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Book Review

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Book Reviews

Reviewed by Raymond L. Shilling, M.D.*

THE MEDICAL SOURCEBOOK, by Fred A. Mettler, M.D., Ph.D., Sc.D. (Hon.) (1959), 1st Edition, Published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1000 pp., 500 figures, 178 plates, 11 color plates; 1959.

The author sets out his basic purpose in the preface, "The present text had its inception in a request to prepare a book which would help lawyers in their dealings with medical matters by providing them with information about the basic medical sciences, the terminology of body structure, and the anatomophysiological background of the commonest personal injuries, together with a group of references which would enable them to inquire with profit into more specialized subjects about which they might wish to become more adequately informed." The author sets up a great task in organization of material and presentation of specific details; such a task, in fact, that the reader immediately wonders what manner of presentation could possibly succeed. Mind you, he will take, to accomplish this purpose, a lay concept and develop anatomy, physiology, pathology and terminology to establish his goal of "the creation of a climate of medical opinion."

To accomplish this, he must first have an index that lists lay terms; for example, "painful back" is found as *backache* and four pages are devoted thereto. Secondly, he must present anatomical material. Several references to the abundant anatomical plates are made, but singularly no reference to the descriptive anatomy of the text where a chapter is devoted to the head, front of the neck, and vertebral column. Thirdly, he must present physiology. The author devotes a whole chapter to muscles and movements wherein muscle groups are named and again the anatomical plates referred to. Should the reader digest all the material presented in the book, he will have a full understanding of *backache* and its various clinical entities, such as a ruptured intervertebral disc, and what is more, he will even learn that "of course, the 'commonest' cause of back pain is simple muscle fatigue due to an unusual degree of work or strain or to the pursuit of an unusual task."

The general format of *The Medical Sourcebook* starts with 30 pages of general introduction, which *inter alia* brings out clearly the contrast of legal and medical disciplines of thought. It then moves into a chapter of 100 pages dealing with general considerations, which include a wide variety of related subjects. This chapter lays down the later developed plan that "anatomy

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has here been presented not as an abstract science but against a background of normal function and its disturbance by injury and disease." The author then discusses nomenclature in a most exhaustive way, the medical library, healing, medical malpractice, the layman and the practice of medicine and many other related topics. A section on 'topographical anatomy' is general enough to be well understood by the non-expert, such as you and I, and is spiced with interesting topics like 'Finger Prints,' 'Anatomic Age,' and 'Cosmetic Defects.' The book then follows with chapters on bones and joints, with practical discussion of fractures, joint disorders, muscles and movements, as before stated, and nerves and disorders of sensation.

Chapters then follow on the body regions from head to foot, or from scalp to toenails. This portion of the work is almost entirely anatomy, but clearly descriptive and not without practical suggestions, for example, "It is difficult to commit suicide by cutting the throat. The head must be retracted to get the muscles out of the way." The discussion of treatment of throat lacerations promptly follows as a reminder of the humanistic element of the physician's thinking.

A final chapter on "The Most Common Causes of the Most Common Complaints" discusses pain, insomnia, malingering, along with 17 additional stimulating topics to give the reader a glimpse at the broad expanse of *The Medical Sourcebook*. There follows an appendix of 140 pages, "A Guide to Activities, Personnel, Literature, and Societies in the Basic Sciences and Clinical Fields of Medicine," which is an exhaustive bibliography in all fields of medicine and those allied fields from the largest in creation, Aerospace Medicine, to the simplest living things, Virology, to which is added the author's lucid observations. He tells us what a medical specialist is and why he is so classified. This chapter alone, gives this book a must position on your library shelf.

The shortcomings are few in view of the tremendous amount of material which the author has so well organized. They should be mentioned in hope of improvement of future reprints. The most outstanding defect, and the most annoying, is the total lack of relationship of illustrative drawings to the text. The legend of each plate accompanies the plate, but the key system of classification to the drawings will exhaust the reader. The material needs no perplexing arrangement to challenge the reader's powers of concentration.

Sections on the organs of special sense are illuminating and orderly, but are treated in a much less thorough manner than the reference needs of the lawyer demand. However, the references for further study are complete.

The style of the author is particularly stimulating. His expanse of thought and descriptive support make for enlightening reading. The particular accomplishment of "the creation of a climate of medical opinion" is of inestimable value to the lawyer.