

Lessons from childhood. Some aspects of the early life of unusual men and women. R. S. ILLINGWORTH, M.D., F.R.C.P., D.P.H., D.C.H. and C. M. ILLINGWORTH, M.B., B.S., M.R.C.P. Edinburgh and London. E. & S. Livingstone Ltd. 1966. Pp. xi + 384. Price 37s. 6d.

It is strange that although psychologists have spent so much time on the effect of childhood influences on the personality, so little attention has been given to the examples provided by those who have left their footprints on the sands of time. Professor Illingworth and his wife have tried to right the balance in this book, and in the face of what must have seemed tremendous difficulties, have produced a fascinating study. Wisely, they have avoided the trap of confining their survey to the description of genius, and all who have laid claim to fame or infamy are included, only mediocrity is excluded; thus in the index Eichmann rubs shoulders with Einstein and Oliver Wendell Holmes and Victor Hugo follow after Himmler and Hitler. Is the irony of this accidental? The choice of material must have presented the authors with many quandaries.

A work so packed with facts demands close attention of the reader, and yet it is difficult to put the book down once it is started. Each chapter is devoted to a different theme, such as 'education difficulties', 'education at home', 'unrecognized ability' and each ends with a comment by the authors, always restrained and wise. This arrangement prevents the book from becoming a mere catalogue as might so easily have happened in less skilful hands. As a bedside book there can be few better.

Profiles of disease. A study of the natural history of common diseases.

J. FRY, M.D., F.R.C.S., M.C.G.P. Edinburgh and London. E. & S. Livingstone Ltd. 1966. Pp. viii + 176. Price 21s.

"Naturalists hold certain attributes in common, notably the desire to establish the truth of things by observation and recording, by classification and analysis." So wrote John Ryle in *The natural history of disease*. In another part of this essay he compares the general practitioner with Gilbert White of Selborne, that "peaceful, parochial sage watching his birds and his seasons, his flowers and his weather signals". The parallel is indeed close. The research worker in general practice is above all an observer of nature, studying man and his diseases in their natural habitat and, like no other physician, dwelling in that habitat himself.

After coming under John Ryle's influence at Guys, Dr John Fry started to make systematic observations in his own practice. Since this time, Dr Fry's work has become familiar to all of us through his writings and his contributions to scientific meetings. Now, after 15 years, he has brought together the results of his work in one volume. Its publication is a milestone in the postwar development of general practice.

The core of the book—and half its volume—is a detailed study of six diseases: chronic bronchitis, asthma, respiratory infections, hypertension, coronary disease and catarrhal disorders of childhood. These are important and fascinating chapters. The shorter ones on anaemia, urinary

infections, peptic ulcer and other disorders also contain much interesting material. The plan of each chapter is similar: a definition and classification of the disease; the incidence and prevalence rates in the whole practice and in different age, sex and social groups; the course and outcome; and a study of various factors influencing the prognosis. The text is illustrated throughout with numerous tables and diagrams.

At the end of each chapter is a 'profile' of the disease, that is, a word picture of the *whole* disease, from its beginning to its ending, in its mild forms and severe forms, at all ages and in all classes. The knowledge contained in this book is basic not only to general practice but to the whole of medicine. How many false trails have been followed by medical men, and how much bad advice given to patients, because disease was not studied as a whole. As John Ryle said—quoted by Dr Fry in his preface—"Faithful observation of matters must ever in a world of ignorance and prejudice serve to correct men's principles".

Many of Dr Fry's findings have the most important practical applications in the management of disease. To mention only three: the good prognosis of recurrent tonsillitis without tonsillectomy; the benign nature of hypertension in elderly women; and the spontaneous remission of most cases of asthma. Besides the implications for treatment, the book also contains a mine of information which is vital for a rational approach to diagnosis in general practice. Only by knowing the true prevalence of disease in the community, and its distribution in age, sex and social groups, can the primary physician achieve diagnostic precision. And this is exactly what he cannot learn in hospital.

This book will be read and studied by general practitioners for many years to come. It should also be studied by those whose range of experience has been narrowed by specialization, for this narrowing can give rise to erroneous conceptions of disease.

A course in renal diseases. GEOFFREY M. BERLYNE, M.B., Ch.B., M.R.C.P
Oxford. Blackwell Scientific Publications. Pp. xiii + 379 + index.
Price 37s. 6d.

This is an exciting book to read. The author has adopted the method of giving information in short sections each followed by a question to test the knowledge gained. The questions are in multiple-choice-answer form and, according to the answer chosen, direct the reader back to the paragraph which he has just read or on to the next step. If he makes certain answers he is directed to appropriate explanations, so that his misunderstandings are rectified. The effect is like a game of snakes and ladders on an academic plane. The book covers anatomy, physiology, investigations, diseases and disorders of the kidney. It is strongly recommended to those who find it difficult to concentrate when they read textbooks.