

### Book Reviews

Latin with a translation into German. There are annotations and a name index. During the five years since the first two volumes were published, Burmeister has discovered additional biographical data and this he reports in the introduction.

By means of these letters we can learn a lot about Gasser, about his correspondents and about contemporary events. Some have no medical or scientific interest but those to and from Vesalius (1557) discussing technical matters are of special interest, although they are both in English (C.D. O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels 1514–1564*, Berkeley, 1964, pp. 406–407 and 395–396), a fact to which Burmeister does not refer. Gasser's correspondence with Konrad Gessner (from 1554 to 1565) is also to be specially noticed.

As in his bio-bibliography, the author presents the data without comment and does not discuss Gasser's thoughts or those of contemporaries in the context of the times. Nevertheless he makes a scholarly contribution to the Renaissance studies in general and to medicine of the sixteenth century in particular. Others will be able to use this impeccable material in wider-ranging surveys of Renaissance medicine and science.

**BASIL CLARKE**, *Mental disorders in earlier Britain. Exploratory studies*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. xii, 335, illus., £10.

In this book the author discusses the conceptualization, the status, the form and the treatment of mental disease from the Romano-British period to the seventeenth century. It is by no means a complete survey, owing to the small amount of work that has been carried out on the available historical materials by historians, and this explains the paucity of reliable data and interpretations. Dr. Clarke considers his work to be but an introduction to the future research that is urgently needed.

He begins by comparing earlier British attitudes towards mental disorder and ideas of treatment with those in present-day societies, thus employing the same technique as used when modern primitive medicine is equated with palaeo-medicine. By this method he achieves a broader context in terms of social philosophy and place, and this balances the specific detail that constitutes the ensuing chapters. Mental disorder in the Celtic societies of Britain and among the Anglo-Saxons is dealt with, but information here is mostly insufficient and unreliable. Nevertheless mental disorder in its setting can be discussed at some length, with reference to legal implications, environmental problems, popular concepts and hospital facilities. Medieval medicine and mental illness, with reference to the opinions of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Bernard de Gordon, John of Gaddesden, John Mirfield and John Arderne, are next dealt with, followed by a chapter on 'Popular containment of mental disorder'.

After these more general discussions, the author describes individual cases of mental disease, for example, a twelfth- and a late fifteenth-century series reported by patients at shrines in London. For the medical reader these are of especial interest, as are the cases of Henry VI who had a psychotic illness, and of his grandfather Charles VI of France. Changes in opinion concerning mental disease began in the early sixteenth century and continued into the next, due to a decline in the influence of Greek medical theory as enunciated by Galen and the beginnings of the Scientific Revolution. However, popular concepts, customs, cults and beliefs altered little. Dr. Clarke surveys

### Book Reviews

many of the books on medicine published at this time, dealing particularly with their advice on the handling of psychiatric disease. The practitioners, many of them para-medical or empirics and quacks, are considered, with some of the therapeutic procedures detailed. Exorcism is of particular interest in view of the recent attention being paid to this type of therapy. In the seventeenth century new formulations of some mental conditions were being made, but again the background of possession, religious enthusiasms and witchcraft was still very much in evidence. As a concluding case to this period the author selects the terminal illness of Charles II.

This book's topic is one of incredible complexity and Dr. Clarke has done very well in his presentation of it. His text is fully annotated throughout, and most of the illustrations he provides are unique. He has carried out extensive research, although on occasions he has accepted opinions from secondary sources rather too uncritically. Nevertheless, on the whole, he has made a substantial contribution to the early history of mental disease in Britain. It is certainly more than the prolegomena that he modestly claims it to be, and it stands out as a work of scholarship when contrasted with some of the less successful efforts of others. It is to be hoped that he will continue his researches in this much underpopulated field.

NORMAN COHN, *Europe's inner demons. An enquiry inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*, Chatto-Heinemann for Sussex University Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. xvi, 302, illus., £4.50.

At the University of Sussex, the Columbus Centre (previously the Centre for Research in Collective Psychopathology) is devoted to studying the dynamics of persecution and extermination. Both present-day and historical examples have been investigated, and Professor Cohn's book is his contribution to the Centre's publication series, of which he is the Editor.

In a scholarly, provocative, and stimulating work, his objective is to reveal the origins of the stereotype of the European witch from the second century A.D. to the fifteenth century, when it became fully formed. He is not concerned with the resultant epidemics of witch-hunting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The stereotype was made up of several components, but to identify them and to dissect them out is a challenge to the most competent researcher. In addition to historical data dealing with ideas, material deriving from psychology, social anthropology, and from the sociology and social psychology of persecution must be handled. A prominent ingredient was a fantasy originating in Antiquity and preserved in a literary tradition, which maintained that there existed in any society a group of wicked dissidents who practised inhuman rites. The idea was handed down mainly by theological transits and involved Christians, medieval heretical sects, and groups such as the Knights Templars of the fourteenth century, although the author can demonstrate here that accusations were baseless. He also traces the origin of the witches' "sabbat" and shows that, despite nineteenth-century and modern scholars, witchcraft was not an organized activity, that "covens" did not exist, nor was it a vestigial remnant of an ancient pagan religion. Additional factors such as upper-class ritual or ceremonial magic, peasant dream experiences, and village hatreds and jealousies were also potent components of the witch stereotype and responsible for the witch-hunts.