BOOK REVIEWS : BOEKRESENSIES

NEUROGLIA

Neuroglia Morphology and Function. By Paul Glees, M.A., D.Phil., M.D. Pp. 111 + xii, with 44 illustrations. 25s. Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications. 1955.

Contents: 1. Introduction. 2. Historical Introduction. 3. Comparative Studies of Neuroglia. 4. Macroglia. 5. Microglia. 6. Neuroglia in Tissue Cultures. 7. General Conclusions.

This book is a good one. Happily, it is a short one to boot, and the author's claims for it are correspondingly meagre. His 'fairly extensive review of the literature' makes reference to every international figure in this field—just the kind of 'broad-spectrum' bibliography that is hard to find in medical text-books now. In relating past work to his own extensive investigations and other very up-to-date researches, he produces not only a beautiful thumbnail sketch of his specialty but clears up the confusion of names which the earlier workers left behind them. A second claim for the book, expressed modestly as the hope that its morphological studies will be useful to biochemists and others exploring cerebral function, is guaranteed by the exhaustive and impartially presented text. It is regrettable that the specialized nature of the subject will limit the book's readers, and also a pity that the author had not space to discuss commonplace oddities encountered by the general pathologist, such as corpora amylaceae or myelin figures.

The book has minor faults: typographical errors (explanations on page 92 might need a tissue culturist to rewrite), incomplete and incorrect keys to illustrations, and a curious transcription from Brain and Greenfield (1950) on page 61 which if true is 'curiouser'.

J.A.H.C.

A TEXT-BOOK OF MEDICINE

A Text-book of Medicine. Edited by Russell L. Cecil, M.D., Sc.D. and Robert F. Loeb, M.D., Sc.D., D. Hon.Causa., LL.D. Ninth Edition. Pp. 1786, with illustrations. Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company. 1955.

Contents: 1. The Infectious Diseases. 2. Diseases of Allergy. 3. Collagen Diseases. 4. Diseases due to Physical Agents. 5. Diseases due to Chemical Agents. 6. Deficiency Diseases. 7. Diseases of Metabolism. 8. Diseases of the Ductless Glands. 9. Diseases of the Digestive System. 10. Diseases of the Respiratory System. 11. Diseases of the Kidneys. 12. Diseases of the Spleen and Reticuloendothelial System. 13. Diseases of the Blood. 14. Diseases of the Cardiovascular System. 15. Diseases of the Locomotor System. 16. Diseases of the Nervous System. Appendix. Index.

It is not easy to review a standard text-book. For this reason it has almost become the practice among reviewers to weigh it, or measure it, evaluate the cost per page, or perform some other arithmetical feat upon it. Regarding 'Cecil', now in its 9th edition, it is certainly too heavy to hold in the hand, but the most interesting arithmetic seems to me to be the number of contributors, which is over 200. One lone representative from Britain appears (Dr. Desmond Curran). In a book of this type the contributions are necessarily uneven. It would be easy to criticise the sections on sarcoidosis, on dyschondroplasia (this term should not be used), on renal calculi and so on. Thus no mention is made of the importance of bed rest, paraplegia and hypercalcuria in the development of renal stones, while the treatment is inadequately considered. The syndrome of prediabetes is not mentioned. Nevertheless this book in many ways is extremely good—the introduction (by Fuller Albright) to the section on Endocrinology bodes fair to becoming a classic; the chapter on adrenal diseases, gout and the deficiency diseases are particularly good. This edition actually includes mention of meticorten in the chapter on rheumatoid arthritis.

The paper is excellent and the type also good, which makes for pleasant reading. The index is adequate, no misprints were found and there are some helpful figures. There are a few colour-photos —Dr. Spies seems to have done well here (in the section on nutrition); he even has a boy with rickets in colour! The smallest colour-picture ever must be that of Lactrodactus mactans (black widow spider); incidentally the button spider is missing.

Altogether this book must be considered one of the best general text-books of medicine. It is of particular use to students, and for the most part the articles can be recommended as being highly authoritative.

P.J.

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF MEDICINE

British Postgraduate Medical Federation, University of London. Lectures on the Scientific Basis of Medicine. Volume III, 1953-1954. Pp. 366 + ix, with 7 illustrations. 35s. London: University of London, The Athlone Press. 1955.

Contents: 1. Science and History. 2. Biological Synthesis. 3. The Genetics of Some Biochemical Abnormalities. 4. Tissue Repair. 5. The Supporting System and its Disorders. 6. Hemispherectomy and the Localization of Function. 7. Anticholinesterases. 8. Acetylcholine and the Maintenance of the Cardiac Rhythm. 9. The Growth Hormone of the Anterior Pituitary Gland. 10. Stress and Thyroid Activity. 11. The Physiological Actions of the Sex Hormones. 12. Acid and Alkaline Phosphatase in Disease. 13. Body Water Control. 14. Reactions to Bacterial Invasion. 15. Antiviral Immunity. 16. The Action of Bacterial Enzymes on Immunizing Antigens. 17. Causes of Failure in Antibiotic Therapy. 18. Antimalarial Drugs. 19. Chemotherapy of Cancer. 20. The Scientific Approach to Dermatology. 21. Experimental Psychopathology.

The spectacular advances in medicine today come from research in the basic sciences, and even the most hardened clinician must be

ready to prate knowingly of lysozymes and globulins, and to face hydroxyl groups without flinching. Unfortunately the field is now so wide that no one can have first-hand knowledge of more than a corner or two and, to many, its whole expanse is unknown. It is in showing what exciting work is going on that the lectures on the Scientific Basis of Medicine, organized by the Postgraduate Medical Federation, are so valuable. Short of attending them personally one cannot do better than to read this book and its two predecessors. Each lecture is short enough to be read at the kind of sitting that is all one gets in these days, and most of the subjects are so absorbing that the book has the quality of a volume of detective stories. It is excellently adapted to reading in bed.

The matter of these lectures is difficult to criticize because of its diversity; this reviewer, at any rate, could give an expert opinion on about two pages of the 400. He is thus well qualified to review the book for others as ill-endowed, if such exist. The first essential for an expert expounding his own subject to non-specialists is that he should be intelligible, and this almost all the lecturers are. Some, like Paton on the anti-cholinesterases, are unexpectedly entertaining as well. Even those with the most specialized interests should find something of value in this book, and general medical readers bent on improving their minds as well as those preparing for higher examinations should put it on their lists.

P.B.