

Book Reviews

Librarian of the National Library of Wales, and used to illustrate the lecture at Cardiff.

The initial article is a scholarly account of Thomas Baskerville, Elizabethan apothecary of Exeter, by Margery Rowe and G. E. Trease.

To a Welsh reviewer, another pleasing feature of the *Transactions* is that it has been printed by J. D. Lewis and Sons Ltd., Gomerian Press, Llandysul. They have already done so much to improve standards nationally and internationally, and it is undoubtedly largely due to their expertise that the current *Transactions* is offered at the bargain price of 80p or 2 United States dollars including postage.

D. GERAINT JAMES

Roman Medicine, by JOHN SCARBOROUGH, London, Thames & Hudson, 1969, pp. 238, illus., £2.50.

The subject of specifically Roman medicine, first without Greek influence and then with it, has, so far as I know, never been treated in a unified fashion, except in chapters of general histories of medicine, where the authors who are mainly interested in other things have to cross this territory. Like all manifestations of Roman culture, Roman medicine was affected by Greek theory and practice in some degree, but the Roman strands are traceable throughout. The Roman attitude to Greek theory is an important part of the subject, since medicine is as practical as government or warfare, which were Roman specialities.

Scarborough emphasizes that the practical medicine which once fell within the duties of the *paterfamilias* was simple and undeveloped, but never lost its hold on the Roman mind. As time passed, professional practitioners appeared, and beyond them there was a body of religious and magical medicine, Latin and Etruscan. These three types of medicine served the Romans until faith healing was reinforced by the cult of Asclepius, which was installed on Tiber Island early in the third century, and until on the other side professional physicians arrived from Greece, who were theorists and philosophers as well as practitioners. With their coming the conception of a physician among some Romans changed, very much as the conception of a jurisconsult did through stoic philosophy. The interaction of Roman medicine of the old style with Greek medicine may be illustrated by one example quoted on p. 23. Serenus Sammonicus says that a certain fever returns on alternate days, arranging the attacks with the exactness of an accurate balance. This one would suppose was tertian malaria, reckoned by inclusive counting and defined in Greek fashion. But the prescription was seeds of cummin sealed in wax and hung in a red bag round the patient's neck, along with a branch of pennyroyal to give off healing odours, and with a smashed bug eaten in an egg, 'horrible to the touch but not difficult to swallow in this fashion'. As Scarborough says, such practice lacked organization and accepted pattern. Greek medicine is easier to study because, in spite of the detail in some treatises, there is in others much theory which is not difficult to grasp.

Greek medicine reached Rome after its Hellenistic development, which had for a time under the Ptolemies in Alexandria included dissection and thus an advance in anatomy. There was also a theoretical development in physiology, so that Asclepiades arrived in Rome with a medical application of Democritus' theory of atoms. This, in his case, took the place of teleological views. Though Galen and Pliny later dis-

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approved of his theory, Asclepiades seems to have been, through self-education in medicine proper, a practical and sensible physician whom Romans trusted because he dealt directly with patients without presenting theory. This must have been a relief when medicine under the influence of Greek philosophy was proliferating sects, as Christian theology did later under the same influence.

There is much of interest in the short chapter called 'Cato and the medical encyclopaedists'. Cato, in spite of his anti-Hellenic posture, made much use of Greek books on medicine. It would have been worth while to develop this point further. We are told that Romans did not distinguish between the theory and the practice of medicine, while Hellenistic physicians acknowledged a distinction between empirical and advanced study. The same attitude was held by Celsus and, in his medical interests, by Vitruvius. It would have been good to see this contrast and interaction of Roman and Greek ideas more fully illustrated from texts, even at the price of less information on the social position and careers of physicians in the Roman world, as illustrated by the voluble Galen. The Greek distinction is an early form of ours between medical practice and medical sciences. In the training of physicians we have made anatomy, physiology and pathology pre-clinical subjects, a proceeding of which the Romans would have approved.

Scarborough's account in an earlier article of military medicine in the Roman army (*Med. Hist.*, 1968, 12, 254–61) has been criticized in this journal by V. Nutton (*Med. Hist.*, 1969, 13, 260–70). Since the substance of it reappears in a chapter of this book, I shall say only that in my view, as in Nutton's, medical services in so professional an army as that of imperial Rome must have been more professional than Scarborough allows. Though there were not in the Roman army, as in modern armies, non-combatant medical staffs in other respects under military law, the *medici* of various grades must have been more than soldiers with a little medical skill, even if the best physicians and surgeons belonged to the personal following of high officers. Justice is done in ch. V to the hygienic arrangements made for the army which had its *ualetudinaria* long before there was any public provision for sick civilians. It is indeed likely that the Christian institution of the public hospital is indebted to this military example. Among the surgical instruments illustrated is a fine-toothed bone saw of bronze in Fig. 41. This raises in my mind the question of amputation, which seems to have been rare in Hippocratic times but would surely have become ever more common with the increasing scale of warfare and the elaboration of war-engines.

Roman aristocrats of hellenized culture welcomed such physicians as Galen, who would in Greek fashion discuss ailments and treatments with educated patients. But it is obvious, as Scarborough says, that most of the common people would have been treated by a different class of physician and also by various kinds of quack and magician. Within the homes of wealthy Romans there were also slaves or freedmen of medical skill. Indeed most of practical medicine was regarded as a task for slaves and freedmen. Something of this social attitude long survived the Roman Empire in western Europe, where, with some exceptions, physicians were not members of the higher professional classes until the nineteenth century. Thereafter, modern specialist knowledge began to raise their status but for reasons which were different from the concern with the whole man, which Galen and others showed in their views on medical education.

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Scarborough touches on these and on many other matters but too often does not press the enquiry home. This may be due partly to limited space allowed for a various and complicated subject, for which the quantity and the quality of the evidence are alike uneven. There are appendices on medical biographies, on sources and problems, on the vexed question of human dissection in Roman times, and on Roman veterinary medicine. But the combination of medical knowledge with Greek and Latin scholarship and historical insight needed for this subject is unlikely, in our times, to be found in one man, and the right man would take many years to acquire it.

E. D. PHILLIPS

Autobiography of Charles Caldwell, M.D., with preface, notes, and appendix by HARRIET W. WARNER, introduction by Lloyd G. Stevenson, New York, Da Capo Press, 1968, pp. xxvi, viii, 454, \$14.50.

This reprint, with its lively introduction by Professor Stevenson, is to be greatly welcomed. The original came out in 1855 and recounts (though one can never be sure just how accurately) memories of a long, vivid and turbulent life which stretched from 1772 to 1853. Stevenson calls Caldwell 'one of the chief priests of the great god Blah'. This he undoubtedly was; but he was also, as the editor allows, a man with superabundant energy and drive which amply compensated for the deficiencies which the term 'Blah' implies. At any rate there is no better way of getting the feel of early nineteenth-century American medicine—that strange blend of rawness and deep learning—than by reading Caldwell's memoirs.

For the unprepared they have many surprises; and even for those with foreknowledge of Caldwell's character they can provide unexpected moments of revelation. As, for instance, the pen-portrait of Joseph Priestley (missed, to my knowledge, by Priestley's biographers), whom Caldwell admired enormously but yet despised for his Yorkshireman's inability to pronounce aitches. 'These', says Caldwell loftily 'are English vulgarities'.

How useful it would be to have an index to this reprint!

E. GASKELL

A Bibliography of Robert Watt, M.D., Author of the Bibliotheca Britannica . . . With a Facsimile of his Catalogue of Medical Books and with a preliminary Essay on his Works, etc., by FRANCESCO CORDASCO, Detroit, Gale Research Co., 1968, pp. 27, 68 (4), port., \$8.50.

It is a pity this book, first published eight years ago, has not had its title changed in the meantime (or at least reversed). The bibliography actually comprises four pages; the facsimile over sixty. Which is not to argue that the facsimile is not worth reprinting, for the original (published in 1812) is rare in the extreme and its text of continuing use to the medical historian. The editor's short introduction, aided by Watt's own prefatory address to his medical students, show what an enlightened teacher he (Watt) was: both in his ideas on medicine and his attitude to his pupils. To have made his own library available to them was an act of great heroism; just how great can be judged from the quality of the books as revealed in his Catalogue.

E. GASKELL