

Book Reviews

C. R. S. HARRIS, *The heart and the vascular system in ancient Greek medicine. From Alcmaeon to Galen*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. xii, 474, illus., £15.00.

Why did the Greeks fail to discover the circulation of the blood? In fact, it has been suggested by various historians of the past century that at least one of the Hippocratic writers and Galen *did* understand the circulation. C. R. S. Harris's *The heart and the vascular system in ancient Greek medicine* should bury that myth for ever. In this work he not only examines the whole issue, but demonstrates that such straightforward queries can lead to exacting scholarship of the first order. There is no need for wild speculation or clever hypotheses: merely to translate accurately and to explicate sympathetically can solve more historical puzzles than the wishful anachronistic approaches of "modernizers" such as Richard Kapferer.

The Greeks did have an extensive knowledge of the anatomy of the heart and blood vessels, and one of Dr. Harris's achievements has been to collect and present both in translation and in the original Greek most of the relevant passages from pre-Hippocratic fragments of Alcmaeon and Pythagoras to the rich profusion of the Galenic corpus. This makes the text mostly English and the footnotes mostly Greek, and while this procedure lengthens the work and increases the price of the book, it also turns it into a reference tool for specialists. At the same time, the text is elegantly written and contains a clear and readable account of its subject.

Dr. Harris follows a roughly chronological arrangement, devoting chapters to the pre-Hippocratics, to Hippocrates and his school, to Aristotle and other post-Hippocratic writers, to the Alexandrians, to "Greek medicine in Rome", and to Galen. His discussion of Galen is almost a monograph in itself, occupying more than 150 pages, and since Galen is often our source for the opinions of his predecessors, the Pergamum physician and philosopher looms large throughout the work. We are made aware both of Galen's great originality, and his extensive debts to those who went before, even Erasistratus, for instance, whom he loved to refute. Since the cardio-vascular system occupied a crucial place in Greek physiological thought, Dr. Harris can make numerous excursions without losing the thread of his central topic. Thus, he elucidates the on-going Greek debate on the primacy of the brain or the heart as the seat of mental life, and traces the historical vagaries of the concept of the *pneuma*. His review of the literature relating to the authorship of the Hippocratic corpus is a model of clarity and fairness. Throughout Dr. Harris has shown himself the master of both the primary and secondary literature of his subject.

The full analytical index adds to the usefulness of the work, which can be warmly recommended as an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of Greek medicine.

THOMAS B. TURNER, *Heritage of excellence. The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, 1914–1947*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp. viii, 648, illus., £8.75.

Between 1943 and 1963 the late Dr. Alan M. Chesney published his three-volume history of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, which covered the period from 1867, when the Johns Hopkins Trust was created, to 1914. Now the distinguished Dean Emeritus of the Medical Faculty continues the story, divided into four chronological periods: World War I; the 1920s;