

Book Reviews

This is a short book but a scholarly one and heavily documented. It is an important contribution to the study of the relationship of aetiological conceptions of disease in primitive societies.

CUTHBERT DUKES

A History of Ophthalmology. GEORGE E. ARRINGTON, JR., M.D. New York: M.D. Publication, Inc. 1958; pp. xvii+164. \$4.00.

This little book is a philosophical survey of ophthalmology rather than a history of the subject. About a third of the text is devoted to classical antiquity; the middle third to the Renaissance and its aftermath, and the last third to what may be called modern ophthalmology. In the first third the philosophical asides do not crowd out the facts and this is perhaps the best section of the book. In the middle third there is little historical perspective: a whole chapter is devoted to Leonardo da Vinci, whose contributions to optics were only recently discovered, and there is nothing to suggest that they influenced his contemporaries. In the last section, the author is concerned about the contemporary acceleration of ophthalmic technology. An ophthalmological chronology running to 10 pages sets out in parallel columns the master minds in history, the major ophthalmic contributions in their age and the general cultural achievements. In so far as it makes ophthalmology part of the history of civilization, this is a useful thesis.

ARNOLD SORSBY

Medical Terms: Their Origin and Construction. FRANGCON ROBERTS. London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd., 3rd Edition, 1959; pp. viii+92. 6s.

This book will fascinate anyone interested in medical words. It should be in the hands of every medical student and teacher. The great majority of those studying medicine, whether as medical students, nurses or auxiliaries, come to the subject with no knowledge of the classics. They are therefore compelled to learn, or rather to pick up, a vocabulary which is entirely new to them and which is extremely complex. Under the circumstances it is remarkable how well they succeed. Their task could be made so much easier and their work more interesting if they understood the origin and mode of construction of the words which they read, hear, speak and write.

The value of this book can best be shown by these extracts:

Melancholia is a condition which was originally attributed, as its name implies, to a preponderance of black bile. In the retention of such a word there is no harm; the meaning is clear although we no longer believe in the existence of black bile. To abandon such words, even were this possible, would be to deprive our language of much that is expressive and picturesque.

Because they were empty after death the arteries were originally believed to contain air during life, an error which was corrected by Galen, but persists in the word *artery* (G. *arteria*; aer, air, tereo, carry).

Gonorrhoea (gone, seed: rhein, flow) perpetuates the view once held that the discharge consists of seminal fluid.

Nausea (naus, ship) in early Greek times meant sea-sickness, but by the time of Hippocrates it had acquired its modern sense.

There are many alterations and additions to this new edition. Notice the price—six shillings only.

WILLIAM BROCKBANK