

Dr Allan Young with radiology, Dr Geoffrey Storey with medical treatment and Mr Lindsay Symon with the surgical aspects.

The historical section confirms my early impressions. Although Victor Horsley did a laminectomy of a cervical vertebra in 1892, it was not until 1930 that the condition began to be widely recognized.

This is the second edition of the book. The more highly specialized anatomy has been omitted, and greater emphasis is placed on diagnosis and treatment. As a general practitioner I find it of absorbing interest and the section on treatment is of great value. Bed rest and on occasions continuous traction are recommended for the acute case. The less severe cases tend to run a self-limiting course and recover equally quickly whether treated by traction, collar or placebo. Signs of cord compression, if not relieved by lying flat for two to three weeks, are an indication for surgery. Vertebral-basilar ischaemia, often associated with spondylosis, may be helped by a collar and by avoiding provocative movements.

Cervical spondylosis has always tended to be a bit of a mystery—this book has rent the veil from the mystery.

The changing scene in general practice. LAURENCE DOPSON. London. Johnson. Pp. 248.

The general practitioner has had much with which to contend during the last 20 years. State medicine came and brought with it all the difficulties that changes in customs which had existed for centuries were bound to create. At the same time the advances in medical science brought other no less important changes. The kind of disease which the doctor meets today is vastly different from that which he was seeing before the second world war. Hospital care is easier to obtain acute illness such as pneumonia is quickly cured, even the common measles has lost much of its sting. Many more family doctors practise in groups and in so doing have ceased to some extent to be the guides, philosophers and friends of their patients that their predecessors were. The isolated doctor of the past, tied to his surgery with only the help of his wife may not have had so bad a time as has been pictured by such writers as Francis Bret Young, for there were fewer distractions and the telephone was not in those days a universal method of communication. The doctor had to be summoned by messenger, roads were not good, and horses might have to be saddled before he could be fetched. When he saw his patient he had little to offer in the way of cure: diagnosis and prognosis were his forte, comforting words and dietetic precepts, reinforced by galenicals were his *modus operandi*. Today he can prescribe potent remedies for most of the serious diseases which he meets, but he still remains powerless to deal with the lesser ills which beset mankind and truth to say he little understands them. To hedge himself off from the

necessity of meeting with this embarrassment he has surrounded himself with a team of helpers graced with the title of ancillary staff.

The book under review is written by a journalist who has specialized in medical politics and has watched from the side-lines the development of this revolution in medical practice. It is the struggles for better remuneration and conditions of service that especially interest him for it is those struggles that are newsworthy. During most of the time covered by his book another movement was developing; and attempt to bring the patient better service, and to the doctor greater satisfaction in his work. On this aspect of the revolution in practice the author is weak. He mentions the College of General Practice more or less in passing and gives the wrong date for its foundation, yet the effect of the college on the future of medical practice in this country has been great and is continuing.

One of the most valuable features of the book is the very complete list of references.

Blood coagulation simplified. Second edition. F. NOUR-ELDIN, Ph.D., M.B., B.Ch., L.M.S.S.A., M.R.C.Path. London. Butterworth & Co. Ltd. 1971. Pp. xii + 196. Price £2.00.

The appearance of a second edition of this small book soon after the first, pays a sincere tribute to its value for technicians and those students aspiring to pass final examinations in haematology. However, its use to the general practitioner is limited as much of the material is concerned with details of setting up and carrying out laboratory procedures.

The subject of blood coagulation is complex and still not fully understood and Dr Nour-Eldin, as one might expect from such a well known expert, presents the subject in a succinct fashion. The book starts with an outline of the basic principles of haemostasis, including an introductory historical account. The blood coagulation mechanism is described and this is followed by details of the laboratory requirements. A description of the various clotting factors is given, and the theories of their contribution to the coagulation mechanism is outlined in simple fashion. The role of the blood platelets, the vascular wall, clot stability, and the biochemical and biophysical factors and anticoagulants, are not forgotten and are described fully by the author, together with the relevant laboratory procedures.

In the next section of the book, the clinician will find the material of more direct interest and value in his daily work. Here the author gives brief outlines of the clinical application of the various defects in haemostasis as revealed by the laboratory tests which have already been described in the first section of the book.

The final section deals with thrombosis and makes the distinction between what happens

inside the normal circulation and what happens outside the body or after a change in the vascular wall. In this part of the book I believe that the paragraphs on antithrombotic therapy and its control would be found by the general practitioner reader to be the most helpful part of the book and in particular those pages dealing with the use of anticoagulants. The author finishes his book with a chapter on exercises and hints for the students about to prepare for oral, written and practical examinations in haematology, and there is no doubt that this is a most useful part of the book. A comprehensive bibliography is appended.

In summary, this short book is an excellent account of a complex subject presented in a manner suitable for the haematology student, but apart from those paragraphs which have been mentioned above, not of direct interest to the family doctor as the subject is specialized and rather technical.

The care and training of the mentally subnormal.

Fourth edition. CHARLES H. HALLAS, S.R.N., R.M.N., R.N.M.S., R.N.T. Bristol. John Wright & Sons Ltd. 1970. 286 pages. Price £2.60.

This book has been written as a textbook for nurses specialising in the care of the mentally subnormal and as such it is excellent. It covers every aspect of the problem in a most readable and positive way, the emphasis throughout being on ways and means of helping the mentally subnormal.

Some implications of steroid hormones in cancer.

D. C. WILLIAMS, Ph.D., F.R.I.C., and M. H. BRIGGS, D.Sc., Ph.D., A.R.I.C. London. William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd. May 1971. Pages 138. Price £2.60.

This small book gives an interesting account of a workshop meeting organized by The Marie Curie Memorial Foundation, and held in the University of Surrey at Guildford. It is the second of an occasional series of these meetings devoted to topics of current interest in the study of malignant disease, the object being to bring together workers of different disciplines within the same general field of research, and to span the wide gulf between the clinical and scientific approaches to cancer.

Mr R. W. Raven, surgeon to The Marsden Hospital states: "At the present rate of progress it may take at least another 50 years before these diseases are fully understood and that period may be optimistic". Mr Raven, however, feels that "Cancer prevention now offers important immediate results; research is for the long term, we are moving with confidence into the field of prevention of cancer which is likely to prove the final solution".

In the opening paper on "Steroids in relation to breast cancer in human females" Mr Raven gives a brilliant outline of the surgical and clinical aspects of a problem all too familiar to general

practitioners. He also asks some of the questions we all wish to see answered. Why are men so infrequently affected and women so often? He also poses the question as to the reason that the female susceptibility increases uniformly with age? How can we explain the protection against carcinoma afforded by the parous state, and yet the increased risk when the first child is born with the mother under 20 years of age?

Raven notes that in male relatives of breast cancer patients prostate cancer is more common than in the control population, and suggests also that "The epidemiologist should not collect data about the present uses of oestrogens, such as in foods, cosmetics, and in the contraceptive pill". He continues "It is impossible to forecast the possible long-term effects of the pill steroids on the breast and other organs, but complacency about them is unwarranted." He reports the occurrence of carcinoma of the male breast following prolonged oestrogen administration to several patients with cancer of the prostate, and makes the point that secretions from the adrenal cortex and hypophysis may also play their part because "following oophorectomy there is progressive hyperplasia of the adrenal cortex, producing extragenital oestrogens.

In his concluding paragraph Mr Raven writes "Information is desired about the incidence of breast carcinoma in women who have received steroids for benign conditions, and especially concerning the possible cancer risk of the contraceptive pill."

Much wider ground is covered in the nine papers and the discussions all of which are well worth careful reading; it includes cancer of the large bowel and of the kidney, but space must limit comment to those with special and urgent applications to a disease which kills 100,000 persons annually in England and Wales.

Dr R. J. B. King of The Imperial Cancer Research Fund, London, writes on "Are oestrogens carcinogens?", and again leaves us with a big question mark. Mr Raven in his concluding remarks reminds us that history usually repeats itself and "I personally feel that malignant disease will fall into line with the other great killing diseases of the past and that it will prove to be a preventable disease". Many readers will echo Mr Raven's sense of history, and will recall the early work of Dr William Budd on the typhoid carriers in the Devon village of North Tawton. Today there is need for a realistic study of the heritable, emotional and environmental aspects of cancer that calls for contributions from general practitioner participation in future Workshop Meetings.

It is possible that through such field-work cancer may join typhoid fever in the list of killing diseases that, through the work of a Family Doctor, have been illuminated and later controlled, long before a final understanding and a "cure" has been achieved.