BOOK REVIEWS


The human hand is a fascinating subject, an actor of many roles and disguises: the man in miniature, revealing its owner’s story. Here is a book which sets out to teach us how best to examine it. This book has had an immediate appeal to everyone who has seen it. All doctors are, from time to time, called upon to see patients quickly, when facilities and time for a full general examination are missing. A guide to what could be regarded as “how-not-to-miss-systemic-disease without-undressing-the-patient” will obviously have a wide market. The book is excellently printed, beautifully bound, and most of the pictures are clear and comprehensive. Something of the poetry of the hand gets into the text (and a few woolly paragraphs as well). One cannot fail to learn from the illustrations, and one will have the satisfaction of owning an attractive book.

Because of the obviously wide appeal and need for a book of this sort, it has to be judged against high standards, and unfortunately, with such a magnificent subject, this book is disappointing because it is only 50 per cent. of the classic it might have been. In these days when almost every post brings drug company “hand-outs” illustrated by beautiful and exact colour pictures, it seems a shame that a teaching book like this should still rely on black and white illustrations, many of which are artistically indifferent. Probably this was inevitable on grounds of expense, but what might have been avoided is some careless editing, as in the passage which reads as though a functioning parathyroid adenoma was a cause of hypoparathyroidism and in another where a swelling of a finger joint in rheumatoïd arthritis is referred to as a ganglion. The legend to Fig. 19 refers to two pictures of different rheumatoïd hands as though they were from the same patient; a little scrutiny shows that one of these is a hand also illustrated over a different caption in Fig. 20, and almost certainly over yet another caption in Fig. 18. Sometimes the text carries imaginative and facile “explanations” of morbid changes. Thus, of arthritis mutilans: “ . . . Atrophy of the interossei muscles and of the thenar pad occurs from disuse and permits the overpull of unaffected muscles. Shortening of the fingers results . . . .” Clubbing of the fingers is ascribed to rouloux formation: “ . . . and therefore in diseases in which there is an increase in serumglobulin concentration and consequently exaggerated rouloux formation, the digits may exhibit clubbing . . . .”. Of rheumatic fever: “ . . . pocked and stippled nails have been observed in 95 per cent. of subjects with acute rheumatic fever and chorea. This is probably due to a nutritional defect . . . .”

But if space is saved by such unqualified pronouncements it is as surely wasted in the reference list. There are no references in the body of the text, and the many references at the end of the book do not include titles, but are collected in groups under chapter headings. This makes it difficult to find out about any specific topic. The author has his own ideas as to what constitute the “disscollageneous”, but the poor reader, wanting to find out more about, say, osteo-arthritis (which is included under this heading) would have twenty unlisted references to choose from, only one of which might be the germane. A. ST. J. DIXON.


It is a measure of the interest now taken in population studies on the rheumatic diseases that this account of the second international symposium covers 356 pages, whereas the first only 4 years earlier could be compressed into a slim volume of only 97 pages.

The first volume is based on a symposium organized by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences and held in Rome in 1961. It is not only a useful review of epidemiological studies on chronic rheumatism but also a valuable indication of recent trends in research into the aetiology of this group of diseases.

A consideration of the use of national statistics of morbidity is followed by a description of surveys of arthritis in the population by mobile teams. The danger of relying on point-prevalence and the importance of follow-up studies are stressed.

Serum factors occupy a prominent place in epidemiological studies of rheumatoid arthritis and the “collagen diseases” at the present time, and these form the subject of a number of papers. The importance, in studies of rheumatoid arthritis, of adequate coverage of rheumatoid factors in the serum is stressed. It is recommended that at least a reaction of the Waaler-Rose type and one using human F II globulin be used. A detailed description of the methods of carrying out seven tests for rheumatoid factors given in the Appendix should prove a valuable source of reference to both hospital and research laboratories.

Geographical studies of the frequency of rheumatoid