BOOK REVIEWS

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE ACT 1946

This book consists of a collecting together in one volume the complete National Health Service Act, 1946, with its ten schedules, together with all the statutory instruments in full up to the date of publication in July 1948. There is appended a list of other statutes still in force that apply to the present National Health Service.

It is, of course, of value to have collected into one volume all the provisions of the National Health Service Act and the statutory instruments for convenience of reference, but much of the value of this volume lies in the index, permitting quick reference to appropriate sections to be made; this should be very helpful to all concerned with the operation of the National Health Service. Without this volume it would be necessary to keep a large number of official publications to hand, and, when any problem arose necessitating reference to these, a prolonged search might have to be made to make sure that no official provision was being overlooked. The author apologizes for not having had time to make the index, especially from the point of view of cross references, as complete as he wished; doubtless, in subsequent editions, he will achieve an even finer index.

The whole Act and its statutory instruments in one volume impresses the non-administrative medical man with the vast bureaucratic edifice which a nationalized health service has built up, and must make him fear that progress and elasticity may become increasingly emmeshed in this increasing growth. The voluntary hospitals have been criticized since the passing of the Act for their allegedly inadequate and unsystematic account-keeping, but if the reward for a certain incompleteness here was the vigour and speedy progressiveness of these institutions, then the criticism was unjustified.

Unconscious humour and humanity can be found even in a volume of this official character. One must smile, on turning through the pages, to find disproportionately lengthy provisions applying to the Isles of Scilly, with their population, I believe, of only about two thousand. Would it not be a good thing for the future of our society if the whole of Great Britain were broken up into many scores of little Isles of Scilly, with their local variations and differing individualities?

A glance at these official regulations, concentrated into one valuable volume, must impress one with the danger of a rigid over-centralization of administration, with only token devotion to the peri-

phery. Developments since the publication of this volume only increase this natural fear. Let us, therefore, hope for the future of medicine and the hospitals that Parliament, in the not-too-distant future, will make it necessary for Mr. Speller to produce a revised and very different edition of this book.

DISORDERS OF THE BLOOD

A new edition of Whitby and Britton's well-known textbook is a welcome event, and the practising haematologist is hardly likely to be disappointed with the sixth edition recently published. In size the present volume is 85 pages bigger than its predecessor. Revision has been thorough and remarkably complete; few recent papers of importance published up to the end of 1949 have been overlooked, at least from Anglo-American literature. Particularly good are the accounts of recent work in the fields of iron metabolism, the haemorrhagic disorders and the effects of radiation on the blood, and the newer therapeutic agents such as Vitamin B12, radiophosphorus and aminopterin receive their share of space.

It is naturally possible in a book as large as this to find some points for mild criticism. The 'colour index,' for instance; surely this has outlived its usefulness and does not merit the attention it receives. The space thus saved might be usefully given to a much more detailed account of the important subject of the errors of red cell counting and the calculation of 'absolute' values.

A few points on transfusion technique also call for comment; it is stated (page 311) that 'great care must be taken to cross-match (blood) properly (in cases of acute idiopathic haemolytic anaemia) so that the transfused cells are incapable of adsorbing any circulating haemolysin'—this is indeed a difficult task. On the following page there is also a slip—the indirect instead of the direct technique of Coombs is mentioned as the method for detecting sensitization of the patient's own red cells. On page 379 it is surely wrong to say that 'the phenomenon of haemagglutination ... is inevitably followed by haemolysis,' and on page 587 to refer to the antibody which gives the Donath-Landsteiner cold haemolysis reaction as a cold agglutinin (on page 314 this is correctly referred to as a haemolysin).