

## Book Reviews

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*The History and Philosophy of Knowledge of the Brain and its Functions.* Edited by F. N. L. POYNTER. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1958; pp. 224. Illustrated. 30s.

The papers in this volume were presented at an Anglo-American symposium, planned as an historical introduction to the First International Congress of Neurological Sciences. They are almost all of the highest quality, as one would expect from the list of contributors, which includes such men as Penfield, Lewis, Brain, McIlwain, le Gros Clark and Walshe. In the first session concepts of mind and brain in classical and non-Western antiquity are discussed. The limitations of good clinical observations, e.g. those of Hippocrates, unsupported by anatomical knowledge and related to untestable speculations, are pointed out. The second session considered old and new concepts of consciousness and the origin of language. The third session was devoted to mediaeval, Cartesian, and seventeenth-century ideas and observations, and the final two sessions discussed aspects of nineteenth-century and contemporary theory.

The dependence of neuro-anatomy on advances in technique emerges clearly. Dr. Woollam, e.g., points out that modern anatomical ideas are based on the study of the brain preserved in formalin. Unless it is fixed and hardened, the brain resembles an amorphous gruel of which one of the few distinguishing features is that it possesses cavities. Hence for nearly two thousand years the meninges and ventricular cavities were considered of the first importance. It is repeatedly shown that theories of brain function at any period depend both on anatomical knowledge and on current philosophical preconceptions. Dr. Veith's account of Oriental theories gives a beautiful example of this. She shows that in Tibetan speculations on consciousness the brain was ignored, both because surgery and dissection were considered an infringement of the sacredness of the body, and because of the belief that man is composed of the same elements, and functions according to the same principles, as the universe. Hence to understand him it is necessary to study the cosmic forces, not the body.

The symposium includes illuminating accounts of little-known theorists, e.g. Professor Lewis's paper on Reil, as well as more general historical surveys. It should prove a valuable storehouse of evidence and ideas for anyone interested in the development of scientific theory.

*A History of Neurology.* WALTHER RIESE. New York: M.D. Publications, Inc., 1959; pp. 223. \$4.00.

There exists a direct relationship between the difficulties of historiography and the complexities of the subject being considered. Thus a survey of the progression of ideas concerning the skin, the liver or other relatively simple anatomical structures is not a very exacting labour. But he who deals similarly with the nervous system, which is still mostly a mystery, finds himself not only in poorly charted terrain, but, in addition, he is encompassed by the thickets of philosophy and the morasses of psychology. Furthermore, as Dr. F. Martí-Ibáñez points out in the foreword to this book, the history of neurology, unlike that of other specialties, has been complicated