Book Notices

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Magic in a Bottle

This fascinating book tells the stories of the discoveries of important drugs and medicines and their discoverers. The author is a professional journalist and holds a Ph.D. in pharmacology, so thoroughly knows his subject and how to relate it. His style of writing reminds one of Paul DeKruif. The biographies of the discoveries of the drugs are dramatized to such an extent that they seem more like adventure fiction than like histories from one field of scientific achievement.

The following excerpts from the foreword are samples of the type of writing encountered throughout the book. "Great-great-grandfather swallowed a concoction of colchicum and fennel water and Bavarian tar, well mixed, with sassafras and oil of wintergreen and powdered opium or rue. That brew didn’t do him much good for he died in spite of it—or maybe because of it. Today my daughter takes one milligram of 31 (methyl-4-amino-hydrochloride-pyrimidyl-5-methyl-N-41-methyl-5-beta-hydroxy-ethyl-31-chlorothiazole), and she stays strong and healthy. . . . The twentieth-century doctor protects my little girl with a single magic bullet, aimed straight at the exact devil that tries to harm her and that’s why all the statisticians will bet their shirts she’ll live for another sixty years.

The book should make especially interesting reading for high school and college students interested in science.—D. C. Rife.