Book reviews

The Frequency of the Rheumatic Diseases. By SIDNEY COBB. 1971. Pp. 147, 41 tables, 12 figs. Vital and Health Statistics Monographs, [American Public Health Association. Harvard University Press. (\$5)

Recognizing that uncritical bibliographical surveys are useless, Cobb essays an interpretative review of epidemiological data on rheumatic complaints and the principal individual diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, gout, Still's disease, and connective tissue disorders. Much valuable material is considered, and in a commendably brief presentation. However, it is regrettable that those leaders in the morbidity statistics, soft-tissue rheumatism and pain in the back, receive only scant mention.

The bibliography contains over 400 citations and appears to be reasonably exhaustive up to 1968, as well as including two from 1969. On the other hand a sixth of the references relate to 1951 or earlier. A number of the citations are not to published work, a few references appear to be quoted somewhat out of context, and the selection of others is at times perplexing. For instance, why rely on a 1924 Ministry of Health report? Sick-role, the individual's response to illness, has changed appreciably since the NHS was introduced, and it is not as if later data from Great Britain were not available.

A great deal of work has been done on the epidemiology of rheumatism, but there is a dearth of testable hypotheses. A labour of synthesis should highlight the possible directions for future advance, and Cobb must be complimented for not shirking this obligation. One expects an author to indulge idiosyncratic views, but much of the evidence is conflicting and often unsubstantial, and unfortunately the end-result reads rather like a credo.

Particularly interesting are some of the juxtapositions of data from different sources, and the tables provide what is perhaps the most useful aspect of the book. But the work is far more than a presentation of data. Indulgence in conjecture can be stimulating and welcome, and every professional should read the book. However, a casual wanderer into the field of rheumatological epidemiology should tread with caution because the views expressed are often controversial. Thus Cobb argues that associations may be strong enough so that they can hardly be the result of Berkson's fallacy; I know of no evidence to support this claim.

I think this book may have been published in the wrong context. Sidney Cobb is justly renowned for both his pioneer work and his thoughtfulness. To read the reflections of such a man is fascinating and instructive. But whether so speculative a work should be given the authoritative stamp of an APHA Vital Statistics monograph is another matter.

PHILIP H. N. WOOD

Difficult Orthopaedic Diagnosis. By LEWIS COZEN. 1972. Pp. 93, 39 figs. Thomas, Springfield, Ill. (\$7.50)

This is a short and very personal monograph attempting a difficult task to discuss in very general and broad terms

difficult orthopaedic diagnoses. The difficulty lies not in the pathological or even physiological complexity of these diagnoses (which is not described) but in placing these in a proper logical differential diagnostic pattern. One can sense the authority and unique experience of the author in a clinical setting but in cold print the text does not achieve this.

There are several areas where further detail is required if this book is to have value for the postgraduate reader: e.g. 'Dupuytren's contracture' of the plantar fascia usually arises in patients exhibiting chronic anti-convulsant drug toxicity; spondylolisthesis is the most common cause of low back pain in children, etc.

The radiographic reproductions are good but on several pages are placed out of order to the text, e.g. under the heading Thoracic Outlet Syndrome there is a radiograph showing a dislocation of the semilunar bone.

I feel sure that those who have had the privilege of knowing or having worked with Dr. Cozen will have real pleasure in reading this text.

R. B. DUTHIE

Surgery of Rheumatoid Arthritis. Edited by RICHARD L. CRUESS and NELSON MITCHELL. 1971. Pp. 212, 211 figs., bibl. Lippincott, Philadelphia; Blackwells, Oxford (£9.75)

This book is based on a course sponsored by the Postgraduate Board of the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University in Montreal and is edited by two of the orthopaedic surgeons of the Royal Victoria Hospital. It opens with a masterly summary by Morris Ziff of the changes occurring in rheumatoid synovitis which appear to be associated with an immunological response, and some minor speculation on how these arise. This is followed by an interesting chapter on the effect of synovectomy on the synovium and cartilage with particular attention being given to those observed in eight cases who had had a good clinical result.

After five chapters dealing with the knee, which include synovectomy, the management of flexion deformities, the use of the hemiarthroplasty prosthesis, a mould type of arthroplasty, and the hinge-joint of Wallduis, there is a useful short chapter by one of the editors on the selection of the surgical procedure to be employed. This could have been greatly enhanced by more references, particularly to techniques not described by the preceding authors, such as the double osteotomy of Benjamin and the hinge-arthroplasty of Shier, as well as by drawing attention to popliteal cysts and their complications.

The four chapters on the hip include an interesting suggestion that synovectomy should be considered in patients with known rheumatoid arthritis who have persistent hip pain without excessive bone erosion or narrowing of joint space, a competent review of mould arthroplasties, the types and techniques of total hip replacement, and excision arthroplasty in both rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. Again there is a useful chapter on the selection of the procedure.