

Book reviews

Royal College of Psychiatrists (1971). HOWELLS, J. G. Pp. 25. London. The Society of Clinical Psychiatrists. Price 25p.

This is a fascinating little booklet. It describes the formation of the Royal College of Psychiatrists seen through the eyes of one who believed in the College implicitly and who campaigned systematically for its creation.

It is memorable for some interesting statements, such as "the ultimate authority of the doctor arises from the needs of his patient. The patient acknowledges no hierarchy of disorders; he does not accept that a newly recognized disease is less painful or less worthy of attention than a long recognized one. He expects every doctor who interprets his special needs to have an equal voice in working for the satisfaction of that need". Such quotations appear equally relevant to some of the problems of general practice.

The book shows clearly the deep sense of inferiority felt by at least one group of psychiatrists and describes the formation of the Royal College of Psychiatrists as an essential step in attaining parity with specialists in the physical disorders. General practice is not considered and sentences such as "in psychiatry, more than in any other medical field, the doctor has to represent the patient's interest", may strike general practitioner readers as an overstatement.

Nevertheless, this is an interesting historical survey of the thinking that led to the pressure group for the formation of the College and a clear outline of the difficulties encountered.

Dr Howells stresses the importance of the open meeting of the Royal Medical Psychological Association in 1964, at which the Society of Clinical Psychiatrists acted as a pressure group. A vote in favour of the petition for a Royal College was carried by 150 votes to nine and this is described as a decisive step. It is clear that by this time provincial psychiatrists will be convinced of the need for their own College. What is not discussed, however, is what had changed their thinking during the previous two decades. It seems at least possible that the considerable success of the Royal College of General Practitioners, a success which was visible outside the ranks of general practice by 1964, may well have been one feature.

The structure of the new College is of interest. In particular the class of 'inceptor' is unique to this College and is a training position. Members are required to have consultant or equivalent status.

The majority of the Council come from the Divisions each of whom will send a Fellow and a member. One third of the membership of Council must consist of members of the College. This is an interesting provision as it guarantees that one

third of the Council will consist of young consultants within five years of appointment. The constitution does not allow any officer to take office after the age of 65.

The booklet closes with a sentence that indeed summarizes the present position 'the foundation of the Royal College of Psychiatrists adds another intriguing chapter to the fascinating history of the Royal Colleges in Britain'.

The understanding physician. CHARLES D. ARING, M.D. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1971. Pp 1+214. Price: \$8.95.

This book is a collection of essays, addresses and leading articles. The author has had a distinguished career in medicine, his chief interest being neurophysiology which he professes at Cincinnati. This is the second edition of the volume which was originally published in 1969 to mark his 50 years with the University. He is revealed as a wise, kindly and scholarly physician, passionately interested in the education of the future doctor, and a striver towards the improvement of medical writing. He has much to say which is valuable on professional conduct and the doctor's relationship with his patients. His wide reading is evident in almost every page. Each little article, for they are mostly short, contains aphoristic sayings which are worthwhile: "We are in an era of 'diseases of medical progress', whatever that means, and we can wonder whether this may not spawn yet another specialty, perhaps 'Iatrology'"; or "Today (1963), much of the world's energy is beamed towards a lessening of human capacity as events contribute to the devaluation of honesty and mercy, of love, respect and fair play."

Some of Dr Aring's personal impressions are quite charming for their simple directness; his confrontation with doctors concerning his own poliomyelitis, undiagnosed as a child, is one such. His likes and dislikes in reading are revealing. He dissects Osler's list of books which the student should have by him as bedside reading and makes his own personal comments. This leads him onto the description of the things he reads. He prefers, he says, to read many books at once whether they be modern or ancient. He is constrained to take with him on holidays "the large tomes that I have begun, preferably to the seashore." "I derive a good deal from poetry that does not sprain the brain and thus become akin to a conundrum puzzle."

This is a book to have by one, to dip into and to relish. Sometimes Dr Aring's English is a little involved but this is due to the American language which occasionally jars on the English reader.