

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

Present problems of medical education, by Dr. M. Schär, « *Pro Juventute* », 1965, Nos 4-5, Zurich.

During the course of the struggle which mankind has fought for thousands of years to preserve health and life, sickness has often appeared to have triumphed. Such was the case, for example, in the 14th Century when the Asiatic plague spread throughout Europe in many places wiping out as much as a third of the population in a few months. All measures taken to avert the epidemic and to heal the sick were unsuccessful. In the face of threatening death the most extraordinary methods were tried to prevent the spreading of the plague. Accused of poisoning wells, Jews were executed, witches burned. Subjecting themselves to rigorous punishment, some wanted to appease the divine wrath, whilst others passed the last days remaining to them in frenzied debauch. The plague, however, spared neither sinners nor the devout, neither children nor the old.

How could European townspeople and villagers of those days have protected themselves from the plague, since they did not know its causes or how an epidemic spreads ?

Repeated epidemics which passed from the Mediterranean ports over the European continent enabled the conclusion, however, to be drawn that contamination was brought about by men. This fact was at the origin of the first control measures taken in Venice against the plague, namely the placing in quarantine of ships outside the port. During the course of centuries, the struggle against the plague and other epidemics has been completed and perfected by other measures. In this connection, one need only mention the filtration of water, disinfection, the destruction of animals carriers of pathogenic agents, prophylaxis and therapy by means of antibiotics and other specifically microbicide medicaments. Successful results were soon achieved. The number of deaths caused by infectious diseases fell to a remarkable extent ; exceeding 12,000 towards 1900, it did not even reach a total of 2000 in 1962.

What relation exists between the reduction of infectious diseases and medical education ? We will first of all show that the cause is thus the determinating factor in the fight against a particular illness and also explain that infectious diseases today threaten our health and lives far

less today than they did even several decades ago. Whilst, formerly, attempts were made to discover the cause of infectious diseases, now we try to seek out the origins of chronic illness. On some occasions these attempts have been successful, but more often one has had to be satisfied with only partially discovering the causes. However, our knowledge of the subject is already sufficient to enable us to take prophylactic measures against various chronic illnesses. Dispositions of medical control which had shown themselves to be effective against contagious diseases, however, offered no chances of success, as these were directed against microbes and not against the causes of these diseases . . .

The struggle against the more serious threats to health can in the first place only be effective when insanitary habits are altered or are prevented from being adopted. It is not sufficient to inculcate knowledge and point out these dangers, a considerable amount of educative work must be done before any appreciable improvement is forthcoming. Regulations, controls, technical prohibitions and measures to alter existing conditions have been sufficient in fighting effectively against contagious diseases. These are however unable to avert the present-day threats to health. It is only medical education, that is to say, instruction aimed at inspiring cleanliness, which will be assured of complete success in the long run.

Parents must already instil medical education in their own children. This must be continuous whilst the children are at play, at school, during the apprenticeship period and at work. Systems and methods of medical education will vary according to the receptiveness of learning at different ages, but the object will always remain the same.
