BOOK REVIEWS

Progress in Clinical Rheumatology. Edited by ALLAN ST. J. DIXON (1965). Pp. 372, figs, bibl, index. Churchill, London. (72s.).

As Dr. Allan Dixon, the editor, states in the preface, this is not a text-book but an attempt to bring forward selected areas in which progress has been made, and as such it succeeds magnificently.

The chapters are all of a high level. Dr. Malcolm Thompson contributes an excellent account of the visceral, vascular, and neuritic factors of rheumatoid arthritis, a disease which, as he says, "may involve any tissue or organ from the hairs of the scalp to the soles of the feet".

The article on Still's disease by Dr. Barbara Ansell is a classic. It is packed with statistical and descriptive information and no physician need read more about the disease to be completely orientated. However, one wonders if her comment that "an excellent prognosis as regards function, inactivity of disease, and joint residua in those seen early" is compatible with the statements that 63 per cent. had residual joint damage and 69 per cent. radiological damage. Surely the aim should be something much better than this, particularly in the age group affected by Still's disease.

The section on systemic diseases of connective tissue, by Prof. E. G. L. Bywaters and Dr. J. T. Scott, epitomizes well the progress in clinical knowledge in this group of diseases; this chapter is delightfully written and full of up-to-date information.

Besides his splendid editorial work, Dr. Allan Dixon has written on gout, and in one of the best chapters in the book has given a very clear account of the difficult subject of the synthesis and excretion of urate.

Dr. J. Sharp has a well-balanced piece on ankylosing spondylitis with helpful advice on management and drug treatment.

As befits a book reporting on progress, the newer aspects of rheumatology are also covered, as exemplified by the sound review of digital arteritis by Dr. J. W. Laws.

There are a number of good American contributions, particularly that on amyloid disease by Drs. J. D. Kenney and E. Calkins.

Patients with various types of bone disease

frequently attend a rheumatism department, and Dr. J. T. Scott deals with the conditions and differential diagnosis which must be borne in mind in a most interesting manner.

One of the best features of this small book is the valuable and discriminating list of references at the end of each chapter.

The study of the rheumatic diseases has become one of the growing points of medicine out of which has emerged the sub-specialty of Rheumatology. Judging by the calibre of the contributions to this book its future is in very good hands.

OSWALD SAVAGE.

L-Forms, Episomes and Auto-Immune Disease. By PHYLLIS EVELYN PEASE (1965). Pp. 68. Livingstone, London. 10s. 6d.

Views on the aetiology of the rheumatic diseases continue to fluctuate between infective and non-infective causes. This small but extremely interesting book attempts to correlate the two currently popular hypotheses of infection with pleuropneumonic-like organisms (PPLO) and auto-immunity. The keystone of the author's hypothesis is the modification of the genetic material of a host cell by incorporation into its nuclear DNA of fragments of DNA from the infective agent. This would permanently alter the genetically-controlled metabolism of the affected cell and its descendants, an alteration that could lead to the synthesis of either new antigens or new toxic metabolites coded for by the newly-incorporated genetic material.

The basis for this hypothesis is of course the well-established phenomenon of transduction which occurs in bacteria as a result of infection by certain types of bacteriophage. The crucial question, however, is to what extent these phenomena occur in cells of more advanced constitution than bacteria, e.g. mammalian cells. The many persuasive arguments advanced by Dr. Pease provide no substitute for experimental observations, lacking at present.

This brief but clear account of a number of extremely important biological phenomena is warmly recommended.

L. E. GLYNN