

Book Reviews

Dr.med.Gottfried Benn (the famous poet) joined the "Sanitätsdienst" deliberately as a kind of non-political refuge (as apparently other physicians did)? How many German military doctors reacted like Oberstabsarzt Dr Möller, who saw an SS unit shoot a group of Polish "partisans" (including children aged between three and eight) and wrote a critical report to Hitler, the "Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht" (the case is documented in the Militärgeschichtliches Archiv, Freiburg)? It is well known that leading military physicians such as Professor Handloser (chief of the Heeressanitätswesen) and Professor Schröder (chief of the Sanitätswesen der Luftwaffe) were responsible for crimes against humanity (see documentation *Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit* by A. Mitscherlich and F. Mielke, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1949). Was this a consequence of blind obedience ("Kadavergehorsam" is a German slang phrase used to describe the soldier's obedience)? Such questions must be put and dealt with openly, before one can hope to see in print a fully satisfactory history of the "Deutscher Sanitätsdienst" between 1933 and 1945.

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GERALD D. HART, (editor), *Disease in ancient man*, Toronto, Clarke Irwin, 1984, 8vo, pp. xvii, 297, illus., [no price stated].

This book consists of individual papers presented at the International Symposium held at the Royal Society of Medicine in 1979. The symposium was organized and developed largely by the late Dr Calvin Wells, and the book is a just testimony to this, one of his final achievements. It is regrettable, but in no way the fault of the editor, contributors, or organizers, that this volume has taken five years to come to publication, thereby losing some of its impact.

The book is divided, as was the symposium content, into five sections, the whole reflecting the spectrum of palaeopathology. Clearly, in 297 pages, studies in depth of many aspects of palaeopathology could not be undertaken. Anyone requiring a textbook of palaeopathological diagnosis or a catalogue of specimens and specific disease histories should look elsewhere. What is demonstrated is the blend of archaeology, palaeopathology, medical history, and physico-chemical science.

The opening section on interdisciplinary collaboration sets a rather philosophic scene. Professor Cramp remarked that "palaeopathological studies in Britain are uncoordinated and desperately understaffed". In large measure due to the stimulus of Calvin Wells, the symposium, and now the book, these remarks have been heeded and change is occurring.

The two sections on traditional "macroscopic" palaeopathology are rather limited in field but not in excellence. The papers by Professor V. Møller-Christensen, by Dr C. J. Hackett, and by Professor W. J. Moore and M. E. Corbett are now amongst the classics of palaeopathology. Dr D. A. Birkett's paper should have stimulated research into the enigmatic lesions of tibial periostitis: now that it is available in print, maybe such work will be carried out.

The laboratory section contains papers presented in a relatively non-technical way, to demonstrate the range of serology, physico-chemical analysis, and microscopy in palaeopathological investigations. The bibliography of each of these papers is adequate for technical follow-up.

The final section returns to some rather speculative and interpretative aspects of medico-social history. Dr Janssens has shown how the clinical acumen and diagnostic expertise of modern medicine can be applied to sixth-century disease, and surely meningococcal septicaemia must rank high in the differential diagnostic list of *morbus dysentericus*.

Quite appropriately, the scientific bibliography of Dr Calvin Wells is published in full, and what a busy and fruitful life it represents.

For those of us who attended this symposium, this volume has been long awaited. Our patience is amply rewarded with an excellently produced collection of papers, which is a major contribution to palaeopathology and medical history.

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