Book Reviews

Alimentary My Dear Doctor, edited by Clifford Hawkins. Cartoons drawn by John Moll. Pp. xii + 140. Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd., Oxford, 1988. £4.95 + 60p Postage and packing.

Many patients suffer symptoms that they believe to come from their gastroenterological tract. Last year, the General Practitioner Writers Association held a competition amongst its members for humorous writing about the guts of general practice. This volume is made up of the greater part of the submissions, comfortably edited and annotated by the adjudicator. There are fictional descriptions, bits of doggerel and gentle pastiches and most stories obviously derive from actual experience. The writing is free of jargon and the standard and the style varies from the mildly irritating to the gently amusing. I was struck by the masochistic pleasure with which some of the authors seemed to enjoy writing light-hearted accounts of their painful struggles to contain the somatic symptoms of patients plagued by insufferable discontent. Much of the writing captures the flavour of real-time practice and all too often I twinged with recognition of some of the regulars from my Monday morning surgery. Although nothing in the book made me laugh out loud, a wry smile never left me as I read it and you too will likely find pleasure in its pages.

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Annual Review of Microbiology, edited by L. Nicholas Ornston, Albert Balows and Paul Baumann. Pp. x + 794. Annual Reviews Inc. California, USA, 1988. \$34.00 (USA & Canada); \$38.00 (elsewhere). Price includes postage and handling.

Of all the pathology disciplines, microbiology draws on the most diverse scientific sources. Anyone who doubts this assertion should consult the *Annual Review of Microbiology* series, of which the 1988 volume is a worthy example. Forty-nine authors write on an extraordinary range of topics from which a mere virologist was able to select eleven of immediate interest to himself. Other readers will be rewarded by reviews of other topics but, whatever their choice, the expert authorship and careful editing guarantees an authoritative, up to date and judiciously referenced article.

The first review, a microbiologist's autobiography, reminds us how in 50 years the study of microbiology has changed from a club activity to an academic industry. In the following review David Tyrrell summarizes recent investigations of therapies for the common cold including several new coded antiviral preparations and the use of a humidified hair-dryer. It seems, nevertheless, that the rhinoviruses (over 100 serotypes now recognized) and associated respiratory viruses continue to maintain a comfortable lead over man's ingenuity in attempting to prevent or treat infection by them. Fellow virologists should not miss the chapters on Colorado tick-borne fever by Richard Emmons, on baculoviruses as

expression vectors by Lois Miller, on the assembly of viruses at the cellular membrane by Edmond Stephens and Richard Compans and on the simian immunodeficiency viruses by Roland Desrosiers. There is also a highly speculative chapter on the evolution of RNA viruses, and a paean to the Pasteur Institute and its role in vaccine development during its first hundred years.

So far as I could judge the same high standard is reflected by reviews in other fields e.g. of determinants of shigella pathogenicity, of disease due to aeromonads and plesiomonads, of microbial aetiology of the skin, of nosocomial fungal infections and of prospects for filariasis vaccines. In an era of high publishing costs this volume is a bargain at a little over £20 sterling. It is strongly recommended.

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Dictionary of Toxicology, Ernest Hodgson, Richard B. Mailman & Janice E. Chambers. Pp. ix + 395. Macmillan Reference Books (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hants), 1988. £39.50.

In a recent national daily newspaper a reviewer wrote, of a non-technical dictionary, that he forbore reading it, for fear of suffering insanity in consequence. That, too, is my excuse for doing no more with this similar work on toxicology than repeatedly delving into it. The result has been, I must confess, disappointing.

The manifold contributors to this volume are all based in the United States, while the references recommended are, with a few exceptions, of the same allegiance. So the whole tone, and not only the spelling, are North American. This may explain why the entries relating to British legislation are so unsatisfactory.

According to the dust cover this dictionary 'should be invaluable to graduate and undergraduate students and to scientists in disciplines outside toxicology'. The entries for which I might claim some personal understanding impressed me as being superficial and even unbalanced. Those from which I sought enlightenment nearly always left me baffled.

Maybe others may find this work of more use to them. I shudder at the thought of the manner in which politicians, so-called scientific and medical correspondents for the media and programme producers might exploit the information therein. I hesitate to recommend it.

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Doctors and their Careers, Isobel Allen. Pp. 385. Pinter Publishers Ltd, London, 1988. £24.95.

Any Room at the Top? Isobel Allen. Pp. 104. Policy Studies Institute, London, 1988. £4.95.

As more women enter medical school, the impact of their