

BOOK REVIEWS

Memoirs of a Wise Physician

Private and Controversial. Lord Platt. (Pp. 180; £3.50.) Cassell. 1972.

No title could be more apt for this collection of random—but only occasionally wayward—reflexions of one of the leading medical personalities of our time. The term “personality” has suffered debasement by the mass media, but I use it with deliberation and in its true sense. Here we are offered a clear and candid view of a whole person who refuses to be type-cast in any of the fragmented roles so fashionable today. Here is a wise physician who is never pompous, a leader of his profession who has always balanced its legitimate aspirations with the demands of the greater world outside, a man of learning without a trace of pedantry. If these comments have the ring of an obituary Lord Platt will be the first to laugh, for he has a lively sense of fun that enlivens all he writes and he discusses the most sombre of topics with a penetrating commonsense that is almost Shavian.

It is the first part of his book which is “private”, and the second which is “controversial”, a cunning juxtaposition, for one is so won over by the charm and candour of the personal revelations that we are already on his side when we come to consider the highly individual views expressed on some burning issues of the day. But first we meet the family and hear of his student days and beginnings in practice. So engag-

ing and colourful are the characters whose genes were to be transmitted to the future President of the Royal College of Physicians that we should like to know more of the great-grandfather who ran away to sea and came back penniless to dance the hornpipe in the streets of London until he was taken under the wing of the great Edmund Kean and given his first chance on the stage. More too of Uncle James and Aunt Agnes, and particularly of William, his father who, after an unsuccessful start in the family business, during which time he published novels and poems as well as music, opened a co-educational boarding school. His son tells us that he was “quite unable to curb his zest for teaching. He had an enormous general knowledge, perhaps because, like many other really well-informed people I have known, he had never received a formal university education. . . . He remained young and vigorous to the end of his days. . . . He could dive and swim at seventy-six, and only gave it up then because he died.”

Any reviewer would be tempted to quote lavishly from these earlier chapters with their stories of passionate landladies and the exploits of fellow students and comrades in arms, but it would be easy to convey a false impression in doing so. Behind the laughter and the fun there is a great deal of serious thought and purpose. We may smile at a chapter entitled “Modern Medicine and How to Avoid it” but it con-

tains many reasons for supporting general practice: “Don’t let general practice die out. This would be a tragedy. The general practitioner is *more* necessary in the world of modern techniques and specialization than ever before.”

The discussion of the ethical problems of human experiment, ageing and death, euthanasia, and abortion cut through much current verbiage to remind us of the basic human facts which are sometimes lost sight of in the discussion of moral problems. There is a chapter on some common misconceptions about the medical profession which should be required reading for all patients, and most interesting reflections on the Royal College of Physicians and the House of Lords, but the chapter on music is written with more personal warmth and attachment than is inspired by either institution.

From the final chapter of these most unusual memoirs we learn that a period of depression through which their author passed around the age of 70 has been surmounted and that his life has entered on a new phase which, if less athletic than his father’s septuagenarian exploits, offers new pleasures and new occasions for reflexion of which we shall all hope to hear in due course. This is definitely a book to buy and to read and to lend to your patients.

NOEL POYNTER

Acquisition and Use of Haemodynamic Data

From Cardiac Catheterisation Data to Hemodynamic Parameters. Sing San Yang, M.D., Lamberto G. Bentivoglio, M.D., Vlado Maranhão, M.D., and Harry Goldberg, M.D. (Pp. 307; £6.) Blackwell. 1972.

The authors explain that their book is intended to fill in the missing link between the acquisition of raw haemodynamic data and its correlation and application. The book is almost entirely concerned with the calculations which can be made from raw data obtained either by cardiac catheterization or with the use of the modern non-invasive techniques including phonocardiography, apex cardiography, and echocardiography. Basic calculations of heart rate and pressure, mean pressure gradients, diastolic filling period, and systolic ejection period are described. In the second chapter on cardiac output the various methods are described in detail, particularly the various different methods of obtaining cardiac output from indicator dilution curves. In the same style there follow chapters on the calculation of resistance, valve orifice size, and cardiac volumes from both angiocardiograms and blood volumes.

In the assessment of valvular stenosis and valvular regurgitation the essential haemodynamic characteristics of the conditions are

succinctly described and the haemodynamic information to be gained from the measurement of cardiovascular shunts from blood oxygen data and from indicator dilution methods is explained. There follows a long section on the assessment of ventricular function with consideration of all means of gaining access to this elusive objective. The measurements and calculations which are at present possible by non-invasive means are dealt with next, including systolic time intervals and echocardiography. Finally, there is an appendix which contains definitions, conversion factors and constants, nomograms, and even precise instructions on how to do planimetry. Although they appear in the relevant chapters all the formulae commonly and uncommonly used in the derivation of cardiovascular information are usefully grouped together at the end. Relevant references are placed at the end of each chapter and there is a good index.

In its favour, this book is small, 300 pages, and fulfills a need. Instructions on how to make, for example, a calculation of the situation and size of an intracardiac shunt from an indicator dilution curve are so comprehensive that the reader should certainly be able to carry out any of these manoeuvres by himself without previous knowledge or other external aid than this book. On the

debit side English readers will not like the American circumlocution and neologisms, nor the anglicization of latin words. Some sample calculations may give the wrong impression, like that applied to the calculation of injection rate or pressure using a certain sized catheter and amount of contrast medium. In the chosen example an ejection rate of 50 ml/sec. through a #8F catheter gave a pressure of 600 lb/in.² This is much too high a flow rate and pressure and in Britain we habitually use kg/cm², which does not appear on the nomogram. Understandably, some of the book is already out of date and particularly the section on echocardiography, wherein most of the diagrams show the A scan and make reference to papers published in between 1966 and 1967. This seems a little more out of date than is strictly necessary.

It is difficult to think of any other practical manual which contains all this information in such an accessible and useful form. It should prove invaluable to all those who have to interpret haemodynamic data, from the most simple to the more complex, and it will be equally useful both to those who carry out the cardiac studies and to the physicians at the receiving end who have to try and understand them.

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