

Asthma—attitude and milieu. First edition. A. LASK, M.A., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., D.P.M., M.R.C.G.P. London. Tavistock Publications Ltd. Philadelphia and Montreal. J. P. Lippincott Co. 1966. Pp. 237. Price 35s. 0d.

This book is an "attempt by a group of general practitioners to discover what sort of people their asthmatics were".

The doctors classified asthmatic patients by their attitudes as 'demanding babies' (15 per cent); 'going their own way' (70 per cent); and 'hands off' (15 per cent). Some patients had intermediate or changing attitudes, and asthma was sometimes seen as a 'disguised plea for help'.

The second part of the book deals with the environment of the patients' especially the family situations and personal relationships involved. Nothing pathognomonic was found. A section on therapy dismisses briefly the actions of drugs, and deals at much greater length with the effects of psychotherapy. A general section covers the natural history of asthma and discusses the meaning and significance of the disease. No universal psychopathology is found.

The book is an interesting discussion of asthma from the psychological point of view and, although it enlarges the doctor's appreciation in this direction, it offers little of practical help in the management of the disease. It is more likely to help the doctor to feel he understands his asthmatics better, than it is to help him to dispel their predominant symptom.

The early diagnosis of the acute abdomen. Thirteenth edition. SIR ZACHARY Cope, B.A., M.D., M.S., F.R.C.S. London. Oxford University Press. 1968. Pp. 202. Price 28s. 0d.

This classic was published first by its still-living author a year before I was born! I read it with pleasure as a student, I read it with emphasis as a houseman and registrar and I read it with reflection and reawakened joyful reminiscences as a senior general practitioner.

What makes Cope's "Acute Abdomen" such an accepted classic? It is short, it is lucid, it is accurate and it is written by a teacher with the necessary and required skills that enable readers to benefit from his experience.

There are no figures, no tables, no histograms and no statistics—it was written before medical statistics were invented!

It demonstrates the beauty and the skills of clinical acumen and insight. It stresses the fact, which needs stressing and re-stressing, that medicine, in its widest context, is still an art and that its best practitioners are generalists.

As a general practitioner I am sorry to find that there are a few modern specialists who can take the places of the old consultants such as Lord Horder, Sir Arthur Hurst, Dr G. E. Beaumont and Sir Zachary Cope. The moderns I use as my technicians for specific jobs, the consultants of the past I sought out for their overall sense and sensibility.

Although the "acute abdomen" is not frequently seen in general practice its accurate "early diagnosis" rests with the general practitioner. Sir Zachary's 13th edition should be read as a refresher to remind us of the problems and to instruct us in the art of accurate diagnosis.