Book reviews

Rheumatische Erkrankungen. Ein Leit-faden für Studierende und Ärzte. By Werner Otto, Kurt Seidel, and Gerhard Wessl. 2nd edition. (Pp. 176; illustrated + tables. M 12.00.) VEB Verlag Volk und Gesundheit: Berlin. 1977.

The first edition of this slim volume (about 15 × 21.5 cm) was published in 1973 and a measure of its success is the appearance of the second, revised, edition 4 years later. Intended for senior students and junior doctors, its 170 pages of text cover most aspects of the rheumatic diseases. Inevitably, there tends to be some imbalance, as when osteoarthritis of the hip, a common enough condition, is dismissed in 4 lines and 'peri-arthritis coxae' is rewarded with twice that number; the carpal tunnel syndrome is mentioned only in connection with rheumatoid arthritis. It is permissible, too, to raise an eyebrow at the advice to tap a small knee-joint effusion by puncturing the ligamentum patellae and at the use of the term 'fibrositis' which, largely discarded on our side of the 'Iron Curtain', seems to be alive and well on the other side. It is used in 2 senses—as 'generalised fibrositis' when referring to psychosomatic manifestations and as an inflammatory condition e.g. 'fibrositis of a mucous lining' i.e. a bursitis. Traces of a bygone age linger in the injunction to avoid exposure to cold and damp which may result in 'sciatic neuralgia', with lumbago, scoliosis, and some loss of ankle reflex.

Beyond these minor blemishes, the work is modern and, unlike some textbooks, deals with the social consequences of the rheumatic diseases and the rehabilitation of the sufferers. Colour photographs, rather than the black and white provided, are, of course, desirable but would increase cost considerably. The bibliography is up to date and the index helpful. We can look forward to the third edition which should not be long delayed.

DAVID PREISKEL

Current Therapy. Edited by Howard F. Conn. (Pp. xli + 947. £18.00). 1978. W. B. Saunders: Philadelphia.

This is the 30th of an annual series, a testimony to the usefulness of past editions and a good augury for future success. Certainly it is a most useful reference work, with instant access to an antidote chart for poisons (ranging from selenium to the venom of the black widow spider), tables of height and weight for men and women, tables of metric and apothecaries' systems, and laboratory reference values of clinical importance with a good discussion of SI units.

In any comprehensive textbook of this sort the attention given to individual conditions must necessarily be rather superficial, and this applies particularly to 'Current Therapy', which goes far beyond the range of our familiar books on medical therapeutics, embracing as it does the field of surgery (e.g. intestinal obstruction) and obstetrics and gynaecology (e.g. haemorrhage in late pregnancy).

The rheumatic diseases come off rather badly, as they usually do in a general therapeutics textbook. The whole section on disorders of the locomotor system occupies only 12 pages (although some rheumatic conditions are dealt with in other sections, for example gout in metabolic disorders), compared for example with contraception (illustrated) which is given 17 pages. Perhaps in global terms of human happiness and survival this is the right emphasis. The individual piece on rheumatoid arthritis is little more than would be written in an unprepared essay by a well-trained medical student and would not allow an uninformed reader to come to grips with the essentials of the problem, although some of its deficiencies are remedied in the rather surprisingly longer contribution on juvenile rheumatoid arthritis which follows. The difficulty in striking a balance in a multi-author book, of which I am painfully aware, is illustrated by the relative lengths of the portions devoted to rheumatoid arthritis (2 pages), gaseousness (also 2 pages), alopecia (6 pages), Parkinson's disease (7 pages), diabetes (16 pages), hypertension (17 pages), and epilepsy (18 pages). Some common rheumatic diseases, such as polymyalgia rheumatica and lumbar disc lesions, are not mentioned at all.

Although, therefore, the rheumatologist (from whose standpoint this review is purposely written) will find little to help him in his own specialty, he will nevertheless find the book an excellent *vade mecum* for keeping up to date with his general therapeutics. It is well produced and good value by today's standards: strongly recommended for hospital, medical school, and departmental libraries.

J. T. SCOTT

Human Joints and their Artificial Replacements. By Peter S. Walker. (Pp. xiv + 510; illustrated + tables. \$49.50.) Thomas: Springfield, Illinois.

With the present explosion in the number of joint replacements undertaken each year there is a great need for a comprehensive review of the biological and biomechanical principles on which this surgery is based. Dr Walker is both editor and major contributor to a book which covers an analysis of normal joint movements in both the upper and lower limb and also the properties of the materials and fixation used in their replacements.

The early chapters of this book consider, in detail, both the normal arcs of movement and their axes of rotation of the knee, shoulder, elbow, and finger joints. There is also an analysis of the forces passing through these joints based on extensive personal research. The chapters on biological materials, joint laxity, and lubrication are considered from simple physical principles written in a language that both registrar and research worker can understand. The final chapters consider the design of artificial joints based on all these principles and also the wear characteristics and problems in fixation which implantation produce.

This book represents a detailed analysis of up-to-date modern research into the problems of artificial joint replacement written in a language which the non-research-minded student may readily understand. In its concept and design it fulfils a valuable need.

A. C. CATTERALL