

Book Reviews

Price's Textbook of the Practice of Medicine. EDITED BY DONALD HUNTER. 9th Edition. Oxford Medical Publications, 1956, pp. XII plus 1774. Price £3 3s. 0d.

This volume of "Price's Medicine", with Dr. Donald Hunter as its new editor, is a worthy successor to eight previous editions. In its 1,784 pages there is more information than any one doctor can ever need, even before sitting the M.R.C.P. examination. All the common medical conditions and many of the rarer ones are described. In these days of air travel, with tropical countries within a day or two's journey from England, general practitioners may, occasionally, encounter even unusual tropical illnesses among their patients in the British Isles.

Like the medical curriculum, this over-crowded book needs careful revision from time to time. The length of the articles is not always in proportion to their importance to practising doctors—for instance, as many pages are given up to smallpox, toxoplasmosis and histoplasmosis as are allowed for all the rheumatic diseases put together. The neurological chapters would have pleased Dr. James Collier who played so large a part in making the first editions a success; and one is delighted to find the signature of Sir Robert Young still at the end of the chapters on respiratory illnesses, though his name is not included in its proper place at the end of the list of contributors on page x.—a sad omission because he and G. E. Beaumont (the first name on the list) are the last of the authors of the first edition, produced 35 years ago, who still contribute: both these sturdy writers happen to be consulting physicians to the Middlesex and the Brompton Hospitals.

An electroencephalographic tracing is given, but one misses the electrocardiograms. Students and general practitioners badly need some simple guidance to help them appreciate the basic principles underlying these graphic mysteries, and it may be argued that diseases of the heart are quite as important to family doctors as are deep-seated lesions in the brain.

Some of the most helpful paragraphs in the book are those devoted to common symptoms and physical signs—constipation, diarrhoea, jaundice, haematuria, etc. In future editions more symptoms and physical signs might well be discussed in the same way; they are a useful source of reference for the busy doctor faced with a difficult case, and with little time in which to make up his mind what examinations he should make, or tests he should ask for, in order to arrive at a correct diagnosis.

The delay between writing a book as large as this and its publica-

tion must necessarily mean that a few of the most useful modern drugs are not mentioned; for instance, mecamlamine in the treatment of hypertension.

General practitioners must not be frightened by the size of this work, nor put off by the chapters on centipedes, spiders, scorpions, snakes and poisonous fishes; nor should they allow themselves to be bewildered by such names as *diplogonoporus grandis*, *braunia jassyensis*, *acanthocheilonema perstans*, ackee poisoning or anakhre. When insomnia, lassitude, dizziness, masturbation, frigidity and breathing exercises do not appear in the index, one wonders whether it is really necessary to devote the better part of half a page to equations which show that "the pH is linearly related to the logarithm of the ratio of bicarbonate to carbonic acid."

This is the best and most comprehensive of the general medical text-books this country has produced, with an impressive list of first-class doctors among its 28 contributors. It could be made even better with a few additions and considerable judicious pruning following the example, perhaps, of the pruning spider of Peru, whose scientific name is given in full on page 339—*glyptocranlum gasteracanthoides*.

Whitla's Dictionary of Medical Treatment. Ninth Edition by R. S. ALLISON and T. H. CROZIER, and 26 contributors. Published by Bailliere, Tindall and Cox. Pp. XIV + 854. Price 52s. 6d.

This is truly a masterpiece and the best book of its type that I have seen in the last decade. The medical students of Queen's University and its associated hospitals in Northern Ireland are indeed privileged to have such teachers. Medical practitioners, young or old, who purchase this book will have guidance for as long as it is possible for any therapeutic dictionary to give it them. The authors throughout the book have found a happy combination of the underlying principles and rational treatment. The short physiological or pathological introduction to each section makes the therapy more understandable to the student. The practitioner is reminded of the basic sciences which he is all too rapidly forgetting.

In the complex matters of water retention and electrolyte balance, the underlying principles are explained clearly and simply. The authors make the subject understandable to those who but rarely have to apply it; when they do, they need to have a real grasp of what they are doing, as the intravenous drip may be as dangerous as it is life saving.

The treatments suggested are given in great detail so that the practitioner in search of guidance will find exact detailed instruction of how much and how often, instead of the loose instructions that