

LE PROBLEME DU CANCER. Par Charles Oberling. (L'Arbre; Montreal; \$1.50.)

In this admirable book, Professor Charles Oberling, formerly one of the foremost experimental carcinologists in France, surveys the general field of cancer from the viewpoint of its causation. He starts with a measured statement of the problem. Although not in fact likely to be undergoing a primary rise in incidence, cancer remains the second most frequent cause of human death, and one of the greatest causes of human fear; and, occurring largely in later life, its morbidity and mortality rates are bound to increase together with the present rise in the average age of the population—until the revelation of its secrets leads to a means to its prevention. Hence the importance of its scientific study.

The author traces the evolution of ideas about cancer from the fifteenth century B.C. to the present day. In an excellently balanced analysis, he shows that three of the most reasonable and popular modern theories of its causation, those of chronic irritation, embryonic 'rests' in adult tissue, and microbial infection, should not be considered to suggest more than secondary factors.

The modern advances in our knowledge of cancer are derived mostly from laboratory experimental work. To this aspect, accordingly, the greater part of the book is devoted. But the author does not fail to relate experimental data to the human disease. Thus, from this standpoint, grafted cancer has yielded disappointing results. Heredity, although operative in cancer of both mice and men, in the latter is but one factor, not invariably present nor usually of primary importance, among many: the prevalent dread of inheriting a cancer is thus shown to be largely irrational. Radiogenic, parasitic, chemical, and virus-borne cancers, all of which are discussed in some detail, occur, as far as established facts show, only rarely in man; their experimental value lies in the light they shed upon the ultimate cause or causes of the condition. In the final chapter, Professor Oberling takes his stand firmly on the hypothesis that the ultimate cause of cancer is the ultra-microscopic virus.

Professor Oberling explains that the book is intended primarily for medical students and doctors; to them it is to be warmly recommended as a concise, lucid and at times thrilling survey of the present scientific position regarding cancer. But the educated general reader, interested in the subject, will probably not find this shortish account too technical; for Professor Oberling takes the trouble to explain the fundamental scientific processes underlying the various aspects of the subject.

Full references are supplied to the literature; but an index, indispensable to any scientific work, is unfortunately omitted.

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