

practice library, more especially if there is a television in the common room for educational purposes! It will unite the team, give scope to the student, orientate the trainee, and validate the contribution of the social worker and nurse. The general practitioner who may be jaded through hyper-involvement, or staled by a need for wider scope, will find interesting facts and lively writing in this compact volume which is excellent value for money.

M. KEITH THOMPSON

### SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS OF FAMILY MEDICINE

*J. Fry, E. Gambrill, and R. Smith*

*William Heinemann  
London (1978)*

671 pages. Price £30

A sense of excitement and some envy accompanied my first sight of this book: envy, at the ambitiousness and energy of the editors, and excitement, since here at last, perhaps, was something one had waited for for a long time—a fresh integration of the many diverse sciences on which medicine is built and a discriminating anthology of old and new knowledge selected for its relevance to practice.

The 73 chapters of this book are the contributions of 91 authors, 10 of whom are general practitioners and the remainder specialists in a spectrum of disciplines. It is divided into 22 sections, built largely on a traditional system-based pattern with more general sections interspersed on the nature of family medicine, genetics, human development and ageing, immunology and microbiology, nutrition, and pharmacology. Its aims, the publisher's leaflet tells us, are "to enable senior practitioners to learn anew and re-learn what they have forgotten"; to "help trainers and trainees in vocational training programmes to cover their curriculum"; and to "fill a huge gap" by "bringing together in one volume the essential scientific bases on which modern family medicine is practised". Like all multi-author books, the approach adopted by its contributors is variable.

What does the reader get for his money? This is not a clinical textbook, so he will not find, for example, much clinical detail regarding measles; but he will find, instead, a fascinating chapter (by A. B. Christie) on "Infections and Immunization" which will give him pause in the wholesale prescribing of

antibiotics, and a critical respect for protective measures he is commonly called upon to provide. Similarly, in "The Central Nervous System" (by D. E. Shaw) he will find little about the clinical features of 'strokes', but a fine outline of neurological thinking. (And here, as an aside, the dictum that "an understanding of the patient's complaint may seem an obvious and easy part of the enquiry—on the contrary it is probably the most difficult part . . ." should be engraved over every practitioner's desk.)

In "Growing Up" (by J. A. Davies and F. N. Bamford) the reader is provided—in the space of 12 pages—with a wealth of material and a valuable reading list on infant development: and if he is not provoked by D. C. Morley's chapter, on "Growing Up in the Developing World", to reflect again on his own system of medical care (and on the lessons to be learnt from the 'Third World') then he is probably beyond professional redemption!

To pick out, in this way, a few of the gems in the straw is perhaps invidious—but is inevitable in reviewing a book of this size. Equally inevitable in such a book is the presence of a good deal of straw. This arises in part from the difficult task which specialist authors have been given ("to produce their material so that it is appropriate and applicable to normal general practice"). The rare is rarely seen—but occurs. If it is used to illustrate a scientific approach to problem solving in family medicine then its inclusion in such a book can well be justified as 'appropriate': but if not, it becomes no more than an exercise in erudition. And the book is not free from such. The obverse danger, to which the book also occasionally succumbs, is to include the common and omit the important (for example, in discussing acute myocardial infarction only the 'classical' presenting symptoms are described; but it is precisely the atypical presentations of which the general practitioner needs to be forewarned).

This book is an anthology; and like all anthologies it is the individual reader who decides how far it fulfils its title and its aims. However, the title used here, *Scientific Foundations*, raises important questions. Besides an appropriate body of verified 'facts' (carefully separated from personal opinion), does not the 'scientific basis' of family medicine—as of any discipline—include some analysis of the mental processes on which it is built—in this context, for example, some attention to the processes and hazards involved in data collection, in classification and its uses, in handling probabilities, and in assessing the

relative merits of alternative care? The essence of the scientific approach lies not solely in the content of the material it handles, but also in the way it handles it. These, however, find no place in the book—indeed, early on (p. 2) the authors equate 'scientific basis' with a 'core of knowledge', and it is this approach which dominates the book. Inevitably, such foundations are shifting ones.

Nevertheless, this book should be on the library shelves of every postgraduate medical centre.

H. J. WRIGHT

### NUTRITION AND DISEASE

*R. J. Jarrett (Ed.)*

*Croom Helm  
London (1979)*

215 pages. Price £10.50

The exhortation to eat properly—to eschew animal fats, to eat fibre, to make sure we have our vitamins—must impinge on most people in the UK. For general practitioners, the conflicting views of the manufacturers and different parts of our profession make the job of advising patients extremely difficult. Dr Jarrett and his co-authors set out to tackle this problem and are not 'evangelists' for any particular theory of nutrition.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, by Dr Ebrahim, deals with problems of under-nutrition and although relevant mainly to doctors working in the Third World, it does offer some useful information to general practitioners about diseases of malnutrition. The second section, by Dr Jarrett, looks at the problem of food abundance and provides a useful, if rather elementary, review of the dietary factors associated with such conditions as coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer, and blood disorders.

Dr Poston's contribution on nutrition and immunity was new to me and was far from elementary. It must present quite a challenge to the students of the life sciences and the intelligent layman for whom the book was intended. I found the citation of research workers' names with no actual references most irritating.

At £10.50 this is an expensive book and it is unlikely to find its way onto many general practitioners' bookshelves.

M. J. WHITFIELD