

REVIEWS

A History of Tropical Medicine. By H. Harold Scott. (Edward Arnold & Co., London), 1939. Royal 8vo. Pp. xiv + 1119 with 13 plates. Two volumes. Price 50sh.

A History of Tropical Medicine by H. H. Scott, is one of those monumental works which every medical college library and some of the private libraries ought to possess. When Dr. Scott, with his unparalleled facilities and wide knowledge, takes the responsibility to write a book on this subject, the medical public and also the general reading public naturally expect the work to be both comprehensive and authoritative. Even if all these considerations failed to raise great expectations, the mention of the additional fact that the book is based on Fitz-Patrick lectures delivered before the Royal College of Physicians, London, in 1937-38, lends it the seal and dignity of that ancient and learned body and ensures almost universal and instantaneous acclamation.

In a short preface, the author records his mingled feelings of pride and diffidence with which he received an invitation to deliver Fitz-Patrick lectures. He remembered "with trembling solicitude, the high level and excellence of the lectures of his predecessors in office". "With what joy, what interest, what wonder we read, nearly a quarter of a century ago, Rivers's 'Medicine, Magic and Religion'; how we marvelled at the erudition and research displayed by Sir Clifford Allbutt in 'Greek Medicine in Rome'; Raymond Crawford's 'Pestilence and Plague in Arts and Literature' and there are many others. We long to emulate these monuments of industry, these works which, if nothing else of their remained, would suffice to keep green the memories of their authors and we draw back afraid. In every truth, there were giants in those days." He had no difficulty in the choice of the subject. But he trembled at the magnitude of the task before him. "Here and there, scattered in medical works dealing with diseases in the tropics, we find a few notes on the history of these diseases but, speaking in any sense other than the narrowest, there is no history of the rise

and development of tropical medicine. In the case of the so-called Tropical Medicine, the difficulty has been the greater because, it has necessitated tracing back, in some instances, to times of savagery, the earliest available records and to legends prior to record. In others, the first traces had to be sought in articles, in books, in references in foreign languages, works attainable with much difficulty and often only in garbled or mutilated copies, the originals of which had been lost." The author then refers to another difficulty, namely, that we have no definition of the term 'Tropical Medicine'.

Having mentioned the preliminary difficulties, he proceeds to explain his aim in the lectures (the basis of the book), "It is not our aim to give a history of diseases of warm climates but a history of tropical medicine in the generally accepted connotation of the term. The former—history of diseases in warm climates—would necessitate going over ground already well covered, discussion of malaria, plague and perhaps other diseases from the dawn of history, but the latter, the subject of these lectures is the history, that is, the rise and development of tropical medicine. Its starting point can only be that time when reason began to throw its light upon and illumine the darkness of empiricism, when people began to theorise regarding causation of disease, to consider the problems scientifically and that rarely takes us back more than hundred to a hundred and fifty years give due meed of praise to Captain Cook for preserving his crews from scurvy, will in no way detract honour from the work of Lind. In an analogous way, army medical officers saw much of tropical diseases in expeditions abroad in India and in Colonies and some of them wrote many painstaking works on the barracks, on food, on the care of the soldiers' health, apart from the learned disquisitions on the diseases they encountered." . . . "In the course of this study, we shall take occasion to note the reciprocal effects of history and large movements and engineering undertakings on the one hand, and tropical diseases on the other, the medical aspects of the difficulties of construction of the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal and how they were