Book Reviews

Anatomy: Regional and Applied, Seventh Edition, R.J. Last. Pp. 395. illustrated. Churchill Livingstone. Edinburgh. London. Melbourne. New York. 1984. £15.00.

Professor Last achieved fame and respect as a teacher of topographical anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons. Over the years, thousands of aspiring surgeons scraped their pennies together to learn from him, among other things, how to pass the Primary Fellowship.

Now in its 7th edition, his book continues to reflect these origins. To be sure, the author proclaims an unexceptionable philosophy, '... I have sought to exclude details that have neither practical application nor value in illustrating a general principle'. But the best part of a thousand words on the hyoid bone makes one wonder! There is little reference to living anatomy. The surface projections of the liver are not described, though the classical contention that its lower border follows the costal margin is repeated, despite the evidence of Ralph and colleagues from liver scans that this is commonly not the case. The description of the formation of the rectus sheath follows hallowed, though ill-founded lines, and so on. There is minimum reference to clinical considerations.

The colour plates are grouped at the beginning, an arrangement that may be economic of cost, but not of reader effort. A number of illustrations are black and white photographs of dissected parts, with selected features, e.g. nerves, superimposed upon them. Their clarity is not such as to make them as informative as the more customary drawings. There are few X-rays, let alone scans.

Numerous books of this kind exist, some better, some worse, but most little more than compendia of anatomical 'fact'. It is said that everyone has a book in them. Unhappily, anatomists seem to take this dictum more seriously than most. It does not follow, alas, that an inspired – and admired – teacher can *write*, select his material to fit the educational needs of today's students, and at the same time show evidence of sustained creative attitude and purpose.

Despite its distinguished parentage, this book is not to be recommended.

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Atlas of Gynaecological Diagnosis, A.F. Youssef, Pp.178, illustrated. Churchill Livingstone. Edinburgh, London, Melbourne, New York, 1984. £17.00.

This book consists of a collection of 386 colour photographs of macroscopically obvious gynaecological abnormalities. In addition there are 9 colposcopic photographs, 4 rather fuzzy colour photographs taken through a laparoscope, 8 reproductions of ultrasound scans and 9 reproductions of hysterosalpingographic X-rays. The illustrations all measure about 10×7 cm and are attractively distributed through the 174 pages of the book. The accompanying text describes in barest outline what the illustrations portray, something which is not always obvious because of their quality or the apparent reluctance to use special lenses for smaller lesions like herpetic ulcers of the vulva. Nowhere can one find any clinical details of the subjects photographed and another very distracting feature is that some photographs have no accompanying text at all while others are described in the caption of a picture which may be one or two pages back. It need hardly be said that the space allocated to illustrations of ultrasound, colposcopy and laparoscopy is just not adequate to deal in even the most superficial way with three enormously exciting growth areas in gynaecology and the 9 hysterosalpingographic plates chosen for printing do little justice to a method of investigation which still has some scope, albeit limited.

As one leafs through the book one becomes acutely conscious that what is important and interesting in gynaecology is not the recognition of gross lesions but an understanding of the way they present clinically and a discussion of their aetiology, pathology, differential diagnosis and treatment. A collection of photographs can only be of use to clinical teachers wishing to illustrate a point in a rather informal manner during a ward round, tutorial or seminar and under such circumstances this moderately priced book might just be quite useful. It is difficult to think of any other situations in which it might fulfil a need.

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