

An intriguing feature, or one possibly irritating to some readers, is the way in which he uses his characters' ideas as a springboard for his own philosophical and statistical digressions. These digressions constitute a considerable part of the book and they are often most interesting in themselves, although they only occasionally add to the understanding of the person to whom they are supposed to refer.

The choice and use of quotations is excellent. They are not only well chosen for their context, but they are sufficiently long to give the feeling of the writers' ideas and of their style.

This is a book that would be of interest primarily to those who already knew these pioneers of public health, but to those who do not it might be a stimulus to read more about them.

Sanford V. Larkey, M.D.

STEUER, ROBERT O. *Aetiological Principle of Pyaemia in Ancient Egyptian Medicine*. 36 pp. (Supplements to the Bulletin of the History of Medicine, No. 10.) Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1948. \$1.50.

To one who is not familiar with the methods used in the study of Egyptian hieroglyphics this paper is, in many places, rather difficult to follow. It is essentially a piece of etymological research, and was first presented as a brief paper at a meeting of the American Oriental Society. However, if the medical historian can find his way through the hieroglyphics, he will arrive at some very interesting material concerning early Egyptian ideas relating to the etiology of suppurative processes. Any critical evaluation of the accuracy of the scholarship in the field of hieroglyphics is entirely outside the scope of this reviewer. The only comment we can make on this subject is that the author acknowledges the interest and suggestions of several Egyptologists associated with the leading centers of Oriental studies in this country.

This paper is a study of the meaning of *wḥdw*, as used in the ancient Egyptian medical papyri. (The only hint that we could find for the pronunciation of this transliteration was the German word *Uchedu*.) The author arrives at the conclusion that *wḥdw* represents an agent of decay associated with the feces, which might rise from the intestinal tract through the blood vessels, and thus set up purulent abscesses in other parts of the body. The study was undertaken because the author was dissatisfied with the currently accepted translation of *wḥdw* as "pains".

In section V the author enlarges upon the relationship between *wḥdw* and the processes of embalming, which was mentioned in the study of "Aa 2". The material is drawn from literary papyri of the 12th

Dynasty (roughly 2000-1800 B.C.) and the contemporary Kahun Medical Papyrus. The Egyptians apparently conceived of *wḥdw* as a destroying agent which acted upon the blood during life, and upon the corpse after death. This action can be prevented by appropriate therapy during life, and by mummification of the corpse. The close relation between putrefaction and suppuration is indicated by several facts. For example, papyri relating to the treatment of *wḥdw* diseases were found beneath the statue of Anubis, the god of embalming. Also the old symbol for "mummy cloth" is later used to indicate bandages, and the term "embalm" later comes to mean treatment.

In the last section, there are more examples of the association of *wḥdw* with blood, showing that the Egyptians reached a concept of pyemia, i. e. pus in the blood (used in the pre-bacteriological sense, of course). Incision of abscesses was apparently performed for the purpose of eliminating blood contaminated with *wḥdw*, before blood coagulation, or thickening, could develop. The importance of removing all of the pus is emphasized.

In conclusion, the author points out that the Egyptian idea of *wḥdw* is broader than the modern "septicemia", since it applied also to the dead body, thus it "transcends the concept of a strictly aetiological term". However, to the modern bacteriologist, this might not seem to be such a significant difference, since both processes are the result of the action of living micro-organisms. The author points out several fields for further investigation, particularly the influence of Egyptian ideas on Greek medicine, and even on the comparatively recent (but pre-bacteriological) association of putrefaction and suppuration. As an example of the latter, he mentions the association of putrefaction and puerperal fever in the 19th century. Presumably, he refers to the work of Semmelweiss. However, it would seem that any influence of Egyptian ideas over such an extended period of time would be rather difficult to prove. The basic similarity of putrefaction and pus formation must be an idea that would occur easily and spontaneously to isolated groups of people, because of the similarity of odors and of consistency in the two processes.

This publication ends with two appendices: A, a short review of certain Aristotelian concepts of blood and its coagulation, and B, a description and translation of the unpublished stele of Nefer-Yu, which contains a rare form of hieroglyph important in tracing the development of "Aa 2".

This paper is important as an indication that the Egyptians, 2000 years B. C., may have attained to a rational theory of the cause of at least one group of diseases, an unusual achievement for that early period. If the etymological deductions are correct, this is another bit of that evidence which is gradually accumulating to show that the Edwin Smith Surgical

Papyrus is not the only scientific medical writing from ancient Egypt. It is easy to understand why ancient man could treat surgical conditions more rationally than medical conditions. The cause of injury by an arrowhead or a wild animal is easy to see. On the other hand, the cause of an infectious disease is invisible, so the spirits must be involved. Perhaps the reason why suppuration was one of the first infections to be treated rationally lay in its close relationship to surgery: the development of pus in wounds, and the application of surgical methods to the draining of abscesses.

Grace C. Kimball, PhD

POWELL, LAWRENCE CLARK. The chief librarian: bookman or administrator. *Stechert-Hafner Book News*. v.3, no. 2. Oct. 15, 1948, p 1-2

The question of which attribute is more important to the successful librarian—a love of books or administrative ability—is indeed a controversial one. And both sides of the issue have been strongly defended in library literature by different authorities in the field. Dr. Powell belongs to the school of thought which believes a passion for books, or *bibliomania*, properly disciplined, is the greatest single asset a librarian can have.

Those who have disagreed with him on this point have argued that librarians who are merely bookmen have retarded the development of their libraries as institutions. They have accumulated extensive collections of books, but they have failed to secure well-trained and well-paid staffs to ensure the proper listing and servicing of the hoarded treasure. If a choice has to be made between a librarian who is an administrator and one who is a bookman, this group believes the library will benefit most from the choice of the first. For the good administrator will recognize the importance of books and will see that his staff includes one or more bookmen-librarians.

Dr. Powell, on the other hand, is not convinced that the administrator always recognizes his own bookish deficiency and makes certain that his staff includes some expert bookmen. Like attracts like, he says, and the atmosphere and ambience of a library are unconsciously and inevitably conditioned by the man at the head. If he is a leader, he will lead the library in the direction to which his compass points. The British Museum Library and the Library of Congress are in great measure what they are today because of two extraordinary leaders—Panizzi and Putnam.

The librarian who regards administration as the *summum bonum* will ordinarily not attract or hold bookmen of the highest worth. They will prefer to work in a place where their own ancient language is spoken and not in a library where such servants as cost-accounting and statistical analysis are enthroned at the chief's right and left.