

BOOK REVIEWS

Medical Education—A critical approach (1973).

SIMPSON, MICHAEL A. London: Butterworths. Price: £2.90.

When asked to review a book on medical education, one's heart does not inevitably dance with the daffodils. If one is fascinated by clinical medicine, by patients' problems, by the administrative techniques involved in the delivery of good primary medical care, medical educationism is quite often like Aunt Agatha—without reproach but without savour, full of virtue but rather dull.

But this little book has many virtues and is not at all dull. Indeed, it is so elegant and even exciting to read, that it risks losing the respectability that its good sense, its many references and its basic enthusiasm all deserve. Perhaps a few quotations from the book will most effectively show the calibre of the writing.

"... until recently some anatomy departments exacted a sort of droit de seigneur of 900 hours."

"It has been suggested that the practitioner today has been overtrained for the job he is doing and undertrained for the job he is supposed to do."

I enjoyed the advice on how to improve the resistance of senior men to change:

"Adopt the innovation with at least some show of pleasure and with many public exclamations of delight at the heady experience of moving bravely into the future. However, after careful study of the unwelcome new system, ensure that it has inadequate funds, equipment, space, time and personnel. Then, after a suitable interval, you will be able to give it up with well-publicised regret and return to your normal procedures.

This technique is a very successful means of resisting change, and could be compared with changing British drivers to the continental system of driving on the right-hand side of the road, but, for an initial trial period, applying this to buses only!"

New systems and departments of medical education "must be independent of old vested interests and well beyond the reach of the arrièregarde, lest they leap into them, as several have already done, with the awful idealism and selfless energy of protesting developers discovering a new slum."

"The naive writer of MCQ tests, for example, often provides so many unwitting clues to his intentions, as to bias the results. Miller quotes a doctor of education who, using the clues revealed by the wording of an examination in clinical pathology, scored 81 per cent. His secretary is recorded as having become equally adept at earning high scores."

This mixture of good writing, fascinating quotations, and a genuine message add up indeed to what John Butterfield in his preface calls "abrasiveness". But the book makes the point well that such abrasiveness is long overdue and that some of the scientific detachment and analysis

of our clinical attitude must, no matter how painful the process, be deployed on a good baleful look at our inefficient, ill-developed and outdated routines still surviving in so many medical schools.

This book is to be recommended to all those who struggle in the toils of an old curriculum or in the commando-like assaults essential to bringing in a revised one. Of course Simpson does not emphasise that many very good doctors come from our medical schools even if this is in spite of the teaching rather than because of it. It is a little iconoclastic and one-sided. But it has moved me, taught me a lot, and should be required reading for all Deans of Medical Schools and all heads of departments—and just to add to the unrest, to the students also!

It is so effective a document, emanating from such a lively mind, that I have one fear: that in less than three years the author will be thousands of miles away from Guy's, profitably and happily employed on the other side of the Atlantic.

E. WILKES

Iatrogenic diseases. (1972). First edition. D'ARCY, P. F. and GRIFFIN, J. P. Pp. viii+208. London: Oxford University Press. Price: boards edition: £5.00; paper covers: £3.50.

The pharmacological explosion of the last 50 years has stimulated a whole new department of enquiry, that of the adverse reactions and inter-reactions of drugs within the body and of doctor-induced, or iatrogenic diseases. It is no longer possible to prescribe even a relatively simple and familiar preparation without reference to the patient's general condition, his genetic history, his known sensitivities and most important, to the drugs he may already be taking.

The medical press in all parts of the world is full of reports of bizarre responses to therapy, and at times it almost seems as if the study of adverse effects of drugs has assumed more importance than the study of their worth—until it is remembered that it is no part of the doctor's function to make the ill patient worse, and that even the most unlikely after-effect of drug dosage may lead to discoveries which both protect and benefit.

Professor D'Arcy, of the Department of Pharmacology at Belfast, and Dr Griffin, of the Medicines Division of the Department of Health, have combined their experience and knowledge to produce a book which attempts to cover, within a reasonable compass, most that is known about disorders due to the administration of drugs, and their success is remarkable.

Prefacing the work with an amusing salvo against polypharmacy, they devote the first two chapters to a review of the epidemiological aspects of iatrogenic disease, and to drug interaction in general. The discrepancy between the relatively high incidence of drug-induced reactions found in

individual studies and the published official figures suggests to the authors that there may be a general failure to notify adverse reactions—a reminder that the Committee on Safety of Medicines cannot monitor adverse reactions without regular reports on their yellow cards.

The effect of age, sex, genetic factors, blood groups and disease states on the incidence of side-effects are surveyed, and there is a section on drug hypersensitivity and cross-sensitivity which concisely highlights a relatively new problem. The survey of drug interactions ends with a useful table of examples listed by groups of drugs.

The rest of the book follows a systematic pathological approach, so that, for example, skin diseases (a chapter contributed by Dr A. McQueen), blood dyscrasias and lung diseases are dealt with in separate chapters, as are disorders of porphyrin metabolism, carbohydrates and fat metabolism, and water and mineral balance. Each chapter ends with recommended further reading and a list of references that testifies to the immense pains the authors have taken to cover the ground in such surprising detail for a relatively small book.

The treatment of each subject is a well-judged blend of pharmacology, therapeutics and clinical medicine. It is an interesting sidelight on the intense activity in this subject that the inevitable gap between the writing and publication of even as complete a book as this should result in the omission of a few topics which have recently concerned clinical pharmacologists, but this does not detract from its value. It ends with a cross-index of official and proprietary names, and a general index which is more than usually thorough.

The standard works of reference on drug-induced disease are so compendious as to be daunting to the general reader. This work surveys the field in enough detail to keep interest stimulated, but successfully avoids the pitfalls of prolixity. I was left with many sober reflections on the responsibilities that lie with those who prescribe, and if the authors had the encouragement of therapeutic simplicity in their minds as they wrote, they have amply succeeded. There can be few general practitioners who will not find this book a valuable safeguard against the hazards of prescribing.

M. J. LINNETT

A history of the Royal College of Physicians of London (1972). Volume three. COOKE, A. M. Pp. 1247. Oxford: The Clarendon Press for the Royal College of Physicians. Price: £5.00.

This volume—presumably the last—brings the history of the senior of the Royal Colleges from 1858 to 1948: 90 years covering the most momentous years in the history of medicine, not only in its progress as a science but also in the development of practice.

The Medical Act of 1858 made the registration of medical practitioners compulsory and set up the

General Medical Council. This was followed by a series of great Public Health Acts, and then came the National Health Insurance legislation of 1911, to which the National Health Service Act of 1946 was a natural sequel. There is so much to expound and so much that the reader will want to know about how the Royal College reacted to all these events that the author must have been sorely pressed to decide what to include and what to leave out. Sir George Clarke who had so skilfully written the first two volumes reluctantly declined the authorship of this volume and Dr A. M. Cooke has succeeded him. Seldom has a change of author been accomplished so smoothly. Dr Cooke brings to this particular volume personal knowledge of many of the events about which he writes. The first two volumes were valuable additions to our understanding of the progress of medical practice, and the present one is equally important.

Over the centuries the College has had its ups and downs, and has often seemed to be dragging its feet in the path of progress. One of its more endearing attitudes during the last century was its opposition to specialism; the physician was in its eyes physician to the whole body and his learning should be wide. Thus it was that it opposed the project to form a college of obstetricians. Even today the College aims at a membership of physicians well-grounded in the art; it expects specialisation to come later. It is surely right in this.

The great medicopolitical reforms which are still in living memory were too disturbing to be ignored by the College. These are dealt with at some length. The rôle of the president in the negotiations which preceded the inception of the National Health Service is clearly stated. After reading these pages those who were opposed to the service and prepared to wreck it before giving it a chance to start will read again of the tortuous negotiations in which the late Lord Moran played so prominent a part, and, in the comparative peace of the present, will come perhaps to a better understanding of what he wished to achieve. That he was re-elected president in the middle of the negotiations is evidence that he had the majority of his colleagues behind him.

As the shape of medical practice evolved, the College may not always have taken a leading part, but its concern for a satisfactory standard of medical education is demonstrated by its relationship with London University and the General Medical Council. The examinations for its licence and its membership were the main sources of revenue for the College; it was important that candidates should present themselves in sufficient numbers and the competition of London University required to be carefully watched. The fluctuation in the numbers of candidates over the years makes an interesting commentary on the importance in which the College was regarded during these decades.

This is a valuable historical survey of medical