

Book Reviews

Cambridge and its Contribution to Medicine, ed. by ARTHUR J. ROOK, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1971, pp. xiii, 298, illus., £3.00.

These volumes, reporting the Proceedings of the British Congresses on the History of Medicine, are so excellent that one looks forward to their appearance as eagerly as one does to the annual congresses themselves. Dr. Noël Poynter is greatly to be congratulated on seeing to it that they are done. In this case, the editing has been done, and very well done, by Dr. Arthur Rook, who himself contributed two good papers: as the principal Cambridge medical historian he could hardly avoid it.

The 'Contribution of Cambridge to Medicine' could easily have been interpreted as a list, and little more, of all the discoveries that have been made in the university and by its members over the ages, and a very creditable (and dull) exercise it would have been. The organizers of this conference, however, boldly took up a much more serious, difficult and interesting problem: to what extent has the Cambridge atmosphere and teaching contributed to the results achieved by its graduates? The Cambridge Medical School, and Cambridge qualifications, have been held in enormously high repute: with what justification? For most of the time the Cambridge Medical School can hardly be said to have existed; the official shepherds of the flock notoriously, for very long periods, did no teaching at all. And yet Cambridge produced, even at the worst times, marvellous men, not only as doctors, but as men who, after a medical qualification, turned to entirely other pursuits and did brilliantly in them. No professional training, however, has been a better education for the most varied careers, and Oxford has also produced the same results, although it had not, for most of the time, the same apparent interest in medicine. It must be recognized that a medical education has always been one of the finest, if not the *facile princeps* of general, liberal, versatile educations. Why this has been so has never been adequately explained; it was not the function of this conference to provide the answer, though the fact must be borne in mind in assessing any special praise or blame to Cambridge, but it is one of the problems of most immediate importance to this generation, which is 'reforming', or at any rate re-forming, medical education, and should be exercising conscious care not to spoil what has been of such inestimable value to the community in the past, and to be careful not to substitute an efficient technical training, which will make technical doctors, for a peculiar education which fosters multi-directional ability. The new medical education may, for all we know, do just as well in that respect as the old, but until we know, it is a gamble, and a dangerous gamble.

This book provides provender for making a start on such a problem. It looks as though education does make some sort of difference to those who are subjected to it: without figures, it is little more than a 'clinical impression', but it does seem likely that the best of its products have been under the influence of some brilliant man, or of Leyden, Cambridge or some other institution during one of its periods of excellence. But as this book points out, many who went to Leyden, for instance, were there only for days or weeks, and the quality of teaching at Cambridge cannot be inferred from the activity or inertia of the university teachers: the great bulk of the teaching was done by the Colleges, and a College may have a Fellow who was a most inspiring

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teacher at a time when the Professor was completely somnolent.

To come down to details of the book itself, Dr. Robb-Smith gives some refreshingly accurate statements about the statistics of what the university did for medicine before 1600. The late Dr. W. S. C. Copeman (what a loss to Medical History!) gave a very good paper on John Caius; and Prof. Milnes-Walker one on Glisson, full of useful information. He is perhaps not quite fair to poor Dr. Whistler, who has suffered too much for his sins, about rickets: Whistler really was better on it than Glisson. Dr. Rook's paper on Medical Education 1600–1800 grapples with a difficult subject and is splendid (but why do people say that Needham wrote about 'De Formatio Fortu?' That is nonsense). And it was not the College of Physicians which restricted its Fellowship to Oxford and Cambridge graduates in 1675: it was Charles II, who with typical cunning got round an unavoidable demand that Catholics should be excluded by giving that order to the College, knowing that graduates had to sign the Thirty-nine Articles. And what about (p. 56) the botanic garden in the form of the physic garden which correctly means the same thing, at the corner of Downing Street and Corn Exchange Street? But never mind: Dr. Rook produces so many new facts that these are trivia. His paper on Haviland, Paget and Humphrey is equally good.

Dr. Towers' paper on anatomy and physiology is a model: the book is worth buying for that alone. In future, when overcome by depression or weariness, there is the cure. Dr. Hodgkinson is interesting, contrasting the education of three imaginary students at the beginning, middle and end of the nineteenth century, but there is so much more to say that it was a pity to postpone facts to a gimmick of presentation. Dr. Raymond Williamson and Dr. Woollam are both first-class on the history of pathology at Cambridge, and Prof. F. G. Young is full of interest on the rise of biochemistry. One would expect Lord Cohen (who chaired the congress admirably) to produce a tour de force on Allbutt, and one is not disappointed. Prof. Henry Barcroft gave an excellent review of Joseph Barcroft and his contemporaries, of all of whom he can speak with authority (and interest). Prof. J. H. Edwards produced a new and revealing account of Haldane and Genetics, and Prof. Dixon an impressive list of later contributions to biochemistry: what a man Hopkins was! And he is further revealed in Dr. Kodicek's paper on vitamins: these two ought to be read by research workers of all sorts. Finally Dr. Cole tells the by now encouraging story of the Cambridge School and clinical medicine in this century.

No-one says so, but the idea which this book leaves is that even in its worst times, Cambridge has always been able to put forward somebody who was an example of excellence in some subject to the young. The young easily take fire from the vision of excellence, and perhaps that is what Cambridge has been doing all this time.

CHARLES NEWMAN

Der Wandel der Medizin wie ich ihn erlebte, by GUIDO FANCONI, Berne, Stuttgart and Vienna, Huber, 1970, pp. 358, illus., S.Fr.48/DM.43.

The author, Emeritus Professor of Paediatrics and former Director of the Children's Hospital at Zürich University, has gained international recognition by his studies of a number of abnormal conditions in childhood. He has written a textbook of paediatrics and edited the *Helvetica Paediatrica Acta*. After his retirement he was