

Book Reviews

British Contributions to Medical Science, edited by WILLIAM C. GIBSON, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1971, pp. xi, 302, £3.50.

Every foreigner has to admit that among the medical men whom England has produced there are many who belong to the class of genius: Harvey, Sydenham, Willis, Heberden, Jenner, Bright, Addison, Lister, Osler, Fleming and many more occupy a sufficiently important place in medical history to come under that category. And yet, as Noël Poynter says in his 'Foreword', 'There is no single work devoted to the history of medicine in Britain.' This gap is now in great part filled.

In June 1970, a Symposium was held at the University of British Columbia to mark the inauguration of the new buildings of the Woodward Biomedical Library. Among the distinguished participants were H. M. Sinclair for nutrition, K. D. Keele for cardiology, Lord Brock for surgery, and Sir John Eccles for physiology. Professor Gibson of Vancouver, who himself chose to deal with neurology, took the praiseworthy initiative of bringing together and publishing all the papers in one volume of 300 pages. Behind this work is to be found—once again—the powerful and able patronage of the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, to which Institute we already owe a collection of nearly twenty-five published monographs.

In this new volume, the presentation of the different chapters varies according to the subjects and the authors: some of them take the form of a gallery of portraits lined up along the centuries, others that of a scientific genealogy, yet others are in the form of a narrative of a sequence of events, and finally some offer a selection of discoveries among the most important. Professor Gibson has however managed to eradicate the faults which are inevitable in any symposium volume: he has co-ordinated the whole in such a way that disparities, gaps, overlappings and repetitions are reduced to a minimum.

The end of the eighteenth century was, for British medicine, the age of surgical anatomy with the Doctors Monro, the Hunters, Cheselden, Cooper and Pott, while obstetrics and gynaecology flourished first with the dynasty of the Chamberlens and Smellie, and later with Simpson, Tait and Wells. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the clinical medicine scene was dominated by the outstanding triad composed of Hodgkin, Bright and Addison.

Since the discovery of the circulation of the blood, the study of physiology and physiopathology has always been part of the British tradition of medical research. Very early on, it became closely linked with the chemical and biochemical work which was later to form the glory of the three rival schools of London, Cambridge and Oxford, not counting those of Toronto and Montreal in Canada. To the earlier names of Boyle, Lower, Hales, Floyer, Priestley and Bell are added, starting from the end of the last century, those of Langley, Sharpey-Schäfer, Bayliss, Starling, Banting, Best, MacLeod, Collip, Hill, Haldane, Barcroft, Adrian and Sherrington for physiology, Prout, Foster, Hopkins, Mellanby, Laidlaw, Dale, Crick, Harden and Robinson for biochemistry and pharmacology: a long and distinguished list which, as concerns the last fifty years, largely coincides with that of Nobel Prize winners.

Modern surgery is represented by, among others, Syme, Tait, Lane, Moynihan, Macewen, Freyer and Edwards. From the origins of British naval might and the first observations of Glisson, Lancaster and Lind, the diseases of malnutrition, vitamin

Book Reviews

deficiency and metabolic disorders have been particularly studied, a fact which is recalled by such well-known names as Garrod (father and son), Barlow, Stark and many others, while those of Manson, Rogers, Evans, Leishman, Donovan, Bruce and Boyd recall the British contribution to the knowledge and treatment of infectious and tropical diseases.

Cardiology is certainly one of the fields in which the British clinicians and researchers have won the greatest laurels: Heberden, Fothergill, Withering, Cheyne, Graves, Burns, Adams, Parry, Stokes, number among the principal founders or promoters of a specialty for which the way was opened by Harvey's discovery; by their electrophysiological studies, Waller, MacKenzie and Lewis were among the first to give cardiology its present-day scientific orientation. It is all the more to be regretted that it has not been possible for the corresponding chapter to be more amply developed.

The book contains interesting information on the Anglo-Saxon contribution to paediatrics and genetics. Some particularly interesting pages refer to the role of England, its hygienists and its social legislation, in the development of public health during the industrial revolution, under the impetus of Chadwick, Cobbett, Simon, Southwood-Smith and their followers.

This volume, the authors of which and all those involved in its production are to be warmly congratulated, will effectively fill a gap in every medico-historical library. It satisfies in all respects the hopes of those who had been waiting for so long for the publication of a history of British medicine.

CHARLES COURY

The Detective-Physician: the Life and Work of Sir William Willcox, by PHILIP H. A. WILLCOX, London, Heinemann Medical Books, 1970, pp. xiv, 332, illus., £3.50.

In this book Dr. Philip Willcox has described the life and work of his father, Sir William Willcox, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G., M.D., F.R.C.P., who was physician to St. Mary's Hospital from 1907 to 1935 and an expert forensic adviser to the Home Office from 1904 to 1941. It is much more than a work of filial piety. It describes a brilliant career, the like of which is no longer to be seen in the modern world. As Dr. Willcox writes in his introduction: 'Here was the case of a man who, without outside influence or financial support in his youth, at first earned his living as a schoolmaster, paid for his own medical education at St. Mary's Hospital at a time when there were no state-sponsored scholarships, qualified as a doctor, became a Home Office pathologist and analyst, consultant physician and lecturer in several subjects at his medical school.'

Before the first world war, Sir William Willcox gave evidence in twenty-five trials for murder or manslaughter, including those of Crippen, Steinie Morrison and Seddon. After the war, he gave evidence in other famous trials and throughout the whole of these periods he was on the consultant staff of St. Mary's Hospital, treating patients and teaching students and also running a large private practice in the West End of London. His retirement from the staff of St. Mary's was marked by a packed and emotional final ward-round about which the Dean (the late Lord Moran) wrote: 'What everybody thinks was shown by the turnout. I have never seen anything like it.'

Sir William Willcox was born at Melton Mowbray in 1870 and throughout his