Book reviews

Rheumatoid Arthritis: Pathogenetic Mechanisms and Consequences in Therapeutics. Edited by W. MÜLLER, H.-G. HARWERTH, and K. FEHR. 1971. Pp. 781, 282 figs, bibl. Academic Press, New York and London. (£8.00)

Last year a symposium on rheumatoid arthritis was held in Basel and the proceedings have subsequently been published as part of the 'Colloquia Geigy' Series. Most of the speakers were from Germany and Switzerland, and there were also smaller but distinguished representations from the United Kingdom and other European countries and from the U.S.A.

The 79 papers are grouped into three themes. The first is that of morphology and biochemistry, much of the work presented being of an established descriptive nature with, however, good discussions of mechanisms of cartilage destruction and its possible inhibition, inflammation and its mediators, and metabolism of synovial cells. The second part ranges widely over the question of an immunological pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis, and the third is devoted to the effects of anti-rheumatic drugs on pathogenetic mechanisms. A panel discussion on treatment follows, an attempt being made to isolate individual types of disease process and to speculate rather hopefully on their specific amelioration by drug therapy.

The papers vary not only in quality but also in style, some being comprehensive reviews or essays, others brief resumés of work described more fully in other publications. Taken together they highlight many questions which have been extensively debated over the past few years, such as the uncertain status of cellular immunity in connective tissue diseases, the biological significance of rheumatoid factors and the identity of a possible antigen to which they may be responding, the role of immune globulin complexes and inclusions, the nature of trigger-agents or initiators (an 'immaculate infection' as Morris Ziff describes it, since no infectious agent has been identified), and the place of cytostatic treatment. Production and editorship are of high quality and the discussions are well put together, although once or twice comments mistakenly precede the paper to which they refer.

The declared aim of the symposium was to evaluate developments of research and thus to establish a new basis for treatment. This could hardly be possible; as one of the participants observed, diseases such as tuberculosis or gout can be tackled by specific methods—destruction of the tubercle bacillus or lowering of plasma uric acid. With rheumatoid arthritis no such objective can yet be defined. Nevertheless the book is a useful conspectus of the problems as they appear at present.

J. T. SCOTT

Kompendium der Rheumatologie. Ein Vademecum für Klinik und Praxis (A Synopsis of Rheumatology). By W. MOLL. Second ed., 1972. Pp. 288, 22 figs. Karger, Basel (£3.85)

Such has been the volume of work in the field of rheumatology since the first edition of the synopsis was published in 1964, that a second edition was obviously overdue. The amount of effort devoted to the classification of the rheumatic diseases also seems to have been impressive; the author lists that of the Swiss Commission (1952); that of French literature (de Sèze and Ryckewaert, 1954); that of the International League (Toronto, 1957); that of the American Rheumatism Association (1963); and, finally, that of the author himself.

Now there is a tendency in all synopses to give clear-cut, sometimes even dogmatic, instructions to the reader. Dr. Moll is fond of conveying this by diagrams which are easily remembered and help to quantify the various factors involved. What, for example, is the proportion of somatic to psychogenic content in the rheumatic diseases? The answer is given in a square, divided horizontally into 3 equal sections—inflammatory rheumatism at the top, degenerative disease in the middle, and non-articular rheumatism at the bottom. A diagonal joins the bottom left hand corner to the top right one; everything to the right of this diagonal is psychogenic and all to the left is somatic. Such a diagram is not easily forgotten and illustrates that inflammatory rheumatism is largely somatic, while non-articular rheumatism is mainly psychogenic. The Compendium contains a number of these graphic memory-retaining illustrations.

An extraordinary amount of information is packed into the 288 pages (12 × 17 cm). On the one hand, this leads to very small print which makes prolonged reading tiring and yet, on the other hand, such is the wealth of information opened by each succeeding paragraph that it is difficult to put the book down. As already mentioned, the author has views of his own, clearly expressed. For example, he deprecates the continuous interval treatment of gout with drugs unless there is hyperuricemia or a tendency to increased urate excretion, and stresses the value of diet. But he does not indicate how many readings are required to make a decision, and one is left with the uneasy feeling of the man who fell off the top of a skyscraper and said 'so far, so good', as he was passing the second floor. To those who had just become accustomed to the term 'arthrosis', instead of 'osteoarthritis', he delivers a jolt by preferring the use of 'arthronosis', e.g. 'coxarthronosis' 'gonarthronosis'.

Undoubtedly, the Compendium is a work of scholarship and an excellent book of reference. It has a detailed table