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Charles Scott Sherrington

Charles Scott
SHERRINGTON
An Appraisal

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Preface

This book has been written in response to a request from Sir Gavin de Beer. Even though the initiative was not my own, writing it has given me great pleasure, both because of its subject and because it has provided me with an opportunity of paying something of my life-long debt to British physiology. The Editor of the series wanted an appraisal, not a biography, and this agreed well with my own preferences. The main difficulty has been the need to define my reader. I have tried to solve this problem to the best of my ability but it remains to be seen whether my particular variety of humanity corresponds to anything found in real life. The learned may find the book too unsophisticated for their taste, the laymen, too learned. Biologists should be able to read it with little effort.

My plan is simple: firstly 'Personality and Background' followed by a sketch of the kind of physiology of the nervous system that Sherrington encountered in his youth. Then follow some chapters on his achievements and some on what is left over of his fundamental concepts in the present-day physiology of the nervous system. This is enough to make some of the chapters an easy introduction to much of what is relevant today in this complex field, in spite of the limitations imposed by this type of study. If those who are going to read the book as an introduction to modern neurophysiology find themselves compelled to make Sherrington's acquaintance at the same time, this should serve to enrich their experience of a great man and his nature. In his old age, Sherrington wrote a well-known book, *Man on his Nature*. My final chapter deals with this, his poems, and some other literary contributions.

There is a concise and excellent biography of Sherrington by his former pupil and successor in the chair at Oxford, Professor E. G. T. Liddell, in the *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*. Liddell has also written a *Discovery of Reflexes*. From

both these sources I have borrowed a great deal for Chapters 1 and 2, and in addition their Author has been kind enough to serve as my chief consultant, an act of friendship deeply appreciated.

Mrs Lucia Fulton and the late John Fulton's former co-worker, Miss Madeline Stanton of the Yale Historical Library, have kindly given me access to the diaries and notes of Fulton. By courtesy of Professor Cameron, Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, I had a chance, in 1947, of seeing some material in the possession of Sherrington's old college, which I have used in the text. Sir Lindor Brown (Oxford) long ago sent me the records from a meeting of the Physiological Society at which Sir Charles Sherrington and Sir Henry Dale talked about old times in the Society, and Professor R. A. Gregory of Liverpool has provided me with some records from Sherrington's time at his University, including the typescript of a lecture by Professor K. J. Franklin overlapping with the theme of my book. I have used all this material, supplemented by some 'Boswelling' of my own—occasionally without specific quotations of source—in the first chapter. I wish here to put on record my gratitude for all these favours received.

This, however, does not complete my tally-sheet. I want to mention benevolent criticism of several chapters by Sir John Eccles (Canberra) and Professor Göran Liljestränd (Stockholm), valuable photographs, letters, comments, etc., by Professors E. N. Da C. Andrade (London), Sir Gavin de Beer (London), Derek Denny-Brown (Harvard), the late Alexander Forbes (Harvard), Sir Bryan Matthews (Cambridge), R. A. Morton (Liverpool), and Wilder Penfield (Montreal), friendly help by the Librarian of The Royal Society, Mr I. Kaye, and the Librarian of the Royal Society of Medicine, Mr P. Wade, B.A. I thank all of them for kind help willingly given.

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Finally I wish to thank my secretary, Miss Gunvor Larsson, for having typed the manuscript, and Mrs Evi Reigo and Mrs Anne-Marie Chöler for help with the Figures.

Stockholm, October 1963

RAGNAR GRANIT

For as long as our present Western culture can keep above water we shall be inwardly enriched by absorbing the colours and figures of the past and treating the intellectual conditions and transformations of earlier epochs as a great furtherance of our own intellectual consciousness.

—Jacob Burckhardt, *Judgements on history and historians.*

Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1959

(Translations of *Historische Fragmente*, based on Burckhardt's lecture notes, Basel 1865–85.)