

the story for the first time without too pressing a need for accuracy; and to those scholars sufficiently equipped to sift the tares from the

wheat. It is an old student's last endeavour, repetitive in detail, full of wheat but equally full of tares. ALBERIC STACPOOLE, O.S.B.

**SOCIAL AND GENETIC INFLUENCES ON LIFE AND DEATH**, edited by Lord Platt and A. S. Parkes. *Oliver and Boyd*, 1967. 222 pp. 63s.

**BIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL CRISIS**, by J. K. Brierley. *Heinemann*, 1967. 260 pp. 35s.

**MEDICINE ON TRIAL**, by Dannie Abse. *Aldus Books*, 1967. 352 pp. 42s.

These three volumes are further examples of what Bernal, in his recent book *The Origin of Life*, described as 'the convergent generalizing trend that is replacing the divergent and specializing trend of the nineteenth century, with its various subjects separated by thought-proof partitions'. The method of each is different, however, and so is the value. Put on a straight material basis, the cash-value of the first works out at just over 3½d. a page, of the second at just over and of the third (with many coloured plates) at just under 1½d. a page. The first and third are worth every penny. The second is overpriced in terms of intellectual value. All are concerned with the study of Man 'from the cradle to the grave', or better, since each individual already has a long personal history of development behind him before he ever reaches the cradle, 'from the womb to the tomb' as it has been put.

The first-named work comprises the papers from the third Symposium of the Eugenics Society (September 1965) and has been admirably edited by two very distinguished scientists. Admirably proof-read, too—I noticed only one printing error, at the foot of page 183. The word 'eugenics' undoubtedly conjures up, for many people, visions of evil or misguided men 'tampering with nature' with a cold and calculating efficiency. One or two of the contributors show signs occasionally of that typical inhumanity that masquerades as objectivity. But the overwhelming impression of the papers in each of the Sections into which the symposium was divided ('Conception, Pregnancy and Birth', 'Some Major Causes of Illness: I Somatic Illness, II Psychological Illness', 'Causes and Effects of Ageing') is that there is a depth of real concern amongst the authors for their subjects and for the quality of life that they might by their efforts be able to bring to their fellow-men. Medical science has never before had the services of so many skilled and dedicated 'seekers after truth'. Science can, and sometimes certainly does, blunt the human response to suffering and disease, but the Eugenics Society seems happily free of all that.

Lay-readers should not allow themselves to

be put off by the scientific terminology necessarily used, especially in the first two papers dealing with genetic problems: it would be worth their while having at hand a dictionary of biological terms if necessary, in order to follow Polani on human chromosomal abnormalities, and Clarke in his admirable account of the elegant Liverpool technique for protecting mothers and their future offspring from the ravages of blood-group incompatibility. The prevention of death and morbidity is a noble aim and, as Clarke rightly says, it is 'pleasant to feel that we can occasionally outwit our inheritance'. Of course, one can never be quite sure just who or what is outwitting what or whom: as McKeown says, in his paper on 'Social and Biological Influences on Foetal and Infant Deaths', 'it is this uncertainty which has led to the use of the somewhat ambiguous term "potentially preventable", which at least has the excuse that it does not claim too much'. Claiming too much is a habit of some rather narrow biological specialists. It is usually avoided by doctors who actually have to deal with real, living human beings in all their astonishing complexity. Most of the contributors to this volume are doctors, aware to some extent of their limitations. From this particular point of view a chapter on 'Genetic Studies on Longevity', by a specialist on fruit-fly-genetics, falls badly short: the impression is given that longevity depends mostly on one's surrounding temperature, which may be all right for fruit-flies but is not necessarily true for man. Some astonishing expressions then come out, such as, 'the total amount of vitality runs down as the flies age, but is replenished from time to time when the fly feeds'. This mysterious essence or quality or elixir (what price phlogiston?) worries the author a little; but his later statement that 'we do not yet know what vitality consists of' suggests that they expect to have it worked out before the next conference.

Space is too short to mention all the good things in this volume. Kessel has a beautifully-constructed essay on Alcoholism, which would grace many a literary magazine. Fletcher neatly dissects and disposes of the view of Eysenck that

personality-traits constitute the predominant 'cause' of lung-cancer, and Cox's essay on 'Psychiatric Aspects of Old Age' should be compulsory reading for Hospital Administrators and Ministry Officials. The book is full of interesting suggestions about the interplay between heredity and environment (the nature and nurture of old): every now and then Bernal's thought-proof partition goes up and we find ourselves looking at a naked geneticist or environmentalist. The modern 'science of the infinitely complex' refuses, in the last analysis, to be compartmentalized. As one quotation used in the book says, 'a universe in which cause and effect always have a one-to-one correspondence with each other would be easier to understand, but it obviously is not the kind we inhabit'.

Dr Brierley apparently once did biological research in Oxford. He clearly fell much under the spell of Darlington, and the first half of his book is a rehash of Darlington and Haldane. The blurb tells us that after schoolmastering, and lecturing in America, he is now one of H.M.'s Inspectors of Schools, which is a disturbing thought. His book is sub-titled 'A Social Biology For Everyman'. It consists of a collection of a hundred or so short articles, many of which might well have first appeared in the popular press. They cover an enormous variety of topics, from 'classical' genetics (no

new idea since the 1930s at the latest) to modern theories of memory in man. The author writes of both electrical and chemical theories (he is a reductionist to the core) with brash triumphalism characteristic of scientism, but is so muddled in his thinking on these difficult matters that he does not seem to realize that these are competing theories and can't all be equally valid. The book has some singularly unattractive illustrations to match its verbal content.

Dr Dannie Abse, a general practitioner with wide experience, a sharp wit and considerable insight, has produced a survey of Medicine that will deservedly be a best-seller. It has been printed for the American market (at heaven knows what price in dollars) and makes an astonishingly good two-guineas' worth. Ranging as he does over ancient and modern, orthodox, fringe and quack medicine, he is bound to be selective in the topics he discusses. But it hangs together. He is imbued with the best elements in the Hippocratic tradition and is progressive about all things that are clearly good in intention and practice. His chapter on the increasingly-recognized evils of some parts of current 'experimental medicine' reaches a high level of analysis and criticism. This is undoubtedly a book to get and to keep.

BERNARD TOWERS

**WOMEN'S TWO ROLES, HOME AND WORK**, by Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein. *Routledge Paperback*, Second edition, 1968. 213 pp. 15s.

This thorough study of almost every factor relating to the gainful employment of married women was first published in 1956. Although this is a topic which has been discussed almost *ad nauseam* in all the current media and although some of the original aims of the book have since been achieved, yet I believe the authors are correct in claiming the continuing validity of their arguments, and therefore in re-publishing.

The whole subject of women's roles—whether two or any number she might be called upon to play—is fraught with emotion. 'Miserable married women' for whom home in its present attenuated form is simply not enough, have received almost an excess of sympathy; the tide is turning in favour of the husbands who have to live with discontented wives; and even the children in whose name the sacrifice of outside interests is often made appear, ironically, not to benefit. Women have the ability and the need to serve a larger public

than the family, if their faculties are not to atrophy, and yet to do this in any serious way introduces numerous conflicts. Some of these are psychological and due to valid concern for their relationship with husband and children; and some practical, since society is not so far organized with the needs of working married women in mind.

For most women, however, (and especially those of the higher educated middle class, with whom the book is chiefly concerned) the problem is largely one of attitude; having been subtly influenced in their choice of career by the future possibility of marrying, they enter marriage as a complete occupation without looking through or beyond it. Faced later with the painful realization that their home role is not a full-time one, many yet find themselves in a 'tender trap' from which there is no escaping without damage to the family. For these women, in this particular period of adjustment, the present book is an invaluable ally.