

Book Reviews

Anatomies of Pain. K. D. KEELE, M.D., F.R.C.P. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1957; pp. x+206. Illustrated. 27s. 6d.

Research into the fundamental problems attendant upon the experience of pain has attracted some of the finest intellects throughout the ages. This is not to deny, however, that a great deal of nonsense has been written around this topic, and not only by our remote forebears. The subject is a vast one and has shown signs of getting a little out of hand. Pain offers itself as a problem masked in quite different guises according to whether it is a metaphysician, a theologian, a practising doctor or a physiologist who is the inquirer. At no time more than the present has there been a greater need for a clearing-house of opinions and observations upon the topic of pain. Dr. Keele has put us in his debt by dint of this scholarly monograph. As a historian of medicine, Keele has painstakingly traced the slow evolution of our knowledge (and our prejudices) concerning the nature of pain and its anatomophysiological correlates. His researches begin with the Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations and pass steadily forward by way of Greek and Arabian medicine, up to the twentieth century. We are clearly instructed into the earlier conceptions as to the essential organ of personal identity, and the rival claims of heart, stomach and brain are shown to have continued for many centuries. This quest also tied up with the cognate search for the seat of the soul and the *sensorium commune*. After the eventual determination of the brain as the organ most intimately concerned with painful experiences as part of awareness, the topography of pain-pathways still remained a mystery until the early nineteenth century. Keele's historical guide leads us right into the twentieth century and presents us with topical trends of thought. The stimulating—even exciting—ideas of René Leriche have received sympathetic treatment at the hands of the author. We are left, however, with the uncomfortable feeling that many of our newest gods are just as much endowed with feet of clay as in the case of some of the mediaevalists. Dr. Keele has stated in his conclusion: 'The search for the *Sensorium Commune* has commenced again. . . . And it is in the conviction that a re-interpretation of the old ideas in terms of new knowledge constitutes a fruitful form of scientific thought that this attempt to tell the story of the anatomies of pain has been made.'

This interesting monograph can be warmly recommended to medical historians, neurologists, neurophysiologists and philosophers. Excellent bibliographies and indexes add considerably to the value of the book.

MACDONALD CRITCHLEY

The Student Life. The Philosophy of Sir William Osler. Edited by RICHARD E. VERNEY, M.B., F.R.C.P.E., D.R. With Forewords by John Bruce and Alec H. Macklin. Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1957; pp. xiii+214. Frontispiece. 15s.

Selections from the writings of Sir William Osler began to appear during his lifetime, when we had *Aequanimitas* (1905), *An Alabama Student* (1908), and *Counsels and Ideals*, edited by C. N. B. Camac (1905), to be followed by *The Student Life, and Other Essays* (1928); *Aphorisms*, collected by R. B. Bean (1950); and *Selected Writings*, published

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for the Osler Club in 1951. Had this latter remained in print there would have been no necessity for the present collection, which is mainly an anthology compiled from *Aequanimitas*, *An Alabama Student*, and the *Selected Writings*. These are in fact the sources quoted (very inadequately) as references. The title invites confusion with the selection first published in 1928 with an introduction by H. H. Bashford; the book under review, however, does not have Osler's name on the spine.

Any anthology of Osler's writings is useful, and this selection is aimed mainly at students, who cannot fail to benefit from reading the words of wisdom presented. Footnotes elucidate some of the references in the text, but it is suggested that a biographical sketch of Sir William Osler would have made an invaluable introduction to this volume, intended chiefly for those who were born many years after his death. Osler inspired all with whom he came into contact, and almost forty years after his decease his words have a similar effect upon readers. If this anthology persuades students to investigate more fully the life and writings of Sir William Osler, it will have been worth while.

JOHN L. THORNTON

George Birkbeck, Pioneer of Adult Education. THOMAS KELLY. Liverpool University Press, 1957; pp. xiv + 380. Illustrated. 45s.

George Birkbeck's primary interest was in science and invention, and a great part of his energies was devoted to the diffusion of knowledge on these subjects amongst adult workers, particularly through the agency of mechanics' institutes, of which he has a better claim than any other man to be the founder. He was also active in many good causes—social, political and above all educational.

Born on 10 January 1776 at Settle in Yorkshire, George Birkbeck was brought up as a member of the Society of Friends, and the Quaker spirit imbibed from his home background and early schooling remained with him all his life, being evident in his religious convictions, the simplicity of his mode of life, and his sense of social obligation. At that time science did not offer a career: medicine, on the other hand, was recognized as a safe and honourable profession which accorded well with Friends' ideas of service to the community. By the age of fifteen or sixteen Birkbeck had taken the decision and begun his medical studies. He took his M.D. degree at Edinburgh in 1799 and, after a period of uncertainty, established himself in practice in 1806 at Finsbury Square in London, then a fashionable quarter for doctors. Besides his general practice he carried out the arduous duties of a physician to the Aldersgate Dispensary. He also took an active part in the work of several medical societies and in medical journalism. The promise of a brilliant career in medicine, however, was not fulfilled. Although he played some part in the reform of medical education in the newly established University of London and in propaganda for the Anatomy Act of 1832, he allowed himself to be distracted by his interest in other branches of science and by his work for the London Mechanics' Institution, the name of which was later changed to the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution and, in 1907, to its present title of Birkbeck College.

Mr. Kelly's account of Birkbeck's life is complete and well documented, and it is also very well balanced. While giving full credit to his hero's many sterling qualities, he does not hesitate, where necessary, to indicate defects in his character, for this was not all sweetness and light. His judgement was sometimes coloured by personal likes and dislikes, and he could be ruthless or even vindictive to those who