Dr. Donnison has noted that not only are certain types of so-called organic disease, as e.g., hyperpiesis, diabetes mellitus, Graves' disease and peptic ulcer, but also the so-called functional diseases such as the psycho-neuroses, common in civilized communities, whereas they are conspicuous by their absence among primitive races. He sees the endocrine and autonomic nervous system as the association between these apparently different kinds of malady and much of his discussion is taken up with the interrelationship between these organs and psychological factors. While he must himself admit that many of his arguments are speculative, they are none the less interesting, and at the present stage of thought on disease in its broadest sense are specially worth consideration.

PHYSIOLOGICAL CHEMISTRY OF THE BILE.


The enormous growth of the literature on any branch of science has made it difficult even for a specialist to keep abreast of the advances in his own field. For the many workers, especially teachers, whose scope is at all general, it is practically impossible. This seems particularly unfortunate when we realise that the real kernel of most original papers need occupy relatively little space, and that the rest is largely recapitulation and sometimes mere verbiage. There would appear to be only two practicable solutions: a rigorous pruning of original papers by the editors of journals, and an attempt, periodically, to publish the essentials of a large literature in the form of a critical monograph.

This latter is what Mr. Sobotka has done. The present volume is a condensation of about eleven hundred books and papers, and gives a survey of present knowledge on the secretion of bile, its nature and its modifications by cholagogues, and of the normal constituents of the bile with the exception of bilirubin and the lipoids. The latter are being dealt with in a companion volume, which will cover at least as vast a literature as the present one. Such a condensation is invaluable: it may safely be said that this book will be the "Prolegomena to every future study of the bile acids", and it is of interest to others besides the specialised bio-chemist. The relationships of vitamin D, the sex hormones, the cardiac glucosides and the carcinogenic substances to the bile acids and cholesterol have made it important that most clinical and laboratory workers should know more about these substances than has hitherto been necessary.

What we want is more books like this, and on every branch of medicine; and criticism may seem unworthy, especially as this book is, on the whole, very good. Nevertheless, the writer of such a book is under a very great responsibility; he is short-cutting the original papers of hundreds of workers, and it is essential that his short cut should lead us aright. It is greatly to his credit that he possesses an admirable impartiality: there is no hint of a bias, conscious or unconscious, towards one side or another on controversial questions. But it is surely wrong to omit any reference to the excellent work of Councillor and Macindoe and yet to include a paragraph (although a good one) on the miserable mistakes of Sweet, Bland and others.

The view of Aschoff on the excretion of cholesterol by the wall of the gall-bladder are somewhat misrepresented, and indeed I cannot find his name in the bibliographical index. The literature on calcium in the bile is rather too incomplete, and there is surely more to be said about the copper content of pigment stones than is to be found on page 99. Indeed, the whole subject of gall-stones is dismissed in four pages, when it might have been given a volume equal to that of the whole book. But the section ends with a quotation: "It is not quite clear to me why the problem of gall-stone formation should cause so much concern to pathologists and clinicians, etc." This is the laboratory worker's outlook with a vengeance! From the point of view of the laboratory worker himself, it is a pity that there is no critical discussion of the methods of bile-acid estimation, one of the first points a reader would look for. In other words, their synopsis of the literature needs to be supplemented by a little judicious reading of original papers. Perhaps that is inevitable, and the main point is that we have, in this volume, something which is badly wanted, and something which may encourage others to do likewise in other fields.