

Textbook of geriatric medicine and gerontology (1973). BROCKLEHURST, J. C. Pp. 760. Edinburgh & London: Churchill Livingstone. Price: £16.00.

The appearance of this large and expensive volume marks the coming of age in this country of geriatric medicine. There are 44 contributors, all distinguished doctors and scientists, with celebrated names from Paris, Nijmegen and Turku, who impart to it a European flavour.

The book is divided into three sections. There is first a section on gerontology, since some understanding of the fundamental processes of ageing is essential not only as a background to those engaged in geriatric medicine, but as a research interest for all who would advance the frontiers of knowledge in human development. As a section the bewildering complexities of ageing phenomena from macromolecular cross-link damage right up to population and ethnic variants are reported as faithfully as one could wish, although much of the material must be incomprehensible except to those already specialised in the same field.

The second section is devoted to geriatric medicine, and forms more than three quarters of the book. It is here that the general reader is able to formulate distinct opinions as to the value of this book to him, and there is little doubt that he will be very disappointed. Subject matter crystallises round each author with very little regard for the reader. For instance, the largest section on the central nervous system does nothing to help the perplexed physician faced with a healthy elderly patient who shows neurological deficits which would be pathological in a younger patient.

There is no section on examination technique which is, in the elderly, a specialised procedure, both in its order and emphasis. One has a distinct impression that in trying to say a bit about everything, this encyclopaedic work does not say much about anything. Paget's disease, for instance, is not dealt with as an entity, but in three sections, each of which is inadequate, and none of which mention the radiological features. Another disease of late life that the enquiring clinician might look up is polymyalgia rheumatica. Here again it is dealt with under diseases of joints, and muscle, by two different authors. There is no mention of the E.S.R. and its relevance, nor of the diurnal fluctuation so characteristic of this condition. Herpes zoster is dealt with on p. 181 in three short paragraphs devoted to its neuropathology and complications. Genuiculate zoster is not mentioned, and one finds that more is written on the same page concerning the rare and esoteric Jakob-Creutzfeldt disease! If one looks up giant cell arteritis in the index one is referred to 'arteritis' only to find that this is an entry which does not exist! Eventually perseverance is rewarded by finding the entry 'Arteries, temporal' to which there are two short entries.

The third section on Medical and Community Care is written almost entirely from the hospital physician's point of view, except for two or three

pages on the social services by a reader in industrial sociology. The role of the general practitioner is almost totally ignored except as a referring agency and is the most surprising omission of all from this uneven work. There have been many important contributions to the literature of geriatric medicine and community care by general practitioners, some of which have appeared in this *Journal*. It is astonishing that no one from this field was invited to contribute and bring balance to a work which by all other standards is encyclopaedic.

The book is beautifully produced and printed, but at 2.1p per page this is to be expected. However, some of its bulk could have been reduced, and its readability enhanced by using numbered references, instead of using names and dates in parenthesis throughout the text, an extravagance which probably adds more than ten pages to the print.

There is no question of recommending this book to general practitioners, until it is recast in a future edition; There are fine sections of course, particularly Bourliere on the ecology of human senescence, Fitzgerald on diabetes, Post on psychiatric disorders, and Irvine on thyroid disorders, although one is bound to take issue with Fitzgerald's assertion that a single blood glucose reading in excess of 180 mg per 100 ml is conclusive evidence of diabetes, without warning the reader of the need to exclude other endocrinopathies, and the effects of certain drugs. But specialist excellence does not compensate for the failure to acknowledge that general practitioners, aided by health visitors, district nurses, and social workers, home helps, mobile meals services and voluntary agents care for the majority of elderly people. For the people dealing with the every day medical and social problems related to the ageing patient, much of the information so assiduously dredged up for this book is purely marginal. It belongs to the library of the ivory tower.

M. KEITH THOMPSON

Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco in Britain. Compiled by ZACUNE, JIM and HENSMAN, CELIA. Pp.x-240. London: William Heinemann Medical Books Limited. Price: £4.00.

Here we have a sort of Whittaker's Almanac to these vexations. Physicians and politicians alike will browse happily among this harvest of statistics and curious detail. Be his hobby-horse never so frail, here he will find substance to sustain it. This is in reality a reference book of the facts and figures of the subject of addiction. It is no fault of the compilers, who state that they have avoided making comments on the material that they have collected, that *res ipse loquitur*, leaving the reader with a taste in the mouth similar to that imparted by over-indulgence in the substances described.

In the introduction we read "One and the same country spends £2,000 million a year on the alco-

hol it drinks, takes £900 million taxed revenue from those sales, and lays out over £20 million on advertising alcoholic drinks and the pleasures of the pub. Its liquor consumption climbs.

“ The same country—its left hand largely ignorant of its right hand—admits to hospital 7,000 alcoholics each year, some of these to its 14 specialised treatment units for alcoholism, makes over 80,000 arrests each year for public drunkenness, estimates that over 40 per cent of its prison population and 60 per cent of its vagrants have a serious drinking problem and makes 30,000 annual arrests for drunken driving.

The country employs over 80,000 people in the brewing and distilling industry, and there are more

than 125,000 licensed premises; . . . The amount that the same country spends on educating the public as to the nature of safe and dangerous drink is vestigial, and there appears to be only scant official concern directed toward prevention of alcoholic casualty. And so the story unfolds. . .”

Oh, that Jonathan Swift were alive today to dress those facts in the manner that they deserve. But then few would credit any such far fetched a tale.

Giving a lecture on drink or drugs or smoke? Get this book. If then you have the face to pontificate you will at least be armed for the venture.

R. M. S. MCCONAGHEY

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