

### Book Reviews

ensure that in each university any new appointments are grafted on to that existing department—history, history of science or medicine—which in that particular university offers the right intellectual environment, and that no attempt is made to impose a uniform pattern throughout the country.

As Dr. Lloyd Stevenson says, 'if curiosity is the parent of "pure" science, love of the past or curiosity about it may be the parent of a kind of history which lacks ulterior motive'. The utility of medical history is surely no more relevant than the utility or otherwise of history in general. The various arguments for and against the utility of medical history often entered the discussions in this conference. One is left with the impression, as one was after reading the New York Academy of Medicine's Monograph on this subject in 1957, that every man is temperamentally an historian or an anti-historian by conviction and that the arguments are mere rationalizations. However medical history is gaining ground in this country and those who are active in promoting this development will enjoy reading this book.

ARTHUR ROOK

*Medicine and Culture* (Proceedings of a historical symposium organized jointly by the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, London, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York), ed. by F. N. L. POYNTER, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1969, pp. vi, 321, 60s.

We are all familiar with the common run of congresses, at which experts read papers to other experts, followed by discussions which contribute little beyond clearing up exactly what the author meant, the main value of the proceedings lying in the informal meeting of colleagues after the business is over.

The first point of importance of this occasion was that it was organized on new lines, in that no papers were read; they had been circulated in advance, so that all the participants could read them at their leisure. This was to give them time to think over what they would like to say about them, instead of having to decide what to say on the spur of the moment (which, because most of us find out what we really wanted to say only later, in the bath, is often unsatisfactory). The second innovation was that Dr. Poynter sent a 'Note to Participants', detailing exactly what the object of the conference was. These notes are most remarkable, in that they pose a wholly new and original attitude to the very nature of Medicine. After postulating that unless history relates to present problems it may be mere antiquarian study, the notes lay down the problems of the way in which civilizations of diverse sorts have produced systems of medicine equally diverse, and of how these 'medicines are to contribute to rapidly changing civilizations'. The details of these instructions, on pp. 2 and 3, constitute a stimulating challenge to medical history. The third feature of the book is that it consists of the leading papers circulated, in full, and the subsequent discussions reproduced from tape-recordings. This, not unnaturally, was a difficult and time consuming process (and was why publication was delayed), and it also led to some interesting misprints, as on p. 289, line 16, which are internal proofs of the genuineness of the procedure.

It may be said at once that the results, in what was produced, do not live up to Dr. Poynter's intentions. In the first place, the papers, although no doubt read beforehand by all the participants (except at least one, which was not produced in

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time to be circulated beforehand), had, certainly in some instances, not been marked, learned and inwardly digested, to the frustration of the intention of the procedure. In the second place, the first part of the congress, until the idea had got home to everyone, was bedevilled by the use of the word 'Culture'. It was meant to conform with the universal, though unfortunate, adoption of the word as a substitute for 'civilization' by the anthropologists, who reserved this word to its strict sense of the organization of human relations in cities, claiming that people who lived in villages or scattered farms could not be said to be civilized. Ordinary people use the word 'culture' to mean the educated refinement of taste and manners which made Goering reach for his revolver, but which ordinary people used to look on as an excellence highly to be prized. There is, unfortunately, an overlap between the two meanings in the concept of Humanism, which makes it desirable not to use the word 'culture' any more. The members of this conference were in complete confusion, especially after a paper which (on p. 80) defined the two concepts with such a wealth of confusion that no one could thereafter know what anyone was talking about. But from p. 179 onwards clear thinking put the whole thing right, and from then onwards the symposium produced splendid stuff. Incidentally, even the Master of Caius, who easily stole the whole show with his superb paper (and contributions to discussion) used the words 'realists and idealists' where everyone else would have said 'nominalists and realists': why must people, for the sake of tendentious thinking, use words wrongly without defining them? Especially the Master, whose vocabulary is so immense that he used three words which I had to look up: 'osphristics', 'decumane' and 'fotive' (one of which is not in the N.E.D., but all of which were the greatest fun).

The earlier sessions, for all their partial irrelevance, contain jewels of thought, such as the concept of Crowd Disease; the significance of 'Martin Arrowsmith'; the possible cross-immunity between tuberculosis and leprosy; 'all the ablest people have got on to all the easiest subjects'; the function of the Arts in universities being to write criticisms, not to initiate; why the medical art is better described as a craft; dozens of interesting subjects. Then, with Dr. Guerra on Spanish American Medicine, the symposium came to life, and the subjects which followed, Dr. Keswani on Indian medical systems, Dr. Lambo and Prof. Huard on African Medicine, and Dr. Needham on Chinese Medicine as a climax, 'the thing became a trumpet'. It turned out that Dr. Poynter was right, and that different social organizations ('civilizations' for short, to the unrepentant) do indeed influence their medical systems profoundly, and that, although their material effectiveness may not equal that of modern western medicine their acceptability to patients may be much greater, their effectiveness in the majority of illnesses better, and their value to human beings possibly, on the whole, superior. The subject opens up a large field for investigation.

It was a pity the first part of the symposium went to some extent astray, and that even the brilliant chairmanship of Lord Cohen could not save it, but it is possible that the very failure increased the value of the experience: there are lessons to be learned from failure which success cannot teach. The thing is to read the whole book; there is not a dull page, and it is quite possible that it will not only start a new field in the history of medicine, but will also start a new era in the organization of congresses.

CHARLES NEWMAN