

Learning about Epilepsy

Epilepsy. (Contemporary Neurology Series No. 2.) By Richard Penrose Schmidt, M.D., and B. Joe Wilder, M.D. (Pp. 220+viii; illustrated. 47s.) Oxford: Blackwell. 1968.

Writing a new book about epilepsy must be an unenviable task, and the authors of this monograph, which is the second in the *Contemporary Neurology Series*, bring to it their wide personal experience both of clinical practice and of neurophysiological research. The editor of the series in his preface says, "What emerges is a balanced scholarly treatise." A scholarly work it certainly is, but I have reservations about the balance of its contents, and it is a little difficult to define the audience for whom the book is intended.

Starting with chapters on the classification of epilepsy and of the different types of seizures, and followed by a review of the causes of epilepsy, there is an absorbingly interesting account, containing little that is new, but so clearly written that anyone from student to practising neurologist could not fail to benefit from reading it. The two chapters that follow, however, admittedly dealing with the much more difficult subjects of the physiology and chemistry of epilepsy, and therefore less familiar to the clinician, give the impression of having moved into a different authorship entirely. These long sections are far from easy to read. They consist of a critical review of work carried out in many centres, including the authors' own, and certainly are a fruitful source of reference for those engaged in research. The clinician, however, will return with some relief to the previous style of writing in the chapter on the diagnosis of epilepsy. Here is to be found excellent practical advice based on the hard facts of clinical experience. There is welcome emphasis on the importance of history, minute detail of clinical presentation, exact definition of the attacks, and critical appraisal of the possible causes, rather than the lengthy description of electroencephalographic changes that are so often found, and which are suggested as the be-all and end-all of diagnosis. The place of the E.E.G. and how to get from it its real value is clearly defined here. After a chapter on the pharmacology of the anti-

convulsant drugs, covering as wide a range of preparations as anyone is likely to use and including some interesting historical facts, the authors move on to the management of the epileptic patient. Here I was again disappointed and would criticize the balance of this book. The particular problems which confront the experienced clinician are not dealt with in any detail. A page and a half are devoted to the thorny problem of the management of status epilepticus, and half a page only to surgical treatment, as compared to the 23 earlier pages on the chemistry of epilepsy. The final chapter on the psychological and social aspects presents all the problems familiar to the doctor, but finds no new solutions to them.

The value of the book as a work of reference, particularly on the physiological and chemical topics, is shown by the 470 references which precede the short but good index. I was simply left with the wish that the style of those first few chapters could have been maintained throughout the whole book.

EDWIN R. BICKERSTAFF.

Physician Poet

The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams. (Pp. 402+xiv. 63s.) London: MacGibbon & Kee. 1969.

William Carlos Williams was the elder son of a British immigrant to the United States of America who retained his British nationality. The family established itself in Rutherford, New Jersey, where Williams lived for the greater part of his life. While still a schoolboy he showed a passion for literature, especially poetry, and made up his mind to be a poet and author. To gain a livelihood he determined to practise medicine, and in 1906 he qualified after a course of study in the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania. He then spent three years as resident in New York hospitals and set up in general practice in his native town in 1910. In 1912 he married a daughter of a prosperous German immigrant. It was a happy marriage and his wife helped him greatly in his career.

For 40 years he practised medicine, giving special attention to obstetrics and diseases of children and keeping up to date by post-graduate work in New York. He states that his was not a "money" practice, yet after 12 years he was able to take a year's sabbatical holiday, spending six months studying and writing in New York, and then visiting Europe for a period of six months. In Paris he met James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, Hilda Doolittle, and other writers. He also spent two months in the south of France before returning to his practice. All his spare time he devoted to writing and thinking poetry and associating with other literary aspirants. He published, at his own expense, several small volumes of poetry that attracted little attention, but just before the outbreak of the second world war his poems and other writings gained recognition in the United States, and he was invited to address audiences at various universities. From that time his reputation increased, and after he died in 1963 he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer prize and also the Gold Medal for literature of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. His work is not so well known outside America.

The autobiography is a frank (sometimes perhaps too frank) account of the principal events in his life, with comments explaining his motives and giving his view of life in general. He acknowledges his failures and is modest about his success. His poetry was of the modern type, for he rather disparaged the traditional forms. In the chapter on "Poetry and Medicine" he writes: "When they ask me how I have for so many years continued an equal interest in medicine and the poem I reply that they amount for me to much the same thing." This view is partly explained in the chapter on "Practice," in which it is pointed out that every physician treats many patients who are going through a physical and mental crisis, and the comment is added that "the poem springs from the half-spoken words of such patients." This must mean that he was inspired by the emotion thus revealed and the poem resulted. This shows that he was a sympathetic as well as a good physician.

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Books Received

Books noticed here may be reviewed later.

Clinical Neurosurgery. Edited by Robert G. Ojemann, M.D. (Pp. 440+xxvii; illustrated. 150s.) Vol. 15. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins. 1968. Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone.

Die Transplantationsreaktion als Zelluläre Immunität. By Hanaruedy Ramseier. (Pp. 254; illustrated. 124s.) Basle: S. Karger. 1969.

An Introduction to the History of General Surgery. By Richard Hardaway Meade, B.S., M.D. (Pp. 403+xi; illustrated. 144s.) London: W. B. Saunders. 1968.

Neonatal Surgery. By P. P. Rickham, F.R.C.S., D.C.H., and J. H. Johnston, M.B., F.R.C.S. (Pp. 633+xiv; illustrated. 170s.) London: Butterworths. 1969.

Psychoanalysis. The First Ten Years, 1888-1898. By Walter A. Stewart, M.D. (Pp. 224. 40s.) London: George Allen & Unwin. 1969.

Malnutrition, Learning and Behaviour. Edited by Nevin S. Scrimshaw and John E. Gordon. (Pp. 566+xiii; illustrated. 117s.) London: M.I.T. Press. 1969.

Measurement and Precision in Surgery. Edited by Sir Hedley Atkins, K.B.E., D.M., M.Ch. (Pp. 248+x; illustrated. 50s.) Oxford: Blackwell. 1969.

Clinical Aspects of Operable Heart Disease. By Donald R. Kahn, M.D., Ruth H. Strang, M.D., and William S. Wilson, M.D. (Pp. 363+viii; illustrated. 145s.) London: Butterworths. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts. 1969.

Society without the Father. A Contribution to Social Psychology. By Alexander Mitscherlich. (Pp. 329+xi. 60s.) London: Tavistock Publications. 1969.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Deposited Radionuclides. Proceedings of a Symposium held at Richland, Washington, U.S.A., 15-17 May 1967. Edited by H. A. Kornberg and W. D. Norwood. (Pp. 680+xviii; illustrated. 352s.) Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica. 1968.

The Doctor and the Soul. From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy. By Viktor E. Frankl, M.D., Ph.D. (Pp. 289+xxi. 35s.) London: Souvenir Press. 1969.

The Healers. By John Doe, M.D. (Pp. 227. 30s.) London: Leslie Frewin. 1969.

Anatomy and Physiology for Radiographers. 3rd edition. By C. K. Warrick, F.F.R., D.M.R. (Pp. 286+viii; illustrated. 40s.) London: Edward Arnold. 1969.

Medical Services in War. The Principal Medical Lessons of the Second World War. Edited by Sir Arthur Salusbury MacNalty, K.C.B., and W. Franklin Mellor. (Pp. 781+xviii. 160s.) London: H.M.S.O. 1969.