

Book Reviews

The Black Hole and Other Essays, by MACDONALD CRITCHLEY, London, Pitman Medical Publishing Co., 1964, pp. x, 288, 40s.

When Dr. Macdonald Critchley, the renowned neurologist, retires next year he will have served forty-two years on the staff of the National Hospital, Queen Square. During this time his contributions to neurology have been of the greatest importance. As well as being an excellent clinical teacher, and remembered by legions of students for his delightful lectures and demonstrations, he has written many books and papers on a wide variety of neurological topics. But in addition he has explored the historical and borderland aspects of his speciality and this book contains twenty-one papers which indicate the wide extent of these interests. The first, from which the book's title is taken, is an excellent account of the Calcutta tragedy of 1756. Next there are essays on the medical features of Oscar Wilde, Samuel Johnson, Alphonse Daudet, and of Anne, Countess of Conway; the detailed consideration of Johnson's aphasia is especially noteworthy. Short biographies of Henry Head, William Gowers, James Collier, Charles Sherrington, and Pierre Marie are followed by an account of the early days of the National Hospital. The last six papers deal with some of Dr. Critchley's favourite topics such as Huntington's chorea, and the punch-drunk state, and with his wartime naval experiences.

Each article has appeared elsewhere and it is a pity that their whereabouts is not recorded here. A more serious defect is the omission of all references. Nevertheless this is a very attractive book which all Dr. Critchley's many students and colleagues in particular will wish to possess, but which will also appeal to a wide audience, both medical and lay. Appearing as it does on the eve of his retirement, it will serve to remind us of a brilliant neurologist's work in the history of his discipline, as well as being, we hope a foretaste of future historical presentations. It would be appropriate if his purely neurological legacy could also be published in a similar form.

EDWIN CLARKE

Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt, by PAUL GHALIOUNGUI, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1963, pp. xvi, 189, illus., 30s.

Pharaonic medicine was for nearly a century the exclusive province of egyptologists, and medical historians had to resort almost exclusively to the hieroglyphic interpretation of a handful of literary sources from Ebers (1875) to Breasted (1930) and Grapow (1954). Only recently in 1957 Sigerist produced a survey of the medicine in Ancient Egypt where social and economic factors played important roles.

Professor Ghalioungui analyses the magical background of Egyptian medicine as well as those sound medical practices established after centuries of repeated observations. The author has applied a broad academic and professional training to every medical papyrus or architectural remnant, exploring with clinical tests the popular medical practices still preserved in the Nile area. The result is a systematic dissection of magical elements, followed by the examination of the nine medical papyri. Their context is studied in detail with special emphasis on the Ebers and Smith papyri, the latter covering a complete chapter. The identification of bilharziasis, a number of surgical cases and several case histories are discussed extensively. In the following chapters the medical achievements of Pharaonic times are critically observed with a keen professional eye.

There are a few points where the reader may have wanted additional guidance, such as a short explanation of the intricacies of hieroglyphic interpretation, in order to have a better understanding of the complexities of the nosological identification in

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the papyri, or perhaps the quantitative aspect of the Egyptian materia medica could have been pointed out with more vigour, because it is accepted that papyrus prescriptions carry for the first time the idea of dosage. However there is no doubt that the author in this respect offers enough evidence to convince us that Egyptian drugs had considerable influence on classical Greece and Islam.

The epigraphic sources show, once more, their limitations in providing accurate or clear information; but this is in the nature of the material. Illustrations of hernias, malformations, possible surgical instruments and the like, suggesting something of the wealth of medical material to be found in the monuments, should be interpreted with caution. Such pictographic representations have been responsible for the interpretation of eye mutilations as cataract operations and other similar misinterpretations.

Ghalioungui declared early in his book that he intended to fill a gap between the scholarly monographs on the papyri and those manuals where Egyptian medicine fluctuated between the summit of intellectual discovery and the depths of superstition. He has accomplished his task, and gone beyond it: for he points out that those who dare to pass judgement on four millennia of Egyptian medicine on the merits or demerits of just nine papyri and a few slabs are open to considerable criticism. And, above all, he destroys the cliché that Pharaonic medicine was a continuously enriched stream departing from the magic concept of pre-dynastic eras to produce the masterpiece of the surgical papyrus parallel to dynastic splendours. The paradoxical truth, that Ghalioungui has finally placed in focus, is that the papyri reveal ingredients of superstitions in latter days while more scientific values are found in the documents of earlier periods. Science, after all, did not come from Egypt in an ever-swelling flood.

FRANCISCO GUERRA

World Health and History, by W. HOBSON, Bristol, John Wright, 1963, pp. xii, 252, 45s.

It has become the custom to concede that preventive medicine is dull in the public eye: that it is far less easy to interest the man in the street in matters of public health than in curative medicine with its more solid and spectacular features. In consequence, opportunities of promoting health in this country are being restricted.

Dr. Hobson had this very much in mind when writing his book, which he calls an attempt to make the subject of preventive medicine more interesting than is usually the case. His experience in a wide field of public health work, civilian and military, at home and abroad, well qualifies him for the task. The work is addressed to politicians, administrators, doctors, students and the intelligent public: he may well have added health education officers, health visitors, schoolteachers and students, sound and television producers, and even the clergy.

There is a mass of information here which cannot fail to appeal to the lay reader, or provide the lecturer with the kind of material he needs to gain the attention of his audience. It may be complained that there are many places in this book in which the voice of the pedagogue drowns that of the medical historian, but is this to be deprecated in a work which has as its aim the health education of the public?

In planning his book the author must have had in mind a readership not confined to the British public (and it is hoped, confidently, that this will be the case) but unless this is clear to readers at home, some of the statements may be misinterpreted. The remarks about the reluctance of local politicians to carry out certain measures, and the way in which the public health law, if it exists, is usually ignored, must refer to the less-developed countries. It is hardly true to say, either, that many of our doctors