

Book Reviews

FRANCIS HITCHING, *Earth magic*, London, Cassell, 1976, 8vo, pp. xiv, 196, illus., £4.50.

For centuries the stone circles, barrows, dolmens and hill "forts" that are found in Northern Europe and Britain have attracted continual attention and bitter controversy. They mostly date from the fifth to second centuries B.C. and many of them have been shown to have acted as calendars and prognosticators of astronomical events.

Mr. Hitching, an amateur archaeologist, presents an excellent survey of the theories that have been put forward to explain the paradox of a primitive people indulging in advanced technology that called for immense labour and infinite precision. A pattern seems to emerge from the location of megalithic sites, for straight lines can be drawn through several of them, and it is contended that the end result was a kind of power-grid emitting "stone force" detectable by dowsers and perhaps related to extra-terrestrial contacts. The central question of the book is, therefore, "Is there an earth magic or hidden force known by our ancestors but not by us?"

Although many will be sceptical of the theories here promulgated, there nevertheless remains a fascinating enigma. Perhaps a parallel survey of contemporary folk-lore and medicine with the idea of earth magic in mind would be illuminating, although the sources for this will be scanty, unreliable and mostly undateable.

A. LANDBOROUGH THOMSON, *Half a century of medical research*, volume 2, *The programme of the Medical Research Council (U.K.)*, London, H.M.S.O., 1975, 8vo, pp. xii, 402, illus., £10.00.

Whereas the first volume of this excellent survey traced the origins of the Medical Research Council, the second describes its activities during the first fifty years of its existence. During this period it has contributed to a very wide range of medical research and it is dealt with here in three sections: 'The general field', on curative and preventive medicine and basic medical science; 'Some special fields', including industrial and social medicine, tropical medicine, medicinal substances, biological standards and the Public Health Laboratory Service; 'War medicine', covering both world wars. As in the first volume, appendices provide useful reference data.

This record of British achievement is a remarkable one and it is related here in an engaging style by one who contributed importantly to the organization of the various projects. The two volumes can be warmly recommended to historians of the medical sciences, for they provide an excellent account of government-sponsored medical research, which demonstrates the value of such a system. It is inevitable that this volume should cost more than the first of 1973, but the more than doubled price seems excessive.

HARRY KEEN and JOHN JARRETT (editors), *Triumphs of medicine*, London, P. Elek, 1976, fo., pp. 193, illus., £12.50.

The editors' aims are to point out to the layman the major achievements in medical science, including treatment, understanding of disease, diagnosis, and preventive medicine. To fulfil them they have enlisted the services of seventeen "internationally eminent specialists", who discuss broad topics such as 'The conquest of infection', 'The body's chemistry', 'Breathing and health', 'Brain, mind and nervous system',