CAREERS IN MEDICINE


'Of the making of books there is no end,' and to this ancient truism the critic of today might well add that no small proportion of them are superfluous. This welcome volume is indeed a notable exception. We can think of no subject on which the need for concise and reliable information is greater, and we congratulate Dr. Williams on what we regard as a most successful effort to supply this need. The ignorance of the non-medical public on the most elementary details of a doctor's work has always astonished us, and indeed it is only too often that the adolescent who has decided to enter on a medical career makes his choice, from whatever reasons, without any adequate conception of what really lies before him. The Editor has emphasized this in his preface, adding an implicit criticism of school, university and hospital authorities for their failure to give that guidance which their pupils may, not unreasonably, expect of them. The justice of this comment is adumbrated by Dr. Brinton's observation in his foreword that 'any man or woman who can wisely determine how best his qualities may be made to serve his fellows, and how least his defects may incommode them, is still assured a lifetime of happiness in Medicine.'

The book consists of over 50 short articles, all of them by authors of the highest standing, and eminent in the fields of knowledge with which they are concerned. The reviewer has been impressed by the fact that, despite the immense variety of the subjects dealt with and the difficulty which an editor must have had in correlating them in one volume of moderate size, there runs throughout the book an unmistakable unity of purpose, as if all the writers had been inspired by a common idea to give the student a full and impartial account of the possibilities before him, so that his choice for the future should at least not suffer from lack of all the guidance which the experience and judgment of his teachers could afford him.

No textbook in any subject can be a substitute for practical experience; in Medicine, as in other walks of life, the old adage solvitur ambulando still holds good. None the less, the student does need a manual, and the information and advice given in this volume are far fuller and more practical than those in any other written guide with which we are acquainted.

The writers deal with those aspects of their subjects which have the greatest importance to their readers, viz., the nature of the particular work and its suitability for the individual proposing to undertake it; the details of the duties as they correlate with the individual's general situation, his interests, temperament, family situation, hobbies, etc., also (and this is indeed important), the financial prospects of the particular career in question. It is made perfectly clear throughout that attainment of the highest positions in Medicine involves the holding of many junior posts after qualification, and an overall expenditure of time and energy greatly exceeding that which might have been considered adequate in the more spacious days before the world wars. Practically all the writers insist on the advantage of a good training in general medicine before embarkation on any special subject, a warning which today is more than ever necessary.
Among so many articles, all of which are so well written it would seem invidious and perhaps unfair to attempt to make comparisons, but the reviewer cannot refrain from special mention of the following. Sir Henry Cohen’s observations are conspicuous for the comprehensiveness of view and clarity of expression which characterize all his lectures; his contribution on General Medicine is, in many ways, a key to the book as a whole. Sir Arthur Porritt’s refreshing chapter on General Surgery is undoubtedly one of the best for its facts and its philosophy. Dr. Dobbs’s remarks on Paediatrics are especially delightful for their insight and commonsense appreciation of the qualities essential for a good children’s doctor. Dr. Barber’s advice on General Practice should be read by everyone, whatever his or her special leanings; he gives an extremely fair, broad description, if a little over optimistic, perhaps, of the present day position.

In addition to the sections on the varieties of the clinical curriculum, there are excellent chapters on the pre-clinical subjects and their possibilities as a whole-time career. There is also a fund of information on Legal Medicine, Social and Preventive Medicine, Medicine in the Services, and several appendices giving necessary details of the regulations for postgraduate diplomas, scales of pay in various departments and a useful commentary on the working of the National Health Service.

Here and there are many delightful obiter dicta which add to the enjoyment which the intelligent reader will derive from a perusal of this really good and much needed book. Not only is it a guide to the student on the threshold of a medical career, it should be in the possession of every headmaster of a large school who has any true sense of his vocation.

We have only one minor criticism. In our view future editions of this work will gain much by the addition of a good index.

Maurice Davidson.

THE SCIENTIFIC PAPER

It is stated in the preface that this book is intended to meet the practical needs of students and research workers preparing scientific papers. The author has endeavoured, in just over 150 small pages, to cover every aspect of the subject. He starts by giving advice on the choice of a research problem and includes such diverse subjects as the use of the library in scientific work, statistical methods, syntax, and the writing of English, botanical and zoological nomenclature, abbreviations of the names of scientific periodicals, proof reading and, perhaps most remarkable of all, he includes a section on photography which even gives advice about the choice of different makes and types of lenses. All these articles are of necessity extremely short and in consequence the majority are of limited value. For example, the section on statistical methods is practically confined to a very brief consideration of Fisher’s test. The book also is loaded with self-evident statements. It would, for instance, be difficult to imagine a group of readers who would find the following observation of any real help:

‘In choosing a research problem, special knowledge of a particular field of science is indispensable’ (page 1).

However, in spite of its many drawbacks, the book does contain quite a lot of information which should be of value to a student writing his first scientific paper.

A TEXTBOOK ON THE NURSING AND DISEASES OF SICK CHILDREN FOR NURSES

A new edition of a well proven textbook is always welcome. This is a book essentially for those nursing sick children but the amount of ground covered briefly but adequately makes it of value to student and practitioner.

The contents are well set out, illustrated and make easy reading. There have been new chapters added on bacteriology, plastic and thoracic surgery. Many other chapters have been completely revised and brought up to date, notably the sections on anaesthetics and drugs. Orthopaedics have been treated very fully and the drawings are most helpful. Dietetics and infant feeding are easily understood and the recipes are written with an eye to present day restrictions. This makes the nurse’s task of instructing parents on feeding problems much simpler.

This book is not intended to be an exhaustive reference volume. No mention however has been made of the management of balances carried out to aid diagnosis and judge progress in such cases as coeliac disease and nephro-calcinosis. The latter together with other metabolic disturbances have been completely omitted from the text. The section on congenital disease of the heart would have benefited by more detail, and fibro-cystic disease of the pancreas has been dealt with in three lines!
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