

Book Reviews

RICHARD CAVENDISH, *The powers of evil in western religion, magic and folk belief*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, 8vo, pp. ix, 299, £5.95.

Evil supernatural agencies are part of every culture in degrees varying with their sophistication. As is to be expected, primitive man is surrounded by them, but they are of course still believed in by races who boast advanced social and cultural development. This book considers each in turn, ranging from the bogymen to fire and brimstone, and including ghosts and astral evil, pagan spirits, the vampire, darkness and night, nightmares, eaters of the dead, hell, the devil, animals, demons, witches and comparable sinister beings and situations.

Mr. Cavendish is a recognized expert on the history of magic and the occult, and writes with authority on his topic, providing a large amount of documented data on each of the agencies he discusses. He carefully explores them in antiquity, in medieval Europe and in modern Europe and America, discovering many associations with, amongst others, evil, sex, death, and the animal world. The very term "the powers of evil" is significant and their influences have been widespread and significant throughout history. The terror and anxiety they have engendered are real enough, but whether supernatural beings and influences actually exist is another matter. The author is significantly agnostic. Nevertheless, he writes about them subjectively, and does not descend to the murky psycho-analytic rubbish that the medical profession has at times produced in this context.

His book can be recommended as a reliable survey of evil agencies, factors that have been constantly present in man's life since prehistoric times, and therefore an important topic for the history of man and medicine. Their role in concepts of disease, etiology, misfortune, sterility, and the destruction of human comfort in general has been, and in some instances still is, a potent one and therefore demands study.

RICHARD WALL, (compiler), *Mortality in mid nineteenth century Britain*, London, Gregg International, 1974, 8vo, pp. xvi, reprints: 567-601; viii, 168, £4.25.

Richard Wall, of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, has brought together facsimile reprints of William Farr's chapter on vital statistics, published in J. R. McCulloch's *A statistical account of the British Empire* (1837), and Henry Ratcliffe's, *Observations on the rate of mortality and sickness existing amongst friendly societies . . .* (1850), and has provided an excellent introduction to them. Farr's article is considered to be the foundation of a new science, along with the emergence of the professional demographer, and the compiler analyses its contents closely. Ratcliffe's data came from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Manchester Unity, and he examined duration of life and average sickness amongst its members, and then correlated these with the occupation and locality of individuals. His work is characterized by general thoroughness, although it does not have the breadth of Farr's.

As the interest in historical demography increases it is essential that classical documents such as these two should be readily available to students and to researchers. The significance of the subject to the history of medicine is undoubted, and there is an urgent need for collaboration between these two disciplines, to the benefit of both.