

Diseases of Poverty

TRAIL TO LIGHT, by R. P. Parsons. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.

"IF YOU should transverse the hills of Brianza and Canavese, you would most likely meet some pitiable wrecks of humanity, with eyes fixed and glassy, with pale and sallow faces and arms fissured and scarred as by a burn or large wound. You would see them advancing with trembling head and staggering gait . . . now falling on one side, now getting up . . . now again falling, uttering a senseless laugh or sob, which pierces the heart—such are the pellagrins." Thus wrote the Italian savant Lombroso in 1892. And this was the picture of our rural South of 1900-15. The plague of the sore mouth and the flaming skin, called *mal de la rosa* on the European continent, took an annual toll of 4,000 and created 100,000 pellagrins in four of our southern states. Since the eighteenth century the ordinary family practitioner of both continents had one answer to the problem, "Feed a pellagrin and he'll do well." But this was the beginning of the scientific age and the pendulum of science had swung toward king microscope. The gods were Pasteur and Koch and the only true scientists shot stuff into rabbits or guinea pigs, isolated the microbes under the microscope, and discovered a method for killing them. Pellagra in 1900-15 among the learned men of medicine was "a disease due to infection with living micro-organisms of unknown nature."

Robert Parsons has retold the De Kruijftale of the "soft-spoken desperado," Dr. Joseph Goldberger, the scientist who proved that "the problem of pellagra is in the main a problem of poverty." This East Side genius cured pellagra by proper diets. The skeptics wanted more definite evidence. Dr. and Mrs. Goldberger and fourteen other men gave it to them in the so-called "filth parties." The author has spared none of the sordid details—the stools, the scales, and urine of the afflicted were mixed with dough and eaten by the volunteers. Blood of the pellagrins was injected into the bodies of these "fifteen men and a housewife" as Goldberger's official reports refer to the case, in order to prove that the disease was not caused by germs, but due only to a deficiency in protein diet. Like the Negro genius, George Washington Carver, Dr. Goldberger felt that his work would mean little unless it was brought home to the poor of the South. He traveled extensively through the red clay of the Carolinas and the cotton fields of the southern states, bringing the message of a proper balanced diet to avoid pellagra. His great contribution of P-P (pellagra preventive) led to the discovery and isolation of Vitamin G, named in his honor. The army has incorporated these

dietary studies into their rations and we may rest assured that none of our soldiers will be brought down by the "red plague."

But this biography is more than a twice-told tale. There are excellent chapters on other wound stripes suffered by Goldberger as a representative of the US Public Health Service. The good doctor almost took the count in his study and contraction of yellow fever. His paper of 1907, "The Etiology, Symptoms, and Diagnosis of Yellow Fever," remains a classic to this day. He contracted breakbone fever or dengue in Texas and made notes on his symptoms and reactions while lying in bed. His fine study of typhus emphasizes the conclusion that "fundamentally sanitation and health are economic problems and in proportion as the economic condition of the masses has improved, this notorious filth disease has decreased or disappeared. In localities where it still prevails its further reduction waits on a further improvement in, or an extension of, the improved economic status of those affected."

Much of Dr. Parsons' book is not pleasant reading. It will take you into an atmosphere of iodoform, gangrene, phenol, pus, and many malodorous smells. The sweat, blood, and tears of the working medico are in this book. You will find a real scientist, a social scientist, who despite his myopia on "cultural" problems knew that only "the improvement in basic economic conditions can be expected to heal the festering ulcers of our people."

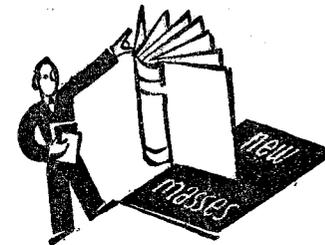
JAMES KNIGHT.

A Symbol and a Power

THE FIGHTING FRENCH, by Raoul Aglion. Holt. \$3.

FIRST reviews of this book commented on the irony of the fact that the first real description of the Fighting French movement should appear at a moment when the French Committee of National Liberation has been formed, and de Gaulle's organization is thereby superseded. But in reality, Raoul Aglion chose a dramatic moment for his story. The spirit of the Fighting French is still very much needed in Algiers; the fight for unity on the basis of an anti-Vichy program has been transferred to a higher plane but it still goes on.

Many parts of the volume are now of purely academic interest, especially the short history of the Fighting French, their organization and administration, the sequence of their growth in the French empire, as seen by one who was for two years in de Gaulle's diplomatic services. Another passage of the book has its academic interest in a different sense; it gives a detailed study of just how the capitulation of June 1940 was engineered, the way the leading personalities played their role, the shrewd Weygand, the doddering Petain, the crafty Laval, and, interwoven, the ef-



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forts of de Gaulle and others to avert the catastrophe.

But what stands out in the volume is the personal testimony of one man, evidence of the powerful grip that the Fighting French have on millions. Aglion was in Quantara, a little town in Egypt, when the betrayal came. He could not believe it, nor could he believe at first the garbled radio transcription of the speech by an obscure general urging resistance. Dazed but unable to accept the betrayal, he made his way instinctively to London; from all parts of the world others did likewise. And there was de Gaulle uttering the fantastic thought that the war was not over, that it was a world war and would be decided by much stronger forces than France. The will to resist, the unthinkability of a Nazi-fied France is what carried these people forward. Within a few months they were a movement; within a year a symbol; within two years a power.

There is a great deal about France which is missing from this book; it is after all the experience of a man in exile, away from the homeland when the war came. There is little here on the French working class and its Communist sector. But what there is here gives a glimpse of the power that is de Gaullism, something bigger than its leader or any of its individual members.

JOSEPH STAROBIN.

Brief Reviews

BEHIND THE SULFA DRUGS, by Dr. Iago Goldston. Appleton-Century. \$2.00.

PAUL EHRLICH is called the father of chemotherapy, the science of "the destruction of the specific disease-producing living agents within the body of the diseased being." Dr. Iago Goldston has written a short history of the "grandfathers" of this science. He presents the perspiration and inspiration of the 400 years that preceded the discovery of the sulfa drugs.

The efforts of these "grandfathers" were ridiculed and they had to wage a constant struggle against the conservatives and Tories. The author has written simply, but has not sacrificed or enlarged on the scientific truths. We see the fifteenth century Paracelsus overthrowing the Galenic tradition in medicine and introducing the use of mercury, sulphur, antimony, and arsenic compounds. Here is the learned founder of the Royal Society and "skyptical chymist," Robert Boyle calling for the development of "specifick medicines." We perfect techniques of tissue and bacterial staining with the unsung hero of 1871, Carl Weigert, which lead to the development of a successful diphtheria anti-toxin by Von Behring. We sterilize instruments in carbolic lotion with Joseph Lister and bend over the diseased wine barrels with Louis Pasteur. All the trials and disappointments of Ehrlich are ours, and ours is the triumph

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