

### Book Reviews

GIUSEPPE PITRÈ, *Sicilian folk medicine*, translated by Phyllis H. Williams, Lawrence, Kansas, Coronado Press, 1971, 4to, pp. xv [317], illus., \$48.50.

The late Giuseppe Pitrè (1841–1916) dedicated his whole life to the preparation and publication of his twenty-five volume study, *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari Siciliane* (1871–1913), of which *Medicina popolare Siciliana* (Turin, 1896) is the nineteenth. Pitrè was a physician, and he was justifiably convinced that only a medically qualified person can deal effectively with folk medicine. He collected his data over a period of about twenty-five years and presents it here in five sections: popular practitioners of the medical art; anatomy, physiology, physiognomy, hygiene; general pathology; special external pathology, medical and surgical; special internal pathology. There is also a list of Sicilian herbs mentioned and of works to be consulted, and a series of illustrations of the healing saints of Sicily. The translator has retained the dialect in the terms cited and quotations given in the text because of its basic importance to the Sicilians. They are grouped in topographical areas, and they preserve their identity, satisfy their cautiousness and provide themselves with protection by keeping their own terms, beliefs and ways. Superstition has an important role to play in their everyday life, but some of their beliefs are now known to be part of modern medicine.

Collected in this book is a remarkable amount of information, which will be of the greatest interest to those concerned with folk-lore and the medical knowledge of relatively primitive communities. It provides fascinating reading and as a book of reference it will be most valuable. The cultural background is, however, given less attention than it deserves. This is perhaps the most important aspect of folk medicine because after the compilation of that belonging to one country, a comparative study with another community possessing different racial characteristics, traditions, personality traits, history, and so forth, would be valuable. It would, for example, be very revealing to compare Sicilian with English folk medicine. Unfortunately there is no work on the latter in any way comparable to the outstanding treatise of Dr. Pitrè. As folk medicine in this country is rapidly dying out and may have vanished in another generation or so, it is perhaps already too late to tackle this task, using Pitrè's technique of direct interview. Nevertheless, someone should be making good this embarrassing defect in our history by recording what remains and culling the widely spread and voluminous literature on the subject. Pitrè's classic work could well be used as a model.

GORDON THOMAS, *Issels. The biography of a doctor*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1975, 8vo, pp. 352, illus., £3.50.

Mr. Thomas's controversial book, the publication of which has been held up for two years, presents the equally controversial cancer treatment practised by Dr. Josef Issels in his Bavarian clinic until it closed in 1973. The debate continues, with the medical profession solidly opposing his claims and denouncing the uncritical acceptance of it by others. The episode above all is an excellent example of the vicious intolerance of the medical profession to unorthodox and unproven views, and a survey of this attitude over the centuries would make a fascinating study. After all, the history of therapy is a sequence of wonder cures, and a study of them should not

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be rejected as useless by the modern therapist and his critics. If they examine them they will discover that an important common denominator is the devotion and enthusiasm of the individual practising the revolutionary method of treatment. This must surely be the reason for Dr. Issels' apparent successes.

Thomas's book is a biased and emotional polemic, which does not discuss with any authority the substance of the criticisms levelled against Issels. It is surely more important to have this information than details of all the ways in which doctors have opposed him. The attempt to justify Issels' holistic concept of cancer by recruiting the Hippocratic Writers is pitiable. Admittedly the best way of appraising the whole affair is to look at it with historical perspective, but not carefully to select bygone ideas which seem to support a present-day theory.

E. RUTH HARVEY, *The inward wits. Psychological theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, London, The Warburg Institute (Warburg Institute Surveys, No. 6), 1975, 8vo, pp. [v], 79, illus., £2.00.

Throughout the Middle Ages and well into the sixteenth century it was held that the psychological functions of commonsense (*sensus communis*, deriving from the special and tactile senses), reasoning, imagination, and memory were located within the brain's ventricles. Ruth Harvey traces the origins of the idea from Nemesius at the end of the fourth century A.D., and discusses it in the light of medical and then philosophical tradition.

Her study is a scholarly one, but defective in several ways. She incorporates into her text a lot of material that is very well known; for example, we are told that Galen was born in Pergamum, etc., etc. Also she demonstrates some naïvety when handling this data. She has omitted a good deal of the "medical" secondary literature and has made a number of errors. Thus she states that, "... Galen handed on a scheme which located the powers of imagination, thought, and memory in the three main cerebral ventricles . . ." (p. 60), but it did not originate with Galen, although he had delineated both the ventricles and the three main psychological functions. Galen was not "... the great Alexandrian master . . ." (p. 29) and would have objected loudly to such an appellation. There is no such structure as the "middle-pan" of the brain; the middle cranial fossa is being referred to.

However, this is the most detailed account in English of the so-called "Cell doctrine" and it may stimulate others to improve on it.

CHARLES LICHTENTHAELER, *Geschichte der Medizin*, 2 vols., Cologne, Deutscher Ärzte Verlag, 1975, 8vo, pp. 736, illus., DM.49.

The renowned medical historian, Professor Lichtenthaeler, is Swiss by birth and now teaches the history of medicine at the Universities of Hamburg and Lausanne. His book is intended for student, doctor, historian, and all those interested in history, and it is claimed to be the first comprehensive textbook of medical history since that of Theodor Meyer—Steinig and Karl Sudhoff published in 1920. There is, however, the outstanding short history by Ackerknecht, first published in English, and then in German in 1959; it is perhaps judged too brief to compete.

The arrangement here is into twenty lectures, from prehistoric magico-religious