

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Atrial Septal Defect.** By H. GÖSTA DAVIDSEN. (Pp. 225; 347 refs; 49 figs; 12 tables. D. kroner 50.00.) Copenhagen: Munksgaard. 1960.

Accurate information concerning the natural history of disease is as elusive as it is important, for without this knowledge rational treatment can hardly be said to exist. In attempting to set down the story of atrial septal defect Dr. Davidsen has clarified the background against which the treatment of this anomaly must be set. Although most of the 225 paper-backed pages are taken up with the minutiae of a thorough, careful and painstaking study of 15% of the atrial septal defects in Denmark, being a series of 132 patients seen at the Rigs-hospitalet, Copenhagen, considerable space is devoted to an analysis of the 190 autopsy reports in the literature. These latter records are admittedly unrepresentative, but they are unique, as they antedate the era of operative treatment and from them the author has extracted an amazing amount of information. In 68 of the 132 patients of Copenhagen the diagnosis of heart disease was made before the age of 7 years. The subject is presented well in eight chapters with excellent summaries of each. From the gravity of the late prognosis in atrial septal defect, the author concludes that there are sufficient grounds for attempting an improvement in the prognosis by surgical treatment. Such treatment should be carried out before irreversible changes have occurred in the pulmonary vessels and cardiac valves. The scope of the book excludes the technique or results of operative treatment. In a chapter devoted to electro-cardiographic changes some reference might have been made to the value of the vector cardiogram. The reproduction of radiographs is good, and the diagrams and line drawings prepared by the author himself are commendable. Full references are given to the 347 publications quoted and the index is accurate if a trifle curtailed. Spelling mistakes are few for a book published in a language 'foreign' to author and printer, and the quality of print and paper is good.

**The Purpose and Practice of Medicine.** By SIR JAMES SPENCE. (Pp. x + 308; illustrated. 42s.) London: Oxford University Press. 1960.

This book is made up of a selection of 20 of the papers and lectures of James Spence, edited anonymously by his friends and colleagues. They are divided into sections entitled 'The Nature of Disease', 'The Study of Disease', 'Children and Families', 'The Care of the Child', and 'The Practice of Medicine' and the 'Training of Doctors'. The first of these sections shows the young Spence writing papers on pernicious anaemia, xerophthalmia, epituberculosis and other medical subjects of current interest in the era 1920-1933. These probably

differ little from similar papers written by others at the time, but in 1934 there was published an 'Investigation into the Health and Nutrition of Certain of the Children of Newcastle upon Tyne between the Ages of 1 and 5 Years'. This work, done at the time of the great depression, marked the beginning of Spence's long and fruitful collaboration with the Health Authority of his own city, which led on to the unique 1,000 family survey, launched before his death and carried on afterwards by his collaborators. From this time, as his bibliography shows, he became less interested in clinical medicine itself, in so far as it concerns itself with particular diseases, and more and more interested in the way in which medicine should be studied and should be taught.

In turn this led on to the main concern of the latter years of his life, the institutions which men create to fulfil particular needs, and the manner in which these institutions evolve, or fail to evolve, as those needs change. He liked to regard the human family as the oldest of its institutions, and his masterly discourse on 'The Purpose of the Family' should be read in this context. His membership of the University Grants Committee brought him into close contact with the university and the teaching hospital *qua* institutions, and during the last decade of his life his interest, his talk and his energies were increasingly taken up with university policy. Unfortunately he wrote little on this subject.

The book ends with his address to the Newcastle and Northern Counties Medical Society, given a few months before his death in 1954. He spoke on Institutional Medicine, and the opening words are beautifully characteristic of his style.

'It is, I think, one of the inherent peculiarities of an Englishman, and more particularly of a Northumbrian, that, if you scratch him he begins to brood over his institutions. And then from time to time he reforms them. He is, as it were, still in those tremendous years before and after 1688, when our revolution was settled more by sincerity of argument than by force of arms, and when there were men of the calibre of Halifax the Trimmer to hold the balance. Now, again, in this century we are in the midst of another revolution, which is shown in our concern about our institutions. If we have neither the vigour, which is an affair of the spirit, nor the means, which is an affair of the intelligence, to reform our institutions, it will be a matter of interest mainly to the historians of the future; but such a state of affairs will be cold comfort to those of us who believe that the excellence of a civilization is shown in the capacity of its citizens constantly to reform its institutions in order to meet its changing cultural needs. But change may be for the better or the worse, and in remembering this we should be guided by Burke's admonition, that "merely to innovate is not to reform".'

The style of his prepared utterances is terse, witty and embellished with apt references to the work and words of men, past and present, whom he admired. Discussion of the present and future is characteristically based on experience to be gained from a study of history,