

Brainspotting: Adventures in Neurology *by A J Lees*

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The author of this small book is a consultant neurologist in London who is particularly interested in movement disorders. The subject is his early interest in bird spotting and the progress of his observations from that species to the need in medicine, and perhaps especially in neurology, to observe movement, behaviour, emotion and much else.

The author succeeds in telling us his story from childhood hobby to prolonged practice in medicine. He explains how he relates to patients and the extent to which the personality of a doctor and other healthcare workers can influence the response to the management of disease. The same applies to health when functional disorders are met with – conditions where physical disease can not be identified and, sometimes erroneously, a psychological explanation is advanced simply for that which is not understood at the time. This is an important point for those who study the history of medicine since surely it is inconceivable that in this present era we understand all the mechanisms of disease. New disorders, and new explanations of disorders we do recognise, arise quite frequently and therefore we must not assume we have all the answers.

This book guides us through some of these thought processes, coloured by interesting anonymised vignettes of patients the author has seen. The value of lessons from classical neurology include the writings of Jean-Martin Charcot in Paris and of Freud in Vienna and London. The author mentions the rarities akin to his earlier bird spotting but as a clinical neurologist he recognises that common things are common although they present in differing ways, hence the old adage that something is more likely to be an uncommon presentation of a common condition than to be a common presentation of a rare condition. The excitement does rise however when the rarities are spotted - like the bird spotting!

This is a very good and entertaining read but it is highly educational as well and should appeal to many medical historians.

Christopher Gardner-Thorpe
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