

of peripheral neuropathy in slow inactivator patients taking this drug.

The genetics of mental illness form a still controversial section. The possibility is discussed of schizophrenia being explained, p. 228: "by invoking a polymorphic system, the disadvantage as regards biological fitness of those affected being offset by heterozygous advantage (*e.g.* alleged resistance to normal shock and allergy) in those with a single dose of the gene." We are left with the wise decision that, like so many aspects of this swiftly moving field of research, we must await further evidence, while keeping our minds open and receptive to unfamiliar and at times uncomfortable changes in basic medical and social philosophy.

There is a wealth of clinical information in this book that is of great importance to all who are in general or specialist practice; but it is to be hoped that its publication will not unduly delay the next edition of Professor Clarke's *Genetics for the clinician*, which for many will remain the key to the gateway of this highly relevant but still formidable aspect of medicine.

The science of social medicine. ALWYN SMITH, Ph.D., M.B., Ch.B., D.P.H., M.R.C.P. London. Staples Press. 1968. Pp. vii+214. Price £3 3s. 0d.

'Social medicine' is a descriptive term which is used in the loosest of ways. To some people it is medicine in the context of the group or family as opposed to 'clinical' medicine in the ward or at the bedside. By this definition many of the activities of the modern general practitioner would be included, and indeed it is hard to find a definition of social medicine which could exclude his work. Social medicine embraces the study of man in his environment, his illnesses which are failures to adapt to it, and the influence of both social and biological factors. It is concerned with the occurrence, spread and prevention of communicable disease as much at the level of a group practice list as a community of larger size.

Works on social medicine, and this is no exception, acknowledge that the general practitioner has a contribution to make to scientific research and then pass on to describe the work of local health authority departments or those in universities. Seldom is there evidence that any regard has been paid to work that has not been done in one of the two traditional contexts, institute or university department. In this book there is a list of 88 references to published work, none are found which recognizably arise from general practice. All this is not to say that Professor Alwyn Smith has not written an excellent book which will help many of us who are practising social medicine every day and wish to acquaint ourselves of research in collateral fields. We know that the principles on which sound scientific work

is based are equally applicable to non-departmental studies and in its 12 main chapters the book describes principles and illustrates them with clear accounts of published work.

The first part of the book is an historical introduction followed by accounts of the development of ideas and means for their validation by measurement. This part of the book is good reading for the practitioner who wishes to plan his own study. The second part is concerned with problems in conventional social medicine to which these principles have been applied, on both sides of the Atlantic, during the past decade. What are now becoming the standard reference papers in different aspects of the field are well summarized and the full range of social science, as seen from a university department, receives treatment.

Though in places reading is hard it is a rewarding task and one that can be recommended to the practitioner who is prepared to work not only at his subject but on the preliminary homework to his study. Whatever line he may wish to follow the reader may be sure of sound advice on principle and useful guidance on strategic planning. He will, too, in a world which is becoming increasingly preoccupied with the computer as the sole means of salvation in research, be grateful to the author for devoting no more than a page and a half to the subject.

Vitamins in the elderly. Report of the proceedings of a symposium held at the Royal College of Physicians, London, on 2 May 1968, sponsored by Roche Products Limited. Edited by A. N. EXTON-SMITH, M.A., M.D., M.R.C.P. and D. L. SCOTT, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., M.R.C.G.P. Bristol. John Wright & Sons Ltd. 1968. Pp. xi+99. Price 22s. 0d.

The question whether hypovitaminosis is a significant factor in the health of aged people in this country seems to be swelling from a debate into a controversy, and the papers and discussions reported in this edition do nothing to diminish the general brouhaha. The papers are all by experts in the subject and include G. F. Taylor's now well-known Farnborough experiment, but all attract a considerable amount of scepticism and some rough handling in the ensuing discussions—there is obviously as yet nothing like a consensus among the experts, and much more research will be needed before this is achieved.

The report is well worth reading, if only to understand the complexity of the subject, but it is clear that nowhere yet are the foundations strong enough to bear the weight of a therapeutic superstructure, and any reader expecting practical guidance from this symposium will be disappointed. The book is elegantly produced and edited.