

**Research in diseases of the tropics.** Ed. C. E. GORDON SMITH, C.B., M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C. PATH. *British Medical Bulletin*. 1972. Vol. 28, No. 1. London: The British Council. Price: £2.25.

Many general practitioners have a commitment to look after visitors and immigrants from almost any part of the world. All have to look after returning holiday-makers. Many of these patients come from tropical areas and they arrive in the United Kingdom, and often in our consulting rooms, only a few hours or days after leaving their area of departure.

A wide knowledge of disorders common in the tropics is now obligatory. This knowledge must extend throughout the whole range of 'burned out' disease, chronic disease, acutely presenting episodes, and diseases in the phase of incubation.

While neither useful nor intended as a text book of diseases of the tropics commonly seen in this country, the *Bulletin* provides a compact source of information about recent advances in a selected number of these. Important references to further reading are given in abundance.

Some conditions commonly seen in the United Kingdom such as the dysenteries, enteric fevers, trachoma, and yaws—this last usually but not always 'burned out'—are not covered. Others such as tuberculosis, hookworm, giardiasis, sickle cell and other anaemias and haemoglobinopathies are not dealt with in as much depth as we need.

However, excellent papers are dedicated to malaria, schistosomiasis, protein-calorie malnutrition, leprosy, leishmaniasis, and trypanosomiasis among others. Epidemiological changes are occurring because of urbanization, human migration, road building and easier transportation. The results of progress are sometimes surprising. In tropical Asia a new epidemic and fatal form of dengue fever has emerged. The provision of piped water supplies has reduced domestic water storage places, but *Aedes aegypti* has found extensive new breeding grounds in an increasing urban litter of tin cans and discarded motor tyres.

For those who wish to delve deeper, and many general practitioners do, there are exotic subjects to delight the mind and to fill with interest and wonder those few hours of contemplation left to us: chikungunya and other arbovirus diseases, the ability now to study leprosy in mice rendered immunologically incompetent by thymectomy and whole-body irradiation, the triatomid bug and Chagas' disease, onchocerciasis, and filariasis.

Medical understanding, health education, and medical care are being mobilized in the developing tropical areas at a level that involves an unavoid-

able mixture of primitive expedience and sophisticated technology.

With greater awareness and knowledge, more disorders of tropical origin or accent will be detected in and relieved through general practice, and this *Bulletin* will help towards that objective.

**The Child: A textbook for the paediatric team.**

J. RENDLE-SHORT, M.A., M.D., M.R.C.P., M.R.A.C.P., D.C.H. (1971). Pp. 200. John Wright and Sons Ltd. Price: £2.25.

To the British general practitioner the subtitle of this book is impelling—for he has waited a long time for one which provided an integrating approach to the hospital and community care of children.

He is quickly disappointed, however; for the purpose of this book, the preface explains, is to provide "a good acquaintanceship with the general management of children" for members of a paediatric team comprising "speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical social workers, dieticians and even teachers in special kindergarten schools and hospital schools".

The book is in six sections: general (comprising a collection of chapters on social and developmental paediatrics); the perinatal period; infections and respiratory disorders; mental and neurological disorders; behaviour problems; systemic diseases. The attempt to cover such ground in 177 pages inevitably creates a danger of superficiality; and superficiality breeds imprecision. The reader will have no difficulty in finding examples of both in the first section.

In the chapter dealing with congenital abnormalities, the author does not do justice to the difficulties and defects of the "at risk register" (which, after all, can be stated quite succinctly); nor to the possibilities of total population screening of children. Indeed, writing of phenylketonuria, he remarks: "Ideally one of these (screening) tests should be performed on all newborn babies. This becomes especially important if the child is at risk, that is if he has an affected relation". Have we not, surely reached the stage where this is a routine, mandatory, part of good clinical practice?

An interdisciplinary literature is greatly needed in medicine. But the difficulties facing any specialist who undertakes to write for an audience outside his own immediate discipline are well illustrated in this book. As a "spin off" the book also illustrates the artificiality of drawing lines around the hospital based team instead of looking at the total needs of the child and the team that is needed to provide for them.