

Book Reviews

Problems and Progress in Medical Care. Essays on current research. Published for the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust by the Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto. 1964. Pp. vii + 368. Price 12s. 6d.

The purpose of this admirable book is to record the results of recent research projects sponsored by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. It comprises a series of eleven essays which penetrate deeply into many fascinating avenues of medicine and offers something of abiding interest for almost every medical palate and especially for those with a taste for statistics.

These thoughtful and well-written essays dissect with meticulous care many parts of the corpus of medicine and some of them, whilst revealing facts hitherto unsuspected or but little known, point at the same time to other problems revealed by the research schemes here described. What is the reason, for example, for the apparent deterioration in medical and dental care the farther north one travels in this country? Why is it that so many Edinburgh practitioners fail to take advantage of the amenities offered at Professor Richard Scott's diagnostic centre?

The essays range widely over such vital subjects as medical care, the morale and effectiveness of hospitals, nursing care, the Edinburgh Family Doctor Diagnostic Centre, the social work content of general medical services, prescribing—with particular reference to prevailing influences in prescribing habits; the last five of the series relate to various aspects of mental illness. It is quite impossible in a short review to do justice to these up-to-date and authoritative contributions to the literature of social medicine since each merits detailed appreciation.

At a time like the present, when there is so much discontent and frustration in the profession, we might well learn a salutary lesson from Professor Revans' observations on the relationship between, on the one hand, good communications and enlightened leadership in hospitals and, on the other hand, contented nurses and a speedier recovery rate among patients. For, as Sir Robert Platt wrote in his recent Rock Carling Lecture, at a time when the morale of the profession appears to be low, his "first examination of the situation . . . would be to see what the medical politicians of the profession were telling their members and what their own relations were with the Ministry of Health".

This important work of reference (surely at 12s. 6d. one of the best buys of the year) should make a particular appeal to all family doctors, all hospital officers, consultants, administrators and nursing directors alike, and to all who have a sense of social responsibility or an interest in the social sciences.