BOOK REVIEWS

years. For this purpose volunteers were sought among nurses, medical students, and contacts of tuberculous patients, a control group consisting mainly of office workers in London—a group of boys at a Naval Training Establishment being included later. The original aim of obtaining about 5,000 volunteers in each of the main groups was unfortunately rendered impossible by the outbreak of war, and it was only among nurses that the proposed figure was reached.

Quantitative tuberculin tests and radiographs of chests were done on each entrant to the survey and were repeated at regular intervals for a varying number of years in each case. It was found that about 85 per cent. of males and 82 per cent. of females in England reacted to tuberculin, the incidence increasing with age and with the degree of contact with tuberculosis.

Valuable information was obtained on the occurrence and course of the primary infection, which was generally held to occur on the conversion of the Mantoux test from negative to positive. At the same time Mantoux reversion occurred in an appreciable number of cases. Only a small proportion of primary lung lesions were seen on x-ray examination, but of these about half tended to progress. The Report emphasizes the occupational risks of nursing, especially to those who are tuberculin-negative, the morbidity among the latter being about three times as great as among the tuberculin-positives. The predisposition of Irish and Welsh nurses is a point of considerable interest. The importance of multiple factors such as environment, nutrition, and heredity must not be forgotten as influencing the progression or regression of the disease.

Some suggestions are made as to preventive measures to be adopted, especially in the excellent preface by Lord Moran, who recommends preferential rehousing for the tuberculous, extra milk for contacts, and adherence to recent standards proposed for the health of hospital workers. In addition he advocates trial of B.C.G. vaccination among nurses and medical students.

The Report is well set out and documented and it is to be hoped that it will lead to further surveys on similar lines being undertaken on other and contrasted groups within the population.

F. A. E. Crew.


The startling revelations with which supposedly familiar things repay close investigation are an unending source of satisfaction and pain to the scientifically minded. Dr. Sheldon’s unassuming survey of the lives of a random sample of about 500 people of Wolverhampton is another instance of this ambivalent phenomenon. Well-known facts, such as the liability to falls of old people, gain an unexpected intricacy on nearer approach which makes us realize more acutely the utter ignorance with which we still face the medical problems of ageing.

The chief merit of this important contribution lies in its completeness. In social medicine, more than in any other branch of medical science, it is fatal to lose sight of the whole tableau through preoccupation with one’s own little corner of the picture. Dr. Sheldon’s survey fulfils an important task in this respect by bringing before our eyes the total problem with its manifold medical and social ramifications and interconnexions. Naturally so comprehensive an aim cannot be achieved at present except as “the first ploughing of a field,” as Dr. Sheldon puts it. For this reason it is deplorable that, in common with other recent investigators, he has not found it possible to emancipate himself from the use of the term “normal.” It is absurd that in a survey which represents a beginning towards an effort to find the true standards of ageing, individuals should straightway be divided into normal, super-normal, and sub-normal for their age. The plea that this was done on common-sense grounds seems rather strange. Altogether such few conclusions and speculations as there are in this book are inclined to be expressions of what is commonly known as common sense. Our old friend “wear and tear” is also met with in the pages of this book. If authors dealing with old age would begin to pay tribute to their own ignorance by foregoing the use of such biologically meaningless metaphors they would help to clear the path for the acquisition of some real knowledge.

Such criticism, however, concerns only the analytic parts of this book, the main part of which is devoted to an orderly account of the facts which emerged from an investigation extending over two years, in the course of which the social pattern of the lives of a 1:30 random sample of the old people of Wolverhampton and the functioning of their minds and bodies were scrutinized and studied with the help of a detailed questionnaire. The medical part of the investigation had to be restricted to the taking of histories, but the limitations arising from this and other difficulties are clearly realized by the author, who has made allowance for them in presenting his results. The scope of the survey is far wider indeed. After giving an account of the physical state of the subjects concerned and of the main physical symptoms complained of by them, the author goes on to deal in a similar manner with their mental state, the social structure of their homes, and the problems arising from illness in these old people.

The author explodes some popular misconceptions and applies the corrective of exact recording to many vaguely held notions on the subject of old age. The main impression which he manages to convey is that old people are on the whole less handicapped than our clinical experience would tend to make us think. This book, packed with facts set down by a competent and sympathetic observer, should be read by gerontologists, social workers, and administrative planners alike. Theirs is the task of filling in the details the author has better fitted to do so after having studied this outline of the complete physical and social status of a typical sample of old people.

F. A. E. Crew.


This admirably compact and up-to-date account of the health services—preventive and curative, statutory and voluntary—of England and Wales was awarded the Joseph Rogers Prize in 1946 by the Society of Apothecaries. The author deals with the mechanisms available for the treatment of the sick, the existing environmental and personal services for the preservation of health, and the scope of economic and social legislation relating to this subject. These are matters which are necessarily of interest and importance to the student of social medicine.

F. A. E. Crew.