

ELECTRICITY AND HEALTH.

Studies in Electro-pathology. By Temp. Major A. White Robertson. Illustrated. Pp. viii+304. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1918.) Price 12s. 6d. net.

THIS book begins with the thesis that civilisation is a mistake because it is a negation of the "wild," the law of which is "Thou shalt be fit or thou shalt die." But we are justified in asking, What is "fitness"? The author appears to have left the development of the brain altogether out of consideration. Do music and painting count for nothing? The statement is made that "suffering has come with the law of the artificial"—that is, the civilised. If we are to accept this we must hold that all existences prior to civilisation were devoid of consciousness. Disease is certainly not absent from wild animals or men, and when the author says that it has increased enormously owing to civilisation, we must remember that the conditions producing it can and must be done away with, and this without abolishing civilisation itself. Moreover, is not the increase spoken of apparent merely and due to improved means of detection? It may be doubted whether the physician is the best judge as to the extent of the increase.

The conclusion of the book is that we must go back to the "law of the wild." How? By living in accordance with the theories of the essentially electrical nature of all physiological and pathological phenomena familiar to some of us in connection with the name of Mr. A. E. Baines. The effects of light are now added on account of their electrical nature. It is true that in the far distant future all phenomena may possibly be explained on the basis of the electrical structure of the atom; but no man living can do this, and the author's attempt can only be described as premature, a fact for which he cannot be held responsible. The book shows an extensive acquaintance with literature, although the quotations are apt to be rather disconnected and their relation to the argument not always obvious. The inner meaning attached to many of these quotations appears to be due to the electrical obsession of the author, who is not always consistent. On p. 57 he inclines to the view that enzymes are "forces"; on p. 115 he speaks of phosphorus as their essential factor, apparently, however, forgetting that a very active pepsin has been prepared free from phosphorus.

The reader must be warned against accepting without question the statements contained in the book. Mr. Baines's remarkable experimental results are quoted without criticism. No attempt is made to answer the objections that have been brought against them, and it is not to be expected that they will be believed until they have been described in such a way that others can repeat them. This applies especially to such experiments as that referred to on p. 231, where a boiled potato is made to sprout by the application of an electrical current. The electrical obsession is indicated also by the view taken that the function of the waxy or fatty layer on the surface of plants

or animals is to prevent escape to the air of electrical charges.

The author holds the view that the constitution of "vitamines" is that of phospho-lipines, and his remarks about "quick" food must be referred to on account of the possible mischief that they may do. "Quick" food is that which has a particular electrical reaction, when tested by the method of Mr. Baines, on account of the presence of insulating lipoids. It is the only kind of food that is to be taken. Cold storage destroys this property, as also does over-cooking. But the remarks made as to the misleading nature of calorie values raise doubt as to the competence of the author to advise on problems of nutrition. The application of the theories to medical and surgical practice consists in the addition of a phospho-lipine, lecithin, or similar substance to Mr. Baines's "dielectric oil" or liquid paraffin.

W. M. B.

THE RADCLIFFE FOUNDATIONS.

Dr. John Radcliffe: A Sketch of his Life, with an Account of his Fellows and Foundations. By Dr. J. B. Nias. Pp. 147. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1918.) Price 12s. 6d. net.

DR. JOHN RADCLIFFE, a very successful Court physician at the time of William III. and Queen Anne, was one of the most generous of all the numerous benefactors of Oxford, for he left most of his large fortune to the University. He covenanted that a portion of it should be used to endow two travelling fellowships, to be held by Oxford medical graduates for the space of ten years, and he made a special proviso that at least half of this period should be spent by his fellows "in parts beyond the sea, for their better improvement." Radcliffe's idea was an excellent one, for few medical men could fail to broaden their outlook and increase their experience by visiting the most noted medical schools in foreign countries. At the same time the period of ten years is too long for most men, and so from 1859 onwards the tenure of the fellowships was reduced to three years. The list of fellows includes many distinguished names, and of those elected under the new foundation nearly twenty at the present moment hold appointments on the staff of one or other of the London hospitals. The book under review gives only brief records of living fellows, but detailed biographies of the deceased fellows of the old foundation.

The other foundations under Dr. Radcliffe's will include the imposing Radcliffe Library, or "Camera." For the first century or more after it was built this library was stored with books of all kinds, but from 1811 onwards they were restricted to scientific and medical subjects. In 1861 these science books were transferred to the recently built "Museum," whilst the library itself is now used as an annexe to the Bodleian Library.

Another notable foundation bearing Radcliffe's name is the observatory. This institution was not contemplated in Radcliffe's will, but it was founded in 1772 by the trustees out of the trust