BOOK REVIEWS


The second edition of this most useful book appears after an interval of 5 years. Every chapter has been revised, some extensively, and a new and important chapter on the results of surgery inserted. Prof. Flatt emphasizes the importance of the combined medical-surgical management of cases. Rheumatoid arthritis is a continuing disease, affecting almost the whole organism, and therefore the results of localized surgery must be related to the disease as a whole. The physician has an important part to play in the long-term follow-up of surgical cases. At the Rheumatism Foundation Hospital in Finland, the most striking feature of surgery during the past few years has been the decrease in the more drastic procedures such as fusion, arthroplasty, and prosthetic replacement, and an increase in the prophylactic surgery of synovectomy and soft tissue reconstruction. This will undoubtedly continue. As in the previous edition there are excellent chapters on ulnar drift, the thumb, and cytotoxic drugs. The latter are seldom used in Great Britain and are of little value as they have no lasting effect, but the author still uses Thiotepa as a “surgical back-up” when synovectomy must be delayed. A chapter devoted to the relative value of fixed and dynamic splints also contains a valuable table of the timing of the commencement of post-operation therapy; this should be read by all physiotherapists and occupational therapists working in this field. The chapter on the results of surgery is based not only on the author’s own observation but on the results of a world-wide series of cases.

The value of synovectomy of the wrist joint, inferior radio-ulnar joint, and inter-carpal and digital joints are fully discussed, and the need for further studies to assess natural remission in the latter joints is emphasized. Results of excision arthroplasty of metacarlo-phalangeal joints are disappointing and many surgeons are experimenting with prosthetic replacement. Prof. Flatt devotes much space to the use of his own metallic hinge prosthesis. Although he anticipated that it would have only limited use, he has found it to be very beneficial in some cases. Few other surgeons have been so fortunate in its use, but recent trials in Great Britain and the United States with plastic prostheses have been encouraging and the author expects that the elasticity and mobility of silicone may well replace the more rigid metal that he has already found so successful. The most important point a rheumatologist must decide is the value of early surgery, and particularly synovectomy of joints. The question is whether early synovectomy is a worthwhile procedure, and what is meant by “early”. Prof. Flatt is aware of these problems, but has always been a firm advocate of early synovectomy. In the few published series of cases in which early synovectomy has been used, a recurrence of extrinsic tendon synovitis is extremely rare if a radical operation is performed, but long-term precise follow-up studies of metacarlo-phalangeal joint synovectomies are not yet available. Although Prof. Flatt asserts that recurrent synovitis of a joint is rare after adequate clearance, the reviewer and others have found almost complete regeneration of inflammatory synovium after radical synovectomy of the knee and this may well apply to other joints. The author sums up the position by stating “The procedure (synovectomy) should probably carry the Scottish verdict of ‘Not Proven’ until the results of international trials are available some years from now”. The efforts of the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council and the American Rheumatism Council have led to the multicentre trials now taking place both in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. and we must await the day when the final verdict can be given. Other recent books have contained chapters on the surgery of the rheumatoid hand, but this book is more comprehensive and can be warmly recommended both to established surgeons and to those starting work in this field.
An otherwise excellent book is marred by incorrect references. The reviewer knows that Prof. Flatt has mistakenly attributed a paper presented by Dr. Kay to the Amsterdam meeting (pp. 194). A controlled study of extensor synovectomy (pp. 190) has also been incorrectly attributed. It is hoped that the rest of the references in this monograph are more accurate.

A. KATES


Interest in the surgery of rheumatoid arthritis has been developing rapidly in the Anglo-Saxon countries and, at a slightly slower rate, in the German-speaking ones. In 1959, a well-known German orthopaedic textbook devoted barely two pages to changes in the rheumatoid hand. Now Dr. Gschwend has produced the first work in German on surgery in this disease. His survey covers the surgery of the upper and lower extremities in a little over 200 pages and embraces pathology, aim and method of operation, and indications and contraindications. The recent trend towards early synovectomy, especially of small joints, is enthusiastically upheld and old wives' tales about delayed healing after operation (with or without steroids) are firmly scotched. Illustrated with many photographs and drawings, of which 65 are in superb colour, the book is of interest both to orthopaedic surgeons and to clinicians who, like so many sufferers from the disease, are apt to accept some gross deformities as inevitable. At the same time enthusiasm is tempered with caution and Dr. Gschwend has not failed to point out the possible side or late effects of certain procedures: endoprostheses in the fingers may result in local siderosis; chemical synovectomy, advocated by some eminent authorities, may cause permanent damage—and so on.

Inevitably, every first edition has its small quota of misprints and minor errors. For example, Syme (1799-1870) is quoted as having published his monograph on the excision of diseased joints in 1931 (p. 5), which is unlikely. The volume has an index and an extensive bibliography, but authors are grouped under different headings, such as "introduction", "operations on the hands", "operations on the knees", etc. Such a scheme avoids the use of the Harvard notation in the text, thereby saving space, but leads to reduplication in the index (or indices), where this notation is used. It is a question of choice.

The book should delight the eye of every rheumatologist; the price may not do so, as it is 98 DM in Germany.

David Preiskel