BOOK REVIEWS

Textbook of the Rheumatic Diseases. Edited by W. S. C. COPEMAN. 4th ed., 1969. Pp. 959 + xii, illus. Livingstone, London. (10 gns).

In my own student days, rheumatic diseases were dealt with in a few desultory pages at the end of textbooks of medicine, the approaches to treatment were entirely empirical and the major part of the subject seemed to have little or no scientific content. Those interested in treating rheumatism used the suggestive magic of electric sparks and healing baths or sent their patients to spas where frugal diets were consumed at enormous expense but in the most elegant company.

All this has changed and the subject has now acquired specialist respectability. This progression has, in Great Britain, owed much to the enthusiastic organization and drive of Dr. W. S. C. Copeman, who has relentlessly pressed forward the status of the subject, and it is appropriate that he should write the opening chapter on the chequered history of the rheumatic diseases.

All the renowned British experts are involved in subsequent chapter contributions. J. H. Kellgren writes on pain, and D. V. Davies on the structure and morphology of joints, including the biological processes and the changes of ageing. D. L. Gardner deals with pathology including modern ideas on the chemistry of complicating amyloidosis. L. G. C. E. Pugh presents evidence from the United States that rheumatic fever is related to cold climates which is contradicted in the next chapter by J. S. Lawrence, and, as we know, rheumatic fever is indeed a scourge in tropical Asia. Nevertheless Pugh's studies on adaptation to extremes of temperature are of the greatest interest.

L. E. Glynn and E. J. Holborow from the M.R.C. Rheumatism Unit give a most excellent account of auto-immunity. "It must be admitted that the claim of a role for auto-immunity in the pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis receives its strongest support from the absence of any stronger claimant" (p. 186). It would appear now that in rheumatic fever the identity of beta haemolytic streptococcal antigens and antigens from heart tissues at last

rationalises the relationship of streptococcal infections and rheumatic heart disease.

E. G. L. Bywaters' encyclopaedic and scholarly approach deals with gout and other metabolic disorders in association with Lord Cohen, and he also writes fascinating accounts of Whipple's disease and the relationship between rheumatic and skin disorders. J. J. R. Duthie deals exhaustively with rheumatoid arthritis while Dudley Hart writes on the collagen diseases. J. T. Scott contributes on the neurological complications of rheumatism and the final chapters deal with radiology, low back pain, the place of surgery, the social and industrial significance of rheumatic disorders, the methods of clinical examination, and classification of rheumatic diseases.

This work has grown enormously since the earlier editions but its growth represents the growth of detailed knowledge on this important group of diseases. The editor is to be congratulated in maintaining an excellent balance among the various authors and the work is one which must have its place in all medical school libraries and on the shelves of every consultant physician. For aspirants to the specialty it will be a bible in which they will find modern answers to most of their questions.

There are few omissions and it is remarkably up to date for a textbook where the scripts must antedate publication by many months. Advances are continuous and one can hardly complain when Bearn's work on the recognition of the heterozygotes in Hurler's syndrome by connective tissue cell cultures has not found any mention. These are new and exciting developments but as far as rheumatic diseases are concerned they are somewhat on the fringe.

A work of this standard should be a stimulus in attracting an increasing proportion of our keen and able young men into a field of work which offers such satisfying standards of practice as well as opportunities for further scientific endeavour. Let us hope that conditions of practice in this country will be such that this specialty can flourish and develop on the shoulders of those who have done so much to create the knowledge they have presented in this scholarly volume.

J. McMICHAEL.