but that would well require another long article, if not another book. The weakness of the literary tradition, coming largely from one source, Galen, also casts doubts on the validity of some arguments from silence. "Hippocratism" seems to arise in late-third-century Alexandria: does the debate over authorship have to wait almost four hundred years for the first attributions to Polybus, Thessalus, and other Hippocrates? Can we reconcile Smith's snarling Galen with Ballester's genetic theory of Galenic development as a result of increasing academic and Hippocratic learning? One should also emphasize Galen's antiquarianism, typical of his age, when, for example, he could write a tract on *Regimen in Acute Diseases according to Hippocrates*, for Victorinus (not Victor, as on pp. 115, 137), without once mentioning the treatment he himself would recommend in such cases.

Despite its title, this book is about Galen and his influence on European thought. While less sure in his mathematics than his anti-hero, Professor Smith is wittier, more concise and more courteous in debate. No student of medical history can afford to neglect this book, which, even if not convincing in all its details, stimulates and by its fine methodical scepticism compels us to re-examine a major tradition of scholarship and of medico-historical dogma.

BERNARD DIXON, *Beyond the magic bullet*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1978, 8vo, pp. [iv], 249, £5.50.

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