

Boeke/Books

Portrait of Don Craib

In Search of Truth – A Portrait of Don Craib: By E.B. Adams Pp. xi + 123. Illustrated. London and New York: Royal Society of Medicine Services. 1990.

I found the task of reviewing this book delightful because of the excellence of its presentation by Professor E. Barry Adams, who states in his preface: 'Wherever possible, his story is told in his (Craib's) own words in the pages that follow.' And so I thought that the most illuminating way to present the review is to quote the words of Barry Adams and the words of Don Craib.

This interesting book describes the life and times of Professor William Hofmeyr Craib, generally known as Don Craib. In his preface to the book, Barry Adams writes:

'The fabric of this book is woven around the life of a man of outstanding gifts. Not the least of these were the clarity of his mind and the warmth of his personality. Of Scottish Craib and Afrikaner Hofmeyr, he was born in the small Karoo town of Somerset East in Cape colonial days, and died there 86 years later (in 1982). Despite his given names, William Hofmeyr, all his life he was affectionately known as Don or Donal. Clear of mind though infirm of body, when death came he was greatly revered at home and abroad for his contributions to medicine, and much loved by a wide circle of family and friends. He was delightful to meet for his friendship, his wit and his scintillating conversation . . . he was a man of many parts and his story is worth telling.'

The title of this book reflects Don Craib's philosophy. Adams writes:

'This pen picture attempts to portray Don Craib the man. It is not a biography, for including the more conventional details of a full biography would have detracted from the aims the author had in mind when he set out on his task. The goal was to depict this fascinating, deeply thinking yet fun-loving man for others to enjoy and perhaps be intrigued by; and at the same time to relate him to the times in which he lived.'

The range of Barry Adams' book is reflected in the headings of its eleven chapters. They are: Gardiol, Craib at war; Cambridge and Guy's; Craib's doublet hypothesis; Craib with Lewis at University College Hospital; Craib at Wits; Consultant physician; Research administrator; Craib's jottings and letter writing; Craib – the man; Vindication.

Don Craib grew up at Gardiol, the family farm near Somerset East. Adams records that: 'It was in his childhood at Gardiol that Craib began to challenge the things about him with a clarity of mind which became his most outstanding attribute.'

In one of his interviews with Barry Adams in the early 80s, Craib recalled his concept of the meaning of the word 'truth', saying:

'I began to be very worried about truth; and I left school with a fixed idea in my mind that truth is in no way different from fact, reality, event. As soon as a person made a statement that did not agree with or was not consistent with fact, reality, event, it was not truth. And I found by the time I matriculated that there was never argument when there was discussion of fact, reality, event. Argument always started when opinions were expressed, when hypotheses were put forward, explanations given, guesses made.'

'I formed a fixed idea at the time that truth is self-evident. Truth does not depend upon the mind of man for its establishment or for its abolition. You cannot produce truth with words. Truth is independent of man's brain. I left school with this fixed in my mind and I said I will never again tell a lie – I will stick to the facts, realities, events as closely as I can. And to tell the truth to me then meant, not an opinion, not an authoritative statement, but something in keeping with the environment around me.'

Barry Adams comments on this statement:

'These, of course, are memories of Craib's thinking processes recalled 70 years later. It may well be that he had not formulated them so clearly in his youth. Nevertheless, they may be described as the credo upon which much of his subsequent intellectual life was based, as will be seen.'

Craib was taught at Gill College in Somerset East at a time when several schools in South Africa offered university courses towards a degree at the University of the Cape of Good Hope. Barry Adams records that:

'Don early showed his intellectual calibre by coming first in the Cape matriculation examination in 1911 and, in 1914, gaining

honours when he graduated B.A. in the South African College (now the University of Cape Town). His majors were mathematics, applied mathematics and physics; his original intention was to become an engineer.'

In the First World War, Don Craib was in South West Africa with the South African forces and in France with the British forces. He seldom spoke of his military honours, but he served as a trench mortar officer in the Divisional Artillery of the famous 29th Division of the British Expeditionary Force. He distinguished himself in the British Army, being twice mentioned in despatches and being awarded the Military Cross and Bar. Barry records that as:

'A seasoned soldier and intellectually mature, he went up to Cambridge when peace came, later qualifying in medicine from Guy's Hospital in London . . . By the time he was a registrar in the medical wards at Guy's he had clearly impressed the consultant staff; and it is probable that nobody was surprised when he was awarded a coveted Rockefeller Fellowship to Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore. Here he carried out his now-famous experiments on isolated animal heart muscle. From these he formulated his doublet hypothesis. Though brilliant in its simplicity and logic, his work brought him into confrontation with acknowledged leaders in the field. After Baltimore, he went back to London, continuing his researches in electrophysiology under Sir Thomas Lewis. His incisive thinking and unassailable logic led to clashes with authority, in particular with Einthoven, the great Dutch researcher who was doyen of all European workers in electrocardiology; Lord Adrian, Professor of Physiology at Cambridge; and even Lewis, whom he greatly admired.'

'His doublet hypothesis apparently rejected, . . . he turned down several attractive offers of academic or research posts away from Lewis's laboratories at University College Hospital, determined to return to South Africa and abandon his ambition to spend his life in electrophysiological research. So 1931 saw him back home in Somerset East, newly married to Doris Vevers, a young woman of great charm and a cellist of considerable ability whom he had met in London and who was to share the rest of his life with him.'

Introducing the chapter on 'Craib at Wits', Barry writes:

'Don Craib spent 15 years in Johannesburg as Professor of Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand (1932 – 1947). When he went there the university was a young institution having its teething troubles; now, over 50 years later, it is highly regarded in the English-speaking world for its scholarship and its research achievements. Craib was to play a significant part in this transformation. Soon after his arrival, he developed a burning ambition to lift the medical school to world prominence. But he was well ahead of his time and frequently frustrated. Nevertheless, with minimal staff to assist him and no research facilities, he stimulated students and his younger colleagues by his penetrating questions and his lucid thinking at the bedside, establishing himself as a dominant figure in South African clinical medicine. And he gave the university an insight into what it could become.'

Continuing his account of 'Craib at Wits' Adams records:

'At the outbreak of war in 1939 he was clearly eager to serve as a combatant; an unlikely role since it was now 25 years since the young science graduate had left Cape Town on the start of an odyssey which, as we have seen, took him to German South-West Africa and to France, and which was to bring him such military distinction. He was now an experienced consultant physician and this time his involvement was understandably quite different.'

'"Once again", he wrote, "I offered my services to the Artillery, my first love, but was gently but firmly turned down on grounds of age (44 years). A non-combatant niche in the framework of (the) South African war contribution seemed inevitable, and it was not long (before) Professor Innes Brebner of Surgery and I, (his opposite number in Medicine), were appointed as Consultants in Surgery and Medicine respectively to the South African forces in the field.'

'"We very nearly succeeded in having ourselves posted "up North", as the Middle East used to be named, but General Smuts intervened and ruled that the Medical School could not be further denuded of senior staff, and that we part-time clinical professors should remain in the Union, our military service being confined to part-time duties with the rank of colonel . . .

'"Our duties were mainly advisory, administrative, clinical consultant and humdrum to a degree. We did visit base hospitals in Egypt and Italy for very brief periods during the war."

Adams relates in detail the circumstances that led to the resignation of the three clinical professors from the university in 1947. All

three professors, Craib (medicine), Brebner (surgery) and Black (obstetrics and gynaecology), had strongly favoured the creation of fulltime chairs in the clinical departments.

After leaving the University, Don Craib practised as a consultant physician in Port Elizabeth. Before long he was 'as busy as I could possibly be'.

In the 60s, Don Craib retired to his farm, Gardiol, and had been living there for 3 years when he received an urgent request from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in Pretoria for help. Initially appointed for 3 - 6 months as an associate medical adviser to the President, his appointment was extended and he became Vice-President of the Council. In recording this development, Adams writes as follows:

'And so, for almost 5 years, aged 68 - 73 years, having returned eagerly to what was once his consuming drive to search for truth, he worked again in the field of medical research. These, he told the author, were the happiest days of his life.'

In his chapter on 'Craib's jottings and letter-writing', Adams describes him as a prodigious letter writer. Fortunately, he often kept drafts or photocopies of letters he had sent off, as well as the replies he received. Referring to Craib as a habitual jotter, Adams provides fascinating, and interesting excerpts from his writings.

Introducing an example of his correspondence with colleagues, Adams records:

'Don Craib sometimes had long philosophical discussions with his correspondents. It might be said that he was a self-taught philosopher. The professionals would no doubt say that he was very much the amateur. Be that as it may, his thinking in this area is worth looking at.'

'Over the years, Craib kept up a correspondence with James Schabort, a contemporary of his from Johannesburg who was a consultant gynaecologist. Already aged 85 years, Craib had sent his Thesis on Truth for comment. This opened up several other areas of discussion. A letter to Schabort dated 1.9.81 set out Don's views on time and space. His brain, he wrote "cannot cope with the concept of a future time or a present time" because "the present time represents a period between future and past . . . and the duration of present time is so infinitesimally brief that it really doesn't exist - for no sooner does time come into existence than it is already past . . . The future is not only unpredictable for me, it actually doesn't exist in any objective form capable of being perceived via an appropriate sense organ." Space, he said "has no beginning and no end. There is no region in the Universe where space does not exist. There is no such thing as a vacuum if vacuum means a region where there is nothing at all, for it is not possible to get rid of space, and space is an objective something . . . My basic trouble is that I can define nothing that I cannot personally 'perceive' through my sensory system.'

In the Chapter, 'Vindication', Barry Adams analyses the manner in which cardiologists all over the world from the 40s and onwards changed their views about the validity of Craib's research on action currents emanating from isolated cardiac muscle. Strong support for Craib's original hypothesis came from the Mexican cardiologist, Dr D. Sodi-Pallares; the American cardiologist Raymond Pruitt; European cardiologist Professor D. Durrer and the distinguished Wits graduate Professor Leo Schamroth. Barry Adams records some of the honours bestowed upon Don Craib:

'Perhaps most valued of all was his election in 1977 to the Johns Hopkins Society of Scholars. The citation at the Commemoration Day ceremony when the honour was bestowed included the statement that "it was during his years in Baltimore and London that Dr Craib made exciting discoveries about the fundamental origins of electrical signals in the human heart, and from these developed his original work on the electrocardiogram. At first there was outright opposition to his theories, but he persistently maintained the validity of his experiments and his views ultimately prevailed."

In 1976 Don Craib was honoured at the 7th European Congress of Cardiology in Amsterdam, which met under the Presidency of Professor D. Durrer. Adams recalls that when Professor D. Durrer made the award, he described how he had followed and supported Don Craib's work after he had read Don's publications in *Heart* in 1927 and in a British Medical Research Council monograph in 1930.

In the 'Vindication' Adams notes that:

It is also worth adding that before the congress in Amsterdam, three South African universities, Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Natal, recognised this outstanding man by conferring honorary doctorates on him, and the South African College of Medicine made him an Honorary Fellow.'

Adams records that later Craib received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Stellenbosch, Port Elizabeth and Rhodes, Grahamstown.

Barry Adams has achieved his objectives in this superb book, which will be treasured by those who acquire it and keep it in their fami-

lies because it is Africana. The word Africana is used advisedly, because those of us who were privileged to work with Don Craib knew how he scrutinised the meaning of words we used in discussions or in correspondence with him. This Craib tradition is set out with great understanding, sensitivity and compassion. To ensure that the tradition be maintained, I asked the Librarian of the Killie Campbell Africana Library of the University of Natal to provide me with an outline of the meaning of the word Africana. Indeed, it can be applied to any work in the humanities and in the sciences that relates directly to Africa.

In this sense, this book is Africana, being an immaculate presentation of a great man of this century in Africa.

I. Gordon

Internal medicine

Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine. 12th ed. Ed. by J.D. Wilson, E. Braunwald, K.J. Isselbacher, *et al.* Pp. xxx + 2208. Illustrated. USA: McGraw-Hill. 1991.

A colleague, recently retired from a busy general practice, once confided in me that for a period of over 30 years he had referred to *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* several times a day. No wonder he was such an outstanding GP! *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine* has for 40 years been the major source of information to a vast number of practitioners in general and in specialist practice.

The 12th edition retains the well-known format and style, which have rightly made the previous editions so popular. As always, it is up to date. Important new areas dealt with include articles on the practice of medicine, clinical reasoning, cost-awareness in medicine and geriatric medicine. In addition, the 12th edition contains new or rewritten chapters on chills and fever, visual disturbances, assessment of patients with disorders of cognition, disorders of sleep and circadian rhythm, prevention of cardiovascular collapse and death, and management of the resuscitated patient. There are also new chapters of therapeutic applications of cardiac catheterisation, mechanical ventilatory support, endocrine tumors of the gastro-intestinal tract and pancreas, and breast cancer. As always there is a sound balance between disease manifestations, diagnostic procedures, differential diagnosis and treatment strategies on the one hand and physiology biochemistry and the impact of cellular and molecular biology on the understanding of diseases on the other.

The book contains up-to-date references to newer imaging techniques and their influence in diagnosis of the diseases of the cardiovascular, pulmonary, hepatobiliary and central nervous systems. *Harrison's* is a must for all those interested in keeping up to date with the rapidly expanding knowledge of internal medicine. Take once a day it will have an amazing rejuvenating effect at all ages without any GI or CNS side-effects.

R. Kirsch

HPV and cervical cancer

Human Papillomavirus and Cervical Cancer. Ed. by N. Munoz, F. X. Bosch and O. M. Jensen. Pp. xii + 155. Illustrated. France: International Agency for Research on Cancer. 1989.

This publication is a report of the multidisciplinary meeting held in Copenhagen in March 1988 under the auspices of the International Agency for Research on Cancer in Copenhagen. As such it is an excellent discussion on the main aims of this meeting which were: 'How to obtain better evidence on the epidemiological evidence for a link between human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer'.

All eight chapters are well written and easy to read, and summarise a great deal of the evidence available implicating the HPV link with cervical cancer. Of particular value is the chapter by J. M. Kaldor on 'Measurement error' in epidemiological studies of HPV and cancer, which points out the pitfalls in such epidemiological studies. Also of great value are the suggestions for future research into this very important topic, considering that it is the commonest cancer in women in the RSA.

Not unexpectedly, the most recent developments in virology and molecular biology, and in particular gene amplification by polymerase chain reaction, are not detailed but this may be explained by the recent emergence of this technique.

In summary, this small volume represents an excellent synopsis of the present state of knowledge on the aetiological role of the HPV in the causation of cervical cancer.

B. Bloch