

### Book Reviews

to one on 'Feedback theory and its application to biological systems' by K. E. Machin (1924– ), which appeared in 1964. The texts that were in English originally are reprinted in facsimile and are taken from journals or books; nine are translated from French (8) or German (1). They are grouped into, 'The power of the body to destroy heat', 'Le milieu intérieur', 'Homeostasis', and 'Closing the feedback loop'. Each of these sections is introduced by the editor, the total material amounting to only ten pages, and much of it being devoted to biographical notes.

The selection is good and will provide the student with a ready source of landmark papers, a similar collection never having been made before. However, the paucity of explanatory and introductory material limits the usefulness of the book. If the way through it is led by an instructor this will not be needed, providing the teacher is aware of the history of homeostasis. On his own the student will have difficulties, but in view of the price he is unlikely in any case to possess his own copy. There is no reference to the extensive secondary literature on the history of this vital biological principle, or on the individuals whose work is represented here. These, and suggestions for further reading, may have stimulated the reader to peer further into the history of physiology. Perhaps the editor's deficiencies in the history of medicine are responsible. They are certainly responsible for John Hunter being classed as an Englishman (p. 4), for the inadequacy of the biographical sketches, and for naïvety concerning the long-*s* (p. 4).

JOHN NEUBAUER, *Bifocal vision. Novalis' philosophy of nature and disease*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1971, 8vo, pp. [x], 194, \$7.75.

"Novalis" is the pseudonym of the German poet and philosopher, Friedrich von Hardenburg (1772–1801), who was first attracted to Fichte's philosophy and then to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. In so doing he became one of the most outstanding exponents of German Romanticism, and was inevitably involved with Romantic medicine, which attempted to elucidate medical problems by the use of the humanities, in particular philosophy. He was intensely interested in nature and the natural sciences, as well as in philosophy, but his writings have always presented a problem because of their fragmentary and disorganized state. It is Professor Neubauer's purpose in this book to bring together Hardenburg's work on the philosophy of nature and of disease; its title, *Bifocal vision*, refers to the conflicts engendered by opposing points of view, which were bound to appear in a person attempting to equate science and medicine with philosophy and poetry.

John Brown of Edinburgh initiated Romantic medicine in Germany with his medical system based on excitability and excitement, and Novalis too worked out a disease scheme discussed here; his medical theory was, in fact, anti-mechanical and he argued that a central entelechy governed the body. Professor Neubauer studies this and other aspects, and deals with "the anthropology and physiology of magic", and with the poet's plan to prepare an encyclopaedia. It is clear that Hardenburg had little if any influence upon the Romantic medicine movement, but in discussing his deliberations on it and on related themes the author provides an excellent account of it. It is probably the best presently available in English, but there is still an urgent

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need for a detailed study of a fascinating period, aimed at English readers. The present book has a good deal of German, in a text which, in any case, is not always easy to read. However, it should be widely known to medical historians, and can be warmly recommended to them. Moreover, its price is quite modest.

BEVERLEY M. BARROWS, *A county and its health, A history of the development of the West Riding health services 1889–1974*, [Wakefield], The Health Committee of the West Riding County Council, 1974, 8vo, pp. viii, 249, illus., [no price stated].

Little has been written on the history of medicine in the provinces of Britain, and when contrasted with certain continental countries this deficiency is pitiable and inexcusable. A book, therefore, dealing exclusively with the recent development of medicine in an important part of England is to be welcomed, and those who have sponsored and fostered it are to be congratulated on their enlightened attitude, as much as the author on the excellence of her history.

In view of the changes in local government and health services in April 1974, and because the West Riding was to suffer an especially severe degree of dispersion, it was thought essential that a record should be prepared of events over the last eighty-five years, beginning with the Local Government Act of 1888 which came into effect in April 1889. The author traces events chronologically, basing her history on the many available reports and on other primary source documents. It is not the sort of book that one can read consecutively, but it provides a wealth of information concerning all aspects of health care provision and will be of great value to historians of the future seeking details of twentieth-century medicine in provincial England. It is to be hoped that similar accounts of other areas will become available, and that local government fragmentation will not result in the loss or dispersion of precious documents necessary for the Pevsner-like, district-by-district local history of medicine which must ultimately be carried out in Britain.

F. KHOLEIF, *Avicenna on psychology, a study of his poem on the soul (al-qaṣīdah al-‘ayniyyah)*, Beirut, Arab University Press, 1974, pp. 186 (Arabic) + pp. 3–5 (foreword in English), [no price stated].

This book is in Arabic, with a short foreword in English, and it presents a digest of Avicenna's philosophy, intended for university students. Like Aristotle, Avicenna (d. A.D. 1037) considers psychology as a branch of physics, since the domain of psychology is "the soul and body as one unified thing, substantially brought together as form and matter are." Dr. Kholeif divides Avicenna's writings on philosophy into two groups: some, of a general nature, were meant to convey the tenets of Aristotelian theory to students; while the others were especially written for the intellectual élite. In the latter works, where he drifts away from Aristotle, Avicenna expresses his own attitude in philosophy.

In the Wellcome Collection of Arabic manuscripts there is a commentary by Al-Anbawardi on the poem dealing with the soul, which is attributed to Avicenna; it did not appear in the *Catalogue* of the Collection but will be listed in a forthcoming supplement. The poem is discussed by Kholeif, but neither he nor any other bibliographer mentions this commentator.