

Book Reviews

Los Ruiz de Luzuriaga, Eminentes Médicos Vascos 'Ilustrados', by MANUEL USANDIZAGA SORALUCE, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 1964, pp. 105, illus., no price given.

The author, to whom we are indebted for a most interesting history of Spanish obstetrics and several historical monographs, has focussed his interest on the 'enlightened' Ruiz de Luzuriagas, father and son, Basque physicians like the author. The father emerges as a great defender of smallpox inoculation, widely practised in Spain before Jenner's vaccination was universally adopted; and the son, a Paris and Edinburgh graduate, as a pioneer in pulmonary physiology and public hygiene. These biographies are a welcome contribution to the history of Spanish medicine during a period when French and British influences, with their medical and social implications were of great importance, but which has been studied hitherto only by Comenge and Lopez Piñero.

F. GUERRA.

Germes and Ideas, by ANDRÉ SIEGFRIED, Edinburgh and London, Oliver & Boyd, 1965, pp. 98, illus., 15s.

It was the custom of Professor Pasteur Vallery-Radot to invite intellectuals from non-medical spheres to address his students of contemporary medicine. This book represents an extended version of such a lecture given by André Siegfried in 1958. It was first published in Paris in 1960, and this, the English translation, appeared in 1965.

Siegfried develops the conception that ideas, doctrines and religions have been propagated along the routes followed by classical epidemics of communicable disease, and he uses words such as virus, carrier, soil, contact and quarantine in describing the dissemination of both germs and ideas.

He shows a considerable grasp of the epidemiology of the diseases which he describes, but he is careful to select plague, cholera and yellow fever which are particularly suited to the parallels which he draws. These infections are dealt with in 70 pages of discussion, while the last 13 pages are devoted to developing the proposition that ideas are spread by similar mechanisms.

His approach has produced an erudite and stimulating thesis. For the layman who likes literature that describes the surge of biological forces and their effects upon mankind, or for anyone who appreciates the broad sweep of a fine intellect ranging freely among the intricacies of an alien discipline, this book is to be highly commended. Within the context of modern medicine, however, the author's conclusion suffers from its inseparable link with the somewhat time-worn germ theory of disease. He links his corollary to a steam engine in the age of the jet aeroplane, and for this reason both the book and its essential message appear old-fashioned.

To the reviewer it ignores an important aspect of intellectual discovery, namely the intuitive development of fundamental ideas by reasoning *in situ*. When great minds are about to revolutionize a discipline, they usually seek obscurity and isolation. The scientist who spends his time on a perennial jamboree of conferences, travelling with his ideas (and lantern slides) along the routes once taken by cholera and plague is, on the whole, unlikely to achieve everlasting fame.