

century, and likely to become even more important."

A definitive text has certainly been attempted and any medical library would be poorer without this book. It is well written, contains many moving personal accounts, and uses great narrative skill to link diverse experiences from different times and places. I was nevertheless left with discomfort—perhaps they try too hard. Many reasons may be offered, but mine are as follows: the dangers to society which the authors see from over population, damage to unwanted children, and restriction of women's freedom must be refuted, and therefore facts are assembled from which the refutation should follow logically; unfortunately, the opposing view (that life is sacrosanct from conception) is not refuted when the disadvantages of a very restrictive abortion policy are pointed out. Therefore the authors give double the number of facts that are needed in the hope that the opposing edifice will tumble eventually through sheer weight.

I see no likelihood that the unborn child will cease to be protected in the foreseeable future, whether by societies which exist for that purpose, or by the attitudes of millions of women throughout the world. In other words, I judge this book as a failure in propaganda terms, but a mine of information. It may be merely unfortunate that as you, Mr Editor, and I both served as general practitioners on the Lane Committee, one such nugget suggested, by referring to "a general practitioner" (p. 314), that either you, Sir, or I, do not exist!

D. G. WILSON

Reference

Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act (1974). Chairman, Hon. Mrs Justice Lane. Report. London: HMSO.

CORONARY CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

Aubrey Colling (ed.)

Croom Helm, London (1977)
226 pages. Price £12.95

The debate on the best place to manage myocardial infarction continues fitfully and sporadically but few now believe that a clear consensus will emerge. This account of the proceedings of a National Workshop held in Teesside in 1976 adds little that is new, and the original work that is referred to has been published elsewhere.

It is divided into four sections: community care, giving coronary care, guidelines for general practitioners, and

rehabilitation and prevention in general practice. Despite the editor's intention to avoid repetition, a statement about the natural history of myocardial infarction precedes almost every section.

The quality of the sections is as variable as one would expect. Professor R. M. Acheson's thoughtful review and Dr Jennifer Adgey's account of pre-hospital care are both readable and enjoyable. The section on prevention, which the editor admits he found difficult, is idiosyncratic and strange.

Reviewing this book gives me another opportunity to protest about the phrase *acute* myocardial infarction. Please, what is a *chronic* infarct?

There are one or two surprising statements, for example, Mackenzie is alleged to have recognized very few cases. While it is true that he did not completely understand the process, anyone reading his work soon realizes that he saw a large number of infarcts. The recommendations of the Working Party on the Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease of the Royal College of Physicians and the British Cardiac Society (1976) are misinterpreted in respect of the role of the general practitioner in identifying those at risk. The thesis of the working party was that the general practitioner, because he saw almost all of his patients over a period of years, could theoretically identify those at risk without the need for 'screening' by nurses or other agencies.

Figure 1, based on the Teesside Survey, shows the effect of age on place of treatment but is clearly a biased example as the number of cases analysed falls with age whereas the survey confirmed an increasing incidence with advancing age.

There are good things in this book, but they are like the cherries in a cherry cake, not the greater part. It provides a useful summary of present knowledge and practice but cannot, at a cost of almost £13, be strongly recommended to the ordinary reader.

J. S. McCORMICK

Reference

Royal College of Physicians of London and British Cardiac Society (1976). *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians*, 10, 213-275.

A DICTIONARY OF MEDICAL ETHICS AND PRACTICE

William A. R. Thomson

John Wright and Sons
Bristol (1977)

264 pages. Price £10

Reviewing a dictionary might seem to be

a daunting and difficult task but in fact this need not be so. Not all are books of desiccated knowledge through which one can catch an occasional glimpse of the author, for here is a fascinating treatise on all that is controversial in medicine. It is a skilfully and painstakingly researched book of facts spiced throughout with rich layers of opinion. Indeed, since there is, as the author notes, "less of a moral consensus in society at large", the main conclusion to be drawn from this dictionary is that the so called 'code' of ethics is nothing but a conglomeration of opinions.

William Thomson, a senior statesman among editors and surely the doyen of medical lexicographers, has written, rather than compiled, statements on several hundred topics, all of them controversial and all about situations where the doctor may run into trouble with society. Not only does he deal with subjects of obvious relevance to medical practice such as euthanasia, transplantation, rape and homosexuality but also covers a host of less related subjects such as albinism, cannibalism, exorcism, Mormons, and vivisection. Each entry is approached in a practical, clear, and dogmatic manner, and is followed by several references. The more important entries often occupy several pages. Any comment on the literary style would be impertinent, except to say that the book is beautifully written.

One major inconsistency permeates the pages of what is otherwise a high principled yet commonsense book. It is written to help and guide the student and the young doctor but its treatment of sex is in a tone which will be found laughable by many junior members of our profession. This is not to criticize in any way Dr Thomson's categorical views that all premarital and extra-marital intercourse should be condemned, that the 1967 Abortion Act should never have been introduced, and that trans-sexual surgery is a mutilating exercise performed only for the selfish satisfaction of a sexual deviant and his surgeon. These views were also evident in the author's book *Sex and its Problems*, published in 1968. We should not be surprised to find here also a strong case made for capital punishment and castration, in some circumstances, all of which may be the considered views of a large and senior section of the profession. Nevertheless, these ideas will be seen as so outrageously reactionary by the young that they will be unable to take the rest of the book seriously. This would be a great shame, for it ought to be within easy reach of them all.

Reference

M. J. AYLETT

Thomson, W. A. R. (Ed.) (1968). *Sex and its Problems*. Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone.