

Preface

This book is about four great pioneers of medical microbiology — Emil von Behring, Robert Koch, Paul Ehrlich and Elie Metchnikoff — and their scientific contributions. They were all awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine. Thus, it may be of interest to see what impression their discoveries have made on contemporary science and particularly on colleagues at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, who had been charged with the responsibility of evaluating the candidates for the early medical Nobel prizes. To appreciate their achievements, it is necessary to give the reader a short account of the breakthrough of scientific medicine in the 19th century and in particular the advent of medical microbiology. The book is primarily intended for an audience of laymen and I have tried to avoid being too scientifically ambitious, without falling into the trap of presenting only entertaining chatter.

I am greatly indebted to the Nobel Assembly/Nobel Committee of the Karolinska Institutet for generously giving me access to their archive with information on Behring, Koch, Ehrlich and Metchnikoff.