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Book notices

Not Always on the Level. EJ Moran Campbell. (Pp 246; £14.95, £13.95 BMA members.) London: Memoir Club (British Medical Journal), 1988.

I worked for Moran Campbell at Hammersmith and with others fell under his spell. He was one of the leaders of the new wave of clinical scientists in Britain in the late 1950s and *Clinical Physiology*, which he wrote with Dickinson and Slater, was our bible. Extremely sharp, seeing every side of a problem, Moran was a marvellous discussant. Intensely loyal and kind to members of his circle (which extended far beyond respiratory physiologists), he presented an abrasive and aggressive front in argument with outsiders; at the time (in the 1960s) this was considered “la mode Hammersmith” but EJMC was an extreme example of the species. His early achievements were pioneering—the first comprehensive account (based on electromyography) of the actions of the respiratory muscles; examination of the *sensation* of breathlessness, leading to the length-tension inappropriateness theory; the first advocacy of controlled oxygen for hypercapnic respiratory failure. References to this work and these times form some of the most interesting vignettes in this book. *Not Always on the Level* is described as a collection of memoirs. Its 35 chapters (or scenes) are too disordered chronologically and too much has been omitted since 1969 for this to be called an autobiography. Several chapters have already been published in the *British Medical Journal* (1979). It has been poorly subedited: among the mistakes, Sir John McMichael appears as Sir John McMasters. The first half of the book is a straightforward account, in Moran’s terse and direct style, of his parents, his early life, his medical student days (digs in Shepherds Bush), and his introduction to research. There is a sympathetic account of one of his mentors (Professor Samson Wright), who convinced a reluctant and impatient Moran (anxious to stride the clinical stage) that physiological principles were essential for understanding disease. The physiology course at the Middlesex Hospital (1943), first practical class: “We were split up into groups of four and given two projects: (1) How big is a medical student? and (2) How big is a potato? Four sacks of potatoes each weighing a stone were provided.” Sammy loved Moran and inscribed his pupil’s first book: “My son, more than the calf wishes to suck does the cow yearn to suckle.” I imagine that his second mentor, RL Riley (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore), felt the same. There is a fascinating account (pp 90–1) of how Moran started to work on the respiratory muscles. “My little project arose out of watching the physiotherapists at work on the wards. They would try to

train certain patients to improve the movement of one side of the chest.” Moran never doubted the importance of simple clinical observations, and pursued their explanation relentlessly in the face of accepted dogma. Not surprisingly, he was also a compassionate and skilled physician, though the accounts of his clinical experiences in this book are melodramatic. As everyone knows, disaster struck when Moran moved to McMaster University in 1968 to become chairman of medicine of the newly founded medical school. His behaviour, always erratic, became bizarre (> 3SD from normal) and eventually manic-depressive psychosis was diagnosed. Although he made no further major scientific contributions (by his standards), he ran the department of medicine at McMaster for at least 10 years while this disease slowly increased its grip. The last third of the book deals with this period. It is an incoherent account of isolated events of psychotic (manic) behaviour, which (unaccompanied by any commentary from relatives, colleagues, or psychiatrists) is too egotistical and lacking in insight to be illuminating. In my opinion, much of this would have been better left unsaid. This section is redeemed by the last chapter, “On being manic depressive,” which is a cogent account of what it is like to switch mood from excessively high to low. These memoirs will both interest and sadden Moran’s many friends.

Asthma—The Facts. 2nd ed. DJ Lane, A Storr. (Pp 188; £4.95, paperback.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. ISBN 0-19-261692-7.

The second edition of this book, aimed at patients with asthma, individuals who have contact with asthma, and those who are just plain interested, has arrived eight years after the first edition. In that time the main changes in asthma treatment have been the earlier use of prophylaxis, higher doses of inhaled steroids, and new drug delivery systems. At the same time there has been an increasing emphasis on education of patient, parent, spouse, GP and non-respiratory and respiratory physicians alike, to increase compliance and understanding and thereby achieve better control of asthma. Against a background of an apparent rise in the prevalence of asthma the new edition of this book, appropriately updated, is to be warmly welcomed. Difficult concepts are easily explained and potentially contentious areas (such as hyposensitisation) are discussed clearly and rationally. At £4.95 in paperback it is excellent value given the wealth of information and answers within its pages. It is to be heartily recommended to all patients and those concerned in whatever way (for example, as parent or school teacher) in the care of asthma.