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"Cancer" by R.J.C. Harris
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pp.127; plates 8; text figures 4.

This splendid book fills a most definite need. Not since the publication in ~~1952~~ 1948 of "The Riddle of Cancer" has such a readable and informative book of this kind and on this subject been written. Dr. Harris is to be congratulated,not only because he has neatly covered a broad and difficult subject in the compass of only 127 pages, but also because of the clear manner and good English style in which he has provided a balanced picture of current research and theories.

The book will certainly be invaluable to the young scientist just entering the field of cancer research. Furthermore, many workers who have been engaged in cancer research for a long period will find parts of the book and some of the references very useful. But the book is clearly intended for a much wider public, for scientists in all fields, and for that section of the lay public with some scientific knowledge or a special interest in medical research. To both these categories of person the book can be strongly recommended, being authentic, and the work, not of an armchair scientist or medical journalist, but of a man currently engaged in cancer research, respected by his peers and in the prime of his working life.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first two deal respectively with "The cell and cell division" and "Normal and abnormal growth". Then follows a chapter entitled "Human cancer" in which the occurrence and incidence of cancer of different types and different organs is discussed, and various geographical, racial and environmental factors considered. Chapter 4 is devoted to a discussion of the cancer hazard from radiation, and the occurrence of cancer of the skin, bladder and lung, in association with exposure to certain occupational and environmental factors. Next follows a chapter on the experimental production of cancer in experimental animals. In the heading of Chapter 6 "The 'Causes' of Cancer", the plurality of 'causes' is deliberately emphasised by the single inverted commas ~~around it~~. Few now believe that all forms of cancer can have but a single cause or

that there is a "final common pathway" for all causes. The seventh and eighth chapters are devoted to the treatment of cancer, and the final chapter to "The Prospect for Experimental Cancer Research". Some of the chapters inevitably become somewhat technical but, since they are divided up into sections, it is an easy matter to skip a page and pick up the threads again. Moreover, a short glossary at the end of the book helps to clarify some of the special terms.

My only real quarrel with Dr. Harris is with his final sentence: "There is far more danger that the men and the ideas will fail than that the money and the materials will not be forthcoming". This is a view with which Ministers of Health[1] are apt to justify the small expenditure of the Government on cancer and other forms of medical research. It is not however the view of those responsible for administering and directing research institutions[2]. Ideas spring from work just as much as from workers, and both work and workers require laboratory space and good laboratory facilities. Money for these is always in short supply and good research projects are constantly held up. Given more money, and wisdom in the direction of its use, far more could be achieved than at present.

References.

(1) Denzil Freeth, Official Report, May 9th 1961, cols. 206-7.

(2) Alexander Haddow, letter to The Times, 16th May, 1961, p.15.

Francis J.C. Roe, D.M. (Oxon.),
Reader in Experimental Pathology.