BOOKS RECEIVED

The Editorial Board acknowledge with thanks receipt of the following volumes.
A selection from these will be made for review.


BOOK REVIEWS

The Skin and Gut in Disease


This useful, informative and cheap little paperback achieves its stated objectives of stimulating clinical acumen, facilitating the interpretation of physical signs, and bringing home the need for accurate diagnosis. It is a pity that economic considerations and present-day commercial practice have conspired against the inclusion of a considerable number of useful illustrations which, unfortunately, have been omitted.

In a work of this kind it is fair game for a reviewer to search for the conditions which have not been included, if only so that they can be resurrected in a future edition. Mention should be made of Dupuytren’s contracture in alcoholic cirrhosis, hives in hidatid disease, anti-gout drugs causing villous atrophy, and perhaps the lymphomatosus accompaniments of the yellow-nail syndrome. Since eponyms are used, even too readily, to string together various syndromes, it is a pity that Reiter’s name is perpetuated although Sir Benjamin Brodie described the condition referred to more accurately a century earlier. British readers prefer to call it the Paterson-Kelly rather than the Plummer-Vinson syndrome for the sake of the American market, particularly in the United States. It is possible that the latter was adopted since radiologic and radiological are interchangeable in the text. If these variations are part of a commendable drive to help American dermatologists and gastroenterologists, then it is a pity that Professor Jeghers’ name has been incorrectly spelled throughout the book. This is particularly unfortunate since he is quite likely to be reviewing this book for an American clinical journal.

Another edition should be brought up to date by mentioning the aetiological relationship of Mycoplasma pneumoniae to the Stevens-Johnson syndrome. The system of references is nothing short of sloppy and needs considerable improvement. But even without references, it would remain an admirable little monograph, and most postgraduates will enjoy thumbing through it.

Epidemic Disease in Ghana 1901-1960


As the author points out there was practically no form of disease control in West Africa at the beginning of the present century. He has attempted the difficult task of the review of the natural history of the different epidemic diseases of Ghana from the earliest scientific observation dating from the outbreak of plague in Accra in 1908. Plague, yellow fever, smallpox, cerebrospinal meningitis, relapsing fever, African trypanosomiasis and influenza are discussed but not measles, poliomyelitis, typhoid or dysentery. The task was not made easier by the absence of any adequate medical services although
rapid advances have been made in the past two decades.

Although there were outbreaks of plague in 1908 and 1924 no cases were recorded between 1925 and 1960. The disease gained entry via the ports and antirodent measures were undoubtedly important but fortunately it did not establish itself in the wild rodents. The Rockefeller Foundation Yellow Fever Commission had unrivalled opportunity to study yellow fever in Ghana in 1926-27 and this led to it being established that the cause of the disease was a filtrable virus and transmission by Aedes aegypti was proved.

Although smallpox was endemic and epidemics occurred at regular intervals, vaccination was apparently not on a significant scale until the 1920’s and in many cases was not successful. Rapid strides were made subsequently and especially since the dried vaccine was introduced in 1957. Interesting details are given of relapsing fever—the endemic form does not occur in Ghana as the vector is absent. The epidemic (louse borne) form was first recorded in West Africa in 1921. Cases in Ghana were mainly in the immigrants from the north with poor hygiene and there was a lack of cases in the Ashanti and the Southerners with their better standards of hygiene. The disease, however, has been rare in Ghana since 1933.

Large epidemics of cerebrospinal meningitis have occurred with a high mortality. As might be expected these have occurred in the first few months of the year in the cool dry season with the people crowding together at night. Trypanosomiasis is dealt with at some length but amongst the all too sparse clinical details it is difficult to accept a C.S.P. protein of <25 mg.% as being abnormal.

The book would be of wider appeal if less details were given of some of the admittedly unreliable figures and more concerning methods of control, clinical manifestations and treatment. It is a valuable account, however, for those intending to work in West Africa and illustrates some of the difficulties that have yet to be overcome, and realization of these problems is mandatory to those who have only experienced medicine in the Western World.

Muscle


The predominant part of the book is concerned with recent advances and current thoughts about the structure, physiology and biochemical features of normal muscle. There is some degree of repetition, but much useful information is available for those employed in research. There are several papers devoted to the physiology and biochemistry of muscular contraction and these are followed by papers on the effects of divalent ions and drugs on skeletal, cardiac and smooth muscle. Studies on the regulation of uterine muscle are also of interest and serve to show how little is known of the physiological control of the myometrium.

The latter part of the book presents several papers on muscle structure and function in disease. Although of interest to those employed in research, this section of the book is of more value to the clinician interested in muscular disorders. J. N. Walton summarizes the clinical and genetic aspects of the muscular dystrophies in which the difficulties of classification are discussed and the importance as a guide to prognosis stressed. The value of clinical electrodiagnosis in differentiating muscular dystrophies from neuropathies is mentioned, but although J. V. Basmaijian describes normal electromyography, there is no paper on the electrodiagnostic features of muscular dystrophy. Mention of detection of carriers of muscular dystrophy is made by Walton, and some of the problems encountered are discussed by C. J. Nichol. The value of enzyme histochemistry and serum enzyme studies is also discussed. E. H. Lambert discusses the clinical physiology of the neuromuscular junction, and shows how electrodiagnosis and pharmacological studies may be of diagnostic value and how they may shed light on the defects of neuromuscular transmission. He describes the relationship of these features to myasthenia gravis and to the carcinomatous myasthenic syndrome.

The book is well presented and photographic reproduction is good. It makes a useful book for reference into the current trends and thoughts about normal and pathological muscle function.


Healthy body creates a healthy thought, and thus a healthy mind. Today scientific achievements are becoming possible which beggar mankind’s wildest dreams of the past and yet either due to religious social beliefs, or political ideologies, or economic and educational difficulties, more people in the world are suffering from want and hunger than ever before. Such a situation is intolerable and contrary to the best interests of all nations. Therefore, any book which contributes to the improvement of world health, deserves wild publicity.

This is the objective of this book but in my humble opinion, it is achieved in a very limited way as the book only deals with health problems in rural communities in the Western hemisphere where such problems are totally different as compared to the health problems in the developing communities in Asia and Africa, where more than half the population of the world is without adequate food and shelter.

The book consists of short papers and discussions by doctors engaged in the field of Public Health from the United States, Puerto Rico and Brazil, who attended a Seminar at the Duke University in September, 1963.

There is a chapter on the accomplishments of the World Health Organisation in the Western hemisphere together with chapters on health objective in Brazil, Canada, and South-Eastern United States.

The papers on the responsibilities of the individual, physician and community and the role they have to play to solve health problems in rural communities are written by experienced doctors but one doubts if Public Health doctors working in other parts of the world would find anything new and constructive.

It is an enjoyable and an easy book to read, and gives one the impression that the participants at the Seminar found the papers and the discussion very fruitful.