Reviews

GENERAL EPIDEMIOLOGY

Plague on Us. By Geddes Smith. (Pp. 365. 16s. net, or $3.00.) New York: The Commonwealth Fund; London: Oxford University Press. 1941.

To write a sound and readable book on epidemiology may not be so hard as to translate the Odes of Horace, but of the many who have tried few have succeeded. Dr. Geddes Smith has written a book which is both sound and eminently readable; it is intended for the general reader, but the British physician will learn much from it. In these days of intimate association with the United States, it has often been remarked how superficial is the knowledge of American history and institutions possessed even by educated Englishmen. How few of them even know the name of the great chief justice Marshall! It is the same with epidemiological history; very few, even of teachers, utilize the wide experience of a vast country which has produced many excellent observers. The author's studies of six epidemics—four of typhoid, one of amoebic dysentery, and one of haemolytic streptococcal infection—are admirably written accounts of logical and complete investigations, while the story of the epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793 is a thrilling one. Naturally much familiar ground is covered, too, but the description is so well done that it can be read with pleasure.

In an epilogue Dr. Geddes Smith permits himself to speculate. As Wilfred Trotter so wisely said, although the speculative, theoretical, and rational element in medicine has often impeded progress, when this element is excluded a science is in danger of sterilization. We should use pure reason, but with humility. The author thinks of disease as a "disturbance in a going system"—a phrase reminding one of Sutton's phrase (the Sutton of Gull and Sutton, a fine writer now almost forgotten), "disease is absence of rhythm"—and suggests that even in the frank infections the endogenous factors have more significance than we usually attribute to them. "Resistance may be general as well as specific. Immunological functions may be more closely tied into other physiological patterns than we have supposed; some of the fantastically numerous chemical tools postulated by the physiologist and the immunologist may do double duty. We may come to think of infection not as a special kind but merely as a special case of disturbance in a chemical system. We may find the way to reinforce the body at vulnerable points against threats from any quarter, infectious or otherwise, and without waiting for the threat to declare itself. At the very least we cannot hope to learn what we need to know about communicable disease without knowing more about the body that has it—and the body that throws it off. When pestilence falls on the people there is a story to tell. The story of the people who do not fall sick has never been told. Perhaps it is the most important part of epidemiology." Galen said 2,000 years ago, when writing of an epidemic, "The chief factor in the production of disease is the preparation of the body which will suffer it." That inevitably remained a vague generality, but with our increasing knowledge of physiology and biochemistry it may well be a pregnant truth. The study of those who do *not* yield to strain—whether the invasion of bacteria or more subtle foes—is as important as the observation of "patients."

This book is a real contribution to popular and even professional education. Its author freely acknowledges obligations to others, but his readers will owe him much gratitude.

BIOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

A Biological Introduction to Psychology. An Introduction to Psychology for Students and Practitioners of Medicine. By R. J. S. McDowall, M.D., D.Sc. (Pp. 210. 6s. net.) London: John Murray. 1941.

Recent well-intentioned attempts to lighten the medical curriculum had as their most obvious result the addition of psychology to it. It will be readily admitted nevertheless that it is more important for the student to know something of the working of his patient's mind rather than the materia medica he will never have to handle directly. Then the difficulty arose that there was no suitable textbook for these students. Academic psychology has very little contact with their requirements, and not only is psychotherapy rent by faction but its literature is generally divorced from the biological and physiological viewpoint in which the student is being trained. True, up to the time of his death W. H. R. Rivers was building up a sane psychotherapy from a biological basis, but he was mainly writing for postgraduates. We therefore welcome Prof. McDowall's *Biological Introduction to Psychology*, which is couched in such language as the student who has done his biology and is learning his physiology can comprehend. The publisher rightly claims that the author accepts what is sane and reasonable in the various schools of thought, yet knits the seemingly divergent views together to form a coherent whole. It is at the same time so free from technicalities that the average man can gain much in the understanding of his fellow creatures and incidentally, we hope, of himself.

There is a certain amount of repetition in these pages, possibly deliberate, for every teacher knows that the student fails to take in everything at first hearing. Occasionally an apparent *non sequitur* obtrudes itself, the author having filled in the gap in his mind rather than on the page. There is a curious mistake on page 142. Sydenham did not found the College of Physicians, which antedates his birth by more than a century; indeed, he never even became a Fellow, probably owing to professional jealousies. Strictly speaking, Adler was not a pupil of Freud (p. xiii), and the author's exposition of his doctrine of organ inferiority (p. 108) is not quite accurate. Some of the case notes in Appendix II would have been more useful if an interpretation of the symptoms had been added. But apart from these minor criticisms we have nothing but praise for a book which covers the ground in an attractive way in such a small compass. It seems exactly adapted to the needs of the student who is expected to learn something of normal psychology at his pre-clinical stage. If the professed psychologist is inclined to declare the book to be superficial, we hope he may be stimulated to try to write a better one. From our experience of the medical student we have no hesitation in saying he will not find it an easy task.

THE PRACTICE OF SURGERY

The Science and Practice of Surgery. By W. H. C. Romanis, M.A., M.B., M.Ch., F.R.C.S., and Philip H. Mitchiner, C.B.E., M.D., M.S., F.R.C.S. Vols. I and II. Seventh edition. (Pp. 1,800; illustrated. 15s. each volume.) London: J. and A. Churchill. 1941.

A seventh edition of *The Science and Practice of Surgery*, which appears four years after the preceding one, has been prepared entirely since the war began and brings this well-known textbook up to date. Dedicated to the late Sir George Makins, it is in two volumes, in each of which a preface to the seventh edition appears along with that which introduced the first edition. In the face of a difficulty mentioned by the authors, that enemy action has rendered some of their notes and illustrations inaccessible, they are to be congratulated on the fact that the figures throughout the