

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

“ In trying to show their concern for the patient, visitors often find themselves at variance with the hospital. There is often nowhere for them to hang up hat and coat and, sometimes, nowhere to sit down. Usually, all they are allowed to do is to bring a few flowers, fruit and other tokens of their concern and try to keep up the patient's morale. Anything else seems to be wrong. They often feel awkward and out of place, and leave feeling vaguely dissatisfied with themselves, as if they have in some way let the patient down.”

In conclusion the book draws attention to the complexity of human problems:

“ The groups found that every situation which at first glance seemed to contain human problems only for patients also involved those of doctors, nurses and other medical workers and threw light on their training, the organisation of medical and non-medical work and the social structure of the ward and hospital, and could have been viewed from any of these angles. Also, any problem which seemed to be primarily a medical or nursing matter usually involved the administration. And any situation which appeared to be exclusively a hospital affair also included the hospital's relationship to the community. These things are bound up together, and while some separation was necessary to the examination of a situation, a full appreciation of it could not be reached unless its different components were viewed within the total setting ”.

On the basis of the groups' work, Miss Barnes denounces the de-humanisation of hospitals, which is accentuated by the progress of modern medicine and she puts forward some observations and proposals for sweeping reforms for doctors, administrators and nurses.

J.-G. L.

JEAN RODHAIN: “ CHARITÉ A GÉOMÉTRIE VARIABLE ”¹

The author, who is Secretary General of Secours Catholique (Catholic Aid) and President of Caritas Internationalis, casts a look at the world around him, and, gathering at random from among the swift and penetrating observations that he has made,

composes together the elements of a sort of wall-painting of charity: tales of people he has met, and thoughts on world events, great and small; for he has witnessed and has helped to bring alleviation to much suffering in our time, from Haiphong to Jerusalem, and from Paris to Bogota.

In a book of this kind where the personal atmosphere is so important, we cannot do better than to quote a few passages, as, for example:

“ It is enough to have lived for only a few hours amid the ruins and among the victims of Skopje to realize the value of the parcels that we bring. A food ration, warm blankets, a milk bottle for a child are things beyond price. All political discussions, signed or unsigned manifestos, all those congresses addressed by famous speakers, all these take on the appearance of tiny clouds, far, far away. It is as clear as the midday sun that, at that particular instant, what is essential is to provide immediate relief ”.

Basing himself on concrete facts, Mgr. Rodhain points out that charity itself cannot escape the necessity of labour well performed, of that law of labour which “ restricts us in the choice of those to whom we bring aid as well as in the methods employed for relief ”. Charity must not slumber and the exactness of the work which it inspires is itself a source of perpetual renewal. As the author so aptly writes in his closing chapter:

“ Every occupation contains its peculiar difficulties, and the humblest tasks may hold unsuspected responsibilities. A small error on the part of a laboratory worker may turn a medicine that cures into a death-dealing drug. A fitter who handles his tools inaccurately may well cause an aircraft to fly towards disaster ”.

The Red Cross, cited several times by the author, meets with similar problems, needs and joys; their evocation here enlightens and moves us. It is essential that those who find themselves involved in action should return, at times, to the original founts and that their motions of aid be rooted beforehand in meditation.

J.-G. L.

¹ Editions S.O.S., Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1969, 320 pp.