

Book Review

La Médecine Hippocratique. DR. CHARLES LICHTENTHAELER. (Études sur le Raisonnement Clinique). Editions de la Baconnière, Boudry, Neuchâtel, 1957. Pp. 144. 3 plates.

Dr. Lichtenthaeler inquires into the usefulness of 'Hippocrates' to modern physicians, and finds it in 'la reprise de conscience intellectuelle de la médecine'. This thesis he develops in the first half of his book. The argument is ably worked out, although the style is in places highly rhetorical; here and there are arresting passages, such as the contrast on p. 27 of the nineteenth-century family doctor and his modern counterpart. Many misconceptions about the value of Hippocratic doctrine are attacked, and on the whole successfully. The author wrote an 'étude comparée préliminaire' in 1948, in which he contrasted the experimental method with the Hippocratic; to have read it would be a great help in appraising the later work.

In the second part of the book stress is rightly laid on the danger of studying Hippocratic medicine without taking into account the other, particularly the social, concepts of the age. We must never attempt to impose our own concepts and patterns of thought upon the world of Solon, Empedocles, Thucydides and Plato. Another truism, carefully dovetailed into the argument, is that the present is not isolated; the science of one epoch is the necessary result of the past, and conditions all future development.

In support of his views Dr. Lichtenthaeler appeals to an imposing array of scholars—Burnet, Tannery, Diels, Jaeger, Pohlenz, Capelle, Deichgraeber and (a pioneer in his own field) Fustel de Coulanges. The reviewer found the last an indispensable authority fifty years ago when writing a work on Greek moral concepts. Many illustrations of the author's methods are given in the course of the work. Of these the most interesting are: the date of *Prognostic*, an elucidation of the first *Aphorism*, and the comments upon certain parts of *Oath*, *Sacred Disease*, and *Epidemics*. More fully treated, though perhaps of less interest, is the discussion of innate heat (*τὸ ἐμφυτον θερμὸν*) which occupies sixteen pages (75–90).

The author realizes that the answers to many Hippocratic questions are, and must ever be, mere guesses. Some of the answers, however, under the discipline of criticism, destructive and constructive, may be pruned and modified into something approximating to certainties, although the Reviewer personally does not believe that on p. 70 a good example is chosen in Diller's dating of the treatise *Ancient Medicine*. But in all research guesses are helpful, and sometimes put students on the right track. The essential thing

Book Review

is that these guesses must be regarded as such by all, and never be mistaken for fact. On the other hand, there are many certainties, sure facts, to be garnered from the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. Perhaps not one treatise of the whole collection was written by the historical Hippocrates; we cannot indeed be absolutely certain of the authorship of any work in it except possibly *Nature of Man*. But we do know, or shall know when more scholars take the task in hand, many doctrines, practises, and experiences, of a succession of medical practitioners or teachers from 450 to 350 B.C.

The theme of this book almost demands a detailed description of the Hippocratic doctor. He had no stethoscope or thermometer. He had never heard of wonder drugs, bacteria, germicides, immunization, segregation of the sick, or the importance of boiling instruments and articles. Malaria had to be fought without quinine or satisfactory febrifuge. Hospitals in the modern sense were unknown, as were trained nurses. When we consider these deficiencies we are not surprised that the Greek took such pains to keep well. The art of health, as opposed to the art of healing, has never been so highly valued.

The Hippocratics had, however, some aids. A few surgical instruments were part of his stock-in-trade. Ointments, emetics, purges, suppositories, pessaries, enemas, were well known and widely used. The physician had a few vegetable and animal medicines, but was chary of using them; barley water of various strengths was highly prized. It must be added that he lived in a society of superstitious folk without any knowledge of strict hygiene and without many scientific concepts.

To put oneself in the position of a physician with such a mentality is now almost impossible. A modern has all the aids possessed by the Hippocratic and vastly more besides. But the latter had something seen today less often than it was 2,400 years ago. He had what he called *φιλοτεχνία* (*philo-technia*), 'love of the Art'. This does not refer to an abstraction, but to the healing art as embodied in the cure of the sick. In this love there was a large element of faith, warm trust in the power of medicine, if wisely applied, to banish or at least mitigate the danger and suffering brought on mankind by disease. Here perhaps is the best lesson to be learnt from studying Hippocrates.

W. H. S. JONES