

Book Reviews

MAJOR GREENWOOD, *The medical dictator and other biographical essays*, with an introduction by Austin Bradford Hill, London, Keynes Press (British Medical Association), 1986, 8vo, pp. xviii, 137, £40 (UK)/£43 (overseas).

Major Greenwood, the first name being his family Christian name and bearing no military significance, was drawn unwillingly into medicine by his father and trained at the London Hospital. With no desire to practise, he moved through physiological research and a mathematical training at University College to the natural conclusion, a career in medical statistics. He first worked at the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine, and when the Ministry of Health was founded after the First World War, he was appointed medical officer in charge of statistics. In 1928, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and was soon appointed the first professor of epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene, to which was later added Tropical Medicine, where he stayed until his retirement in 1945. The introduction to this book, written sensitively by Austin Bradford Hill, one of his protégés, depicts an erudite investigator, "the sceptical and somewhat frightening exterior, the interior a sensitive and generous heart."

Greenwood's classical education at Merchant Taylors' School and his wide reading fed his lifelong interest in medical history and particularly historical epidemiology. Being fluent in French, German, and Latin with little interest outside work and his library, he was ideally equipped to study and lecture on the history of ideas. His book *Epidemics and crowd diseases* was based on these lectures. This book, *The medical dictator*, contains a series of essays, several of which were adapted from papers previously published elsewhere. It was first published in this form in 1936. The subjects are some of his medical heroes, Galen (The Dictator), Friend, Latham, Farr, Louis, Osler, and his own friend Arthur Bacot. Their philosophies and writings interested Greenwood, especially when they discussed statistics and epidemics, but he thought that "Not one of them was, in the popular sense, a great man".

Galen and Hippocrates are discussed, and there is regret that a better understanding of Galenic thought could have led to "a rational therapy of emotional disturbances hundreds of years sooner". Friend's character and prose is praised, but his scientific pretensions dismissed. The essay on Latham seems to be a vehicle to further Greenwood's views on medical education, and, as expected, for Farr there is nothing but praise. Louis' numerical method is applauded, and the warm realistic essay on Osler contains the regret that he did not apply himself to rejuvenating the historical collection in the library of the Royal College of Physicians. Lastly, there is a warm tribute to the entomologist, Arthur Bacot, who did so much for the comfort of man through his work on the biology of fleas, lice, and *Rickettsia*.

This book is a delight to read, and, unlike so many slim volumes of essays, well worth reprinting and reading fifty years after the first publication, as secondhand copies are not readily obtainable. The writing is clear and straightforward and frequently contains sentences that make you stop, reflect and promise yourself you will remember. This is the kind of book that the fine presentation of the Keynes Press, in spite of the high price, does so well.

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E. S. LEEDHAM-GREEN, *Books in Cambridge inventories: book-lists from Vice-Chancellor's Court probate inventories in the Tudor and Stuart periods*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 8vo, 2 vols., pp. xli, 649, xii, 861, £150.00 the set.

The libraries of non-eminent persons remain a little-known area only sporadically explored. In extracting and editing this mass of material from probate inventories, of which little has been published hitherto, Dr Leedham-Green has opened the way for a systematic study of the book collections of members of the Cambridge academic community in the early modern period. The first volume contains transcripts of book-lists from inventories of the goods mainly of scholars of the sixteenth century arranged chronologically by date of inventory. The stocks of five university stationers provide a context for the private collections, demonstrating that many of the books could have been bought in Cambridge and reflecting the demand for standard texts in

their holdings of multiple copies. A handful of later lists are included, the most substantial from the seventeenth century being that of John Nidd, dated 1659, with a high proportion of medical books. Where the books were bequeathed to College libraries, as Nidd's were to Trinity and Andrew Perne's to Peterhouse, those still to be found on the College shelves have been identified. The owners form a cross-section of the academic community from the Masters of Colleges to their butlers and cooks, and the collections range from large libraries such as that of Thomas Lorkin, the Regius Professor of Physic, for example, illustrating his acquisition of the latest continental publications and acquaintance with the works of Paracelsus, to the few books of Alice Edwards, widow of David, MD, described as living "comfortably, if untidily (a battledore and a rolling pin were found among her linen)". Such light touches enliven the introductions to individual inventories in which Dr Leedham-Green provides brief biographies and often summarizes the other goods represented in the inventories. Relevant artefacts, such as maps, pictures, and instruments, are included in the transcripts, and this generous practice extends to the entire medical equipment of the "shop" of Robert Pickering, MD (1551), which is, however, omitted from the index of instruments in volume 2.

The difficulties of identifying books, not to mention editions, from entries in inventories, often highly abbreviated and written down from dictation, are notorious, and Dr Leedham-Green has been conspicuously successful. In the second volume, which doubles the price, but possibly not the usefulness, of this work, there is a thorough author-title index with references to Adams, STC, and other bibliographies and catalogues. The valuations of the copies are repeated here and provide matter for speculation, although representing the estimates of the appraisers rather than the books' actual prices; does the variation in price of Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* from 7s. in 1589 to 13s.4d. two years later reflect the condition of the copies? The author-title index is supplemented by a curious classified list of authors in an arrangement derived from Gesner's *Pandectae*. A guide directly to the subject coverage of the individual lists, however rough, would have been a great advantage, as would an alphabetical index of the owners (they are listed by date of death, in order of matriculation, and by college affiliation). The final production of this monumental labour of fourteen years was facilitated by the computer, evidently one with an inbuilt imp (see the instruction to log-off at the end of the list on page 2 of volume 1) and the standard of reproduction of the text is no more than adequate given the price of these volumes. However, their value to students of Cambridge academic life, of the history of the booktrade and libraries, and of much else, will ensure that they are well-used.

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JANE M. OPPENHEIMER (editor), *Autobiography of Dr Karl Ernst von Baer*, Canton, Mass., Science History Publications, 1987, 8vo, pp. xiv, 389, front., \$25.00.

Each field has its heroes, workers whose vital contributions were recognized in their own lifetime and whose reputations survive the vicissitudes of passing fashion in scientific research. Karl Ernst von Baer, who laid the foundations of the science of embryology, was such a hero. He was a superb technician, who set a high standard for subsequent research, and the fruits of his skill included a detailed description of chick development, and the discoveries of the notochord and mammalian ovum. He developed comparative embryology, with the laudable, if impossible, aim of following "... the development of all the larger groups of the animal kingdom". Von Baer found it impossible "... to merely recount the observed happenings without developing some views and opinions of a more general nature", and here were made his greatest contributions. He saw that the germ layers recognized by Pander in the chick embryo were an integral part of all vertebrate development, and he replaced the early recapitulation theory of Serres and Meckel with his own "laws". T. H. Huxley said of von Baer's theorizing that it embodied "... the deepest and soundest philosophy of zoology, and indeed of biology generally, which has yet been given to the world". The publication of this English translation of von Baer's autobiography enables us to learn something of the life of this remarkable scientist, and it is an exception to Medawar's dictum