

Book reviews

The tissues of the body. Sixth edition. W. E. LE GROS CLARK, F.R.S. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. Pp. 1+424. Price £3.25.

This popular textbook continues to be revised with regularity. Although the general practitioner does not have to remember the details of anatomy, he should keep himself abreast of the increasing knowledge of the basic sciences on which his diagnoses and treatment are founded. In this book he will find all that he wishes to know expressed in a lucid and interesting manner. A useful present for the son or daughter who is studying biology or medicine.

Virgin Wives; a study of unconsummated marriages by LEONARD J. FRIEDMAN. Social science paperbacks. Foreword by MICHAEL BALINT. Tavistock publications. London. Pp. xiv+162.

This is the paperback of the book first published in 1962. It is a review of a hundred unconsummated marriages which were discussed at seminars held by the late Dr Michael Balint. Ten women doctors presented cases which they had dealt with in their family practices or in family planning clinics. The result of the research has been written up by Dr Friedman who was not himself otherwise implicated. After describing the origins of the project, he gives a review of the literature which he finds scanty and superficial. The body of the book consists of the presentation and analysis of case histories. This is an extremely delicate subject, yet it is dealt with clearly, cleanly and with sympathy. The patients are classified into those who "specialize in the defence of 'not knowing' about sexuality", those who are aggressive and for whom loving and fighting are confused, those who wished for a baby without intercourse, whose concern for the mother-child relationship outweighed their desire to be wives to their husbands. Folklore is brought in to make the narrative more interesting, but this is hardly necessary in a work on a subject so replete with human tragedy. Here we find one of the best expositions of the cult of Balintology, and yet the outcome in many cases was unsuccessful. The value of this book lies in the number of minutely related histories which will lead those doctors who are likely to meet problems of this kind to consider them with greater understanding. Dr Friedman has largely escaped the danger of banality and is to be congratulated on the clear prose in which he writes. Only once, in describing the result of treatment does he lapse. The patient had an aversion to looking at her husband's body and this was partially altered by treatment in that she could now look at him from the back only; "this suggests an unconscious wish to deny the difference

between the sexes—from the back, men and women look more similar".—And doubtless, like the grand old Duke of York, she found it less exciting.

Whether or not he is a fan of Balint, this is a book which will reward all practising doctors.

Recent advances in paediatrics. Forth edition. Edited by DOUGLAS GAIRDNER and DAVID HULL. London. J. & A. Churchill. Pp. 567. £6.00.

In their preface the editors comment on the growth of 'the literature' from which such books as *Recent Advances in Paediatrics* are made. As they point out, this edition lists some 2,500 references, more than three times as many as in each of the first two editions in 1954 and 1958. These references clearly indicate the current areas of interest and growth in paediatrics, and from them the 15 contributors have culled 16 solid and informative papers.

As might be expected six of the 16 papers are on foetal and neonatal subjects, three of them on respiratory problems. The rest are somewhat more general—the assessment of respiratory function, endocrine function, the nephrotic syndrome, diabetes mellitus, seizure disorders, immunology, malnutrition, and the genetics of common malformations.

All these papers are deep and detailed; it would need experts at least the equals of their authors to make any full and valid criticism. But there are many nuggets of wise and interesting comment alongside the more highly specialized detail for those with a special interest in, and concern for, children and small babies. While this may not be a book for the family doctor's consulting-room shelf, it surely merits a place in the library of the postgraduate centre.

The struggle for the Ministry of Health. FRANK HONIGSBAUM. London. G. Bell & Sons. 1971. Pp. 9+80. Price £1.50.

The Ministry of Health was formed in 1919. To most of us looking back, the wonder is that it was so short a time ago that it started its quite essential work. What happened before that? And why should there have been a struggle to get it when it seems so logical an institution. That it should have been combined with another department caused some misgivings when it happened two years ago: Government is a curious institution and the bureaucratic mind sometimes difficult to understand. This little book explains just how difficult it can be. The state control of the health services was a slowly evolving process. From the time of the plague onwards the government sought the advice of the College of Physicians when epidemics

threatened. When the Poor Law was reformed the medical branch of the service was strengthened and placed under the control of the Poor Law commissioners who later became the Poor Law Board and in succession the Local Government Board whose officers were turned over to the Ministry of Health when that department was formed in 1919. The municipalities were progressing along similar lines from the time when they were given a degree of self government by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and as time passed they took over the title and duties of the Local Sanitary Authorities; their functions were later supervised by the Local Government Board. It was, however, the reports of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law of 1909 which made the need for reform obvious, and the greatest interest and stimulus came from the minority report of the Webbs. Action, as far as the Poor Law was concerned, was becoming increasingly necessary and the outbreak of war in 1914 only delayed the formation of the Ministry by a short time. But, and it is here that this review by Dr Honigsbaum is so revealing, the intrigues which went on in the corridors of power were long and tortuous. In 1912 a new power entered the lists: the friendly societies whose influence had surprised Lloyd George were now banded together under the protection of the National Health Insurance Commission. The appalling infant mortality made some change for the better necessary. Nobody denied the need for a health ministry, and everybody wished to have his own department raised in stature. Details of this struggle for power is the theme of this pamphlet. It is stiff reading and the way that the material is laid out makes the understanding of what really happened difficult. Dr Honigsbaum tells the story in six short chapters, but to each one he has attached footnotes—some longer than the main paragraphs on the page. He has appended notes on the lives of the chief characters and this again caused the reader to be constantly having to refer on to find out about them. Useful in giving an insight into a phase of our history during which the dark clouds of war were casting all domestic affairs into the shade, and, for the sociologist, valuable for the fresh material rescued from the dark vaults of the ministry. For the rest of us not so informative.

A survey on attitudes to general practice. A report from the Central General Practitioners Committee of the Medical Association of New Zealand. New Zealand. The Medical Association of New Zealand. 1970. Pp. 9+64. Price \$1.00 (N.Z.).

It is not difficult to demonstrate the state of a discipline, to show how many people are working in it, and to portray their distribution in terms of age, sex, country of birth, medical school and associated factors. Unfortunately, such a study makes little contribution to knowledge of the causes of dissatisfaction and a deficit in the numbers of practising doctors is unlikely to be

made good without such knowledge.

This New Zealand study has taken advantage of the home growing of New Zealand doctors to trace the changes in their attitudes to general practice as medical undergraduates become junior hospital residential staff. A substantial contribution is thus made to our knowledge of courses. The results of this survey should be compared with the ASME project¹ which looked at 9,000 UK medical undergraduates in 1961 and 1966 and the about to be published studies of the BMA Planning Unit of UK general practitioners and Margot Jeffreys' study of general practitioners in Camden Town.

The New Zealand study both resembles these of the UK and yet sharply differs. We have so many undergraduates from overseas, they so few. We have begun to implement in our country some of the cures which we have identified for the short-fall in recruitment to general practice which appears to exist in every developed country.

The authors have discovered the heart of the problem, the absence or denigration of general practice as an accepted university discipline demonstrated by an independent department in the medical school. They suggest that undergraduates should spend electives in general practice in the latter years of their undergraduate curriculum. Too late of course. Pavlov Hospital has by then conditioned his puppies so that having defined the problem they suggest an inferior solution. Even so, this is a welcome advance on the thinking of some schools in UK. The comments on the abuses of the pre-registration year are domestic and valid, yet it does not appear to be sufficiently stressed that this period of learning was never intended to be specifically vocational for any discipline.

What seems difficult to justify is the extrapolation to New Zealand of the results of a study essentially undertaken in Otago via the Medical School at Dunedin. Nevertheless, the study is important for New Zealand and by that same token one which must be read by any who are concerned with education and training for general practice.

¹Report of Royal Commission on medical education, 1965-68. London. Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Appendix 19.

A colour atlas of general pathology. First edition. G. AUSTIN GRESHAM, T.D., M.D., SC.D., M.A., M.R.C.PATH. London. Wolfe Medical Books. 1971. Pp. 1+365. Price £3.75.

This is one of a series of colour atlases, if the standard here achieved is maintained the student of medicine will be well served. A series of colour reproductions of pathological processes is at first sight of little use to the practising doctor but it can do nothing but good to be reminded of the process of disease as revealed under the microscope,—a book to buy for the medical student and in which to browse before making the presentation. At today's prices for colour reproductions it is most reasonable.