

REVIEWS OF BOOKS: BOEKRESENSIES

HOSPITAL IN THE BUSH

Hospital in the Bush. By E. W. Doell. Pp. 216. 9 Illustrations. 18s. net. London: Christopher Johnson Publishers Ltd. 1957.

Contents: Introduction. A Disgruntled Doctor. Back in the Bush. A Site for a Hospital. Organization, Consolidation, Expansion. Friends and Enemies. Life in an African Village. Fellow Workers. Some Patients. The Year of the Plague. The Last Year at Thomba.

It is a well known fact that many authors attain dazzling heights with their first efforts but with subsequent work sink into obscurity. Fortunately, this cannot be said of the Cape Town born author, writing under the name of E. W. Doell.

In his book, 'Doctor Against Witch Doctor', he vividly described a stone wall of ignorance, with which, the modern medical man finds himself confronted, when he tries to bring the healing art to the uncivilized African. The story is continued, and in his usual crisp, clear style he chronicles the growth of a modern, up-to-date hospital, complete with water laid on from a nearby river, electricity and an X-ray plant—all a one man show.

The book not only appeals to the medical man, however. Geographically, the description of the virgin bush he had to penetrate, equals that in the travels of Livingstone. The book also contains much that is of interest to the hunter, farmer and humanitarian. The two lion stories are unique, especially where he relates the incident of the thirsty lion who enjoys a drop from the lorry radiator so much that he refuses to budge from under the vehicle, and the description of the ravages of an African drought and of the misery it entails, cannot be surpassed.

The narrative of the outbreak of plague is very vivid. Throughout the pages of this absorbing book there merges the character of the author—essentially and firstly a doctor, a true follower of Aesculapius, trying to live out the oath of Hippocrates. He is a practical idealist and philosopher and in the course of following in the footsteps of the great Healer who taught us to heal the sick and to preach the gospel, has developed the essential attribute, so sadly lacking in many present day institutions, namely tolerance.

Without stating it in so many words, however, the conclusion makes sad reading. A fine man has sacrificed his health in order to bring Christianity to the African. The White Man's medicine combated disease, reduced the death rate, relieved suffering, but it also introduced the so-called civilization.

Tracks to the hospital opened up a regular bus service, followed by a store and recruiting labour station, and this was followed by the so-called civilized Native who exploits his fellows in the kraal, and introduced those other 'blessings' namely, syphilis, tuberculosis, alcohol and, inevitably, dishonesty in order to get hold of the White Man's trappings. The flower of gratitude blooms but very seldom in the mission field, and the lost soul that is really saved, is a *rara avis*.

The author however optimistically takes a long view and refuses to be depressed, admitting all the same that it will still take a few generations to really civilize the aboriginal Native. On the whole, this is an exceptionally good book to read; it is on a par with, and in some parts better than, some of the works of other doctor-authors, such as Sutherland, Brett Young, Cronin etc. The hunter, pioneer, the public-health worker, the doctor and the missionary will all not only enjoy reading 'Hospital in the Bush',

but, will also learn a lot by doing so. Personally, the reviewer is looking forward to the next work by our colleague. W.P.S.

INJURIES OF THE HAND

Injuries of the Hand. By Ronald Furlong, F.R.C.S. Pp. vii + 215. 99 Illustrations. 36s. net. London: J. & A. Churchill Ltd. 1957.

Contents: Introduction. 1. Relevant Surgical Anatomy. 2. Technical Matters. 3. Injuries of the Skin. 4. Infections of the Hand. 5. Injuries to Tendons. 6. After-treatment and Complications of Reparative Tendon Surgery. 7. Injuries to Nerves of the Hand. 8. Post-traumatic Disabilities. Index.

Books devoted entirely to the surgery of the hand are appearing more and more commonly, largely because of the new interest which has been brought to the subject by the changing surgical concept of the hand. From being a rather complicated area of small and detailed anatomy with neat spaces and boundaries serving both to guide and limit the spread of infection, the hand today has a live functional surgical anatomy in which the flexion creases of the skin and the course of the digital nerves are as important as are the details of the synovial sheaths and their reflections.

This present volume attempts to present this newer concept in a practical and straightforward manner and succeeds in conveying to the reader that the surgical importance of the hand today lies in the preservation of its function. It makes no claim to cover the subject in its entirety and avoids all reference to the more complicated reconstructive procedure such as pollicisation of a digit or the construction of opposition digits. It is not intended for the specialist in hand surgery, but for the Casualty Officer or general practitioner who finds himself commonly faced with injuries of the hand.

The chapter devoted to infections of the hand, although claiming to present a more modern and functional approach to hand infections, is in fact the teaching of Kanavel, and this section could well have been reduced to devote space to an important aspect of hand injuries which is virtually not mentioned, viz. methods of splintage and especially those which are being used today for the re-establishment of joint mobility.

With the section on elective amputations, many surgeons will take issue. For example, amputations through the metacarpophalangeal joint are roundly condemned as being 'unsightly and undesirable because of the inevitable gap which remains between adjacent digits, so that the hand can never be used to contain small objects'. It is widely held by surgeons today, however, that finger amputations cannot be reduced to rules, but must be based on individual considerations. Finger amputations at cosmetic sites are best performed only if so requested by the patient after a period of trial, for whereas patients of a certain social status and occupation might desire cosmetic results above all else, there are many skilled workers to whom the small stump of a finger proves very important, while to a heavy labourer who requires a powerful grip, a broad hand is essential.

In general, however, the book adequately covers the immediate and late treatment of hand injuries and gives detailed instructions for the treatment of tendon, nerve and bone and joint injuries of the hand. Moreover, it is well written, clearly illustrated and pleasingly printed and presented. T.L.S.