

## BOOK REVIEWS : BOEKBESPREKINGS

### LUMBAR DISC LESIONS

*Lumbar Disc Lesions—Pathogenesis and Treatment of Low Back Pain and Sciatica.* 2nd edition. By J. R. Armstrong, M.D., M.Ch., F.R.C.S. Pp. xii+244. 60 figures. 45s. net+

2s. 1d. postage abroad. Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone Ltd. 1958.

This book is not for the orthopaedic surgeon struggling with a large back-ache clinic; nor is it for the undergraduate student

wishing to learn, amongst many other things, about back-ache; nor is it for the practitioner, who will find it no help in the treatment of the every-day problem of the sore back; nor for the manipulator, who will not find much support here.

For the disc operator, it will, however, be a Bible, which will give him moral and technical support.

#### ABORTION

J.M.G.

*Abortion in the United States.* A Conference Sponsored by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc. at Arden House and the New York Academy of Medicine. Edited by Mary Steichen Calderone, M.D., M.S.P.H. Pp. vii+224. \$5.50. New York: Paul B. Hoeber, Inc. 1958.

Reporting on a unique Arden House Conference, this book provides a sizeable body of current factual information on the nature and extent of illegal abortion as well as its relationship to the practice of therapeutic abortion in the United States. A discussion of the laws and extent of abortion in the Scandinavian countries, Japan, Germany, USSR, and Finland is also included.

Although this is a verbatim report of the conference, the book is set out in a very logical and readable fashion. The many comparative statistics of the different hospitals, however, makes the book dull in parts. As is the case with most conferences, the many questions put to the speaker sometimes distract the attention from the main topic of the address and this is sometimes confusing to the reader. In the final chapter of the book the delegates try to find some solution to this major sociomedical problem of illegal abortion and suggestions such as sex education, consultation centres for women seeking abortion, increased availability of contraceptive services and revision of abortion laws, are made.

After digesting this book it makes us wonder why we as medical men in South Africa are so passive in the fight against this demon which is destroying the lives and happiness of so many women. Is it not time for us to probe into this matter and also have conferences, rather than leaving the whole problem to the prosecutor?

R.W.A.N.

#### ELECTROCARDIOGRAPHY

*Biophysical Principles of Electrocardiography.* Vol. I. By Robert H. Bayley, M.D. Pp. xvi+237. Illustrations. \$8.00. New York: Paul B. Hoeber, Inc. 1958.

This book requires careful study. The author has contributed greatly towards current terminology used in electrocardiography. Unfortunately the terms are often used in a ponderous fashion and without adequate explanation. Basic concepts of electrocardiography are given in words and formulae of which the meaning is not always clear. The use of rather involved mathematical concepts which presuppose a fairly extensive background, in physics and mathematics causes a certain amount of frustration in reading, particularly when practically no reference is made to original publications. Where the approach to the electrocardiogram is such a fundamental one, as is attempted in this book, and references are only to the basic articles, one has been surprised to find that the work of W. H. Craib on the distribution of electric currents generated in a muscle strip immersed in a volume conductor, is not even mentioned. There can be little doubt that this work formed the basis of the monumental work of Wilson at a later date.

The most useful chapters in this book, and those which will repay thorough reading and re-reading, is chapter 6 on the infarction pattern with broad QRS complexes, chapter 7 on the regression wave and its properties, followed by chapter 8 on the primary and secondary T-wave changes in various conditions.

This is a most important book for advanced students on electrocardiography, but cannot be recommended for the beginner.

A.J.B.

#### DIAGNOSTIC HAEMATOLOGY

*Diagnostic Laboratory Hematology.* 2nd edition, revised and enlarged. By George E. Cartwright, M.D. Pp. xi+250. 33 figures. \$6.75. New York and London: Grune & Stratton, Inc. 1958.

In its original form this book was written for the benefit of students, interns and general practitioners.

The 2nd edition, however, includes several more elaborate and esoteric techniques, the bulk of which are unlikely to be used outside properly equipped laboratories. This basic change has

given the work a fatal ambiguity of character, exemplified on the one hand by the relative prominence given to a technique such as platelet counting using phase contrast microscopy, and on the other by the omission of any account of the techniques needed to make satisfactory blood smears using slides rather than the cover glasses which the author favours. For the student or private practitioner too much is offered; for the routine laboratory worker the book is not really adequate and suffers from the grave disadvantage of being written in what the author himself terms a 'cook book' fashion. The individual techniques described are sound and the book is well produced but at its price it represents poor value compared with works of similar scope emanating from the British schools of haematology.

N.W.

#### CHANGE OF SEX

*Homosexuality, Transvestism and Change of Sex.* By Eugene de Savitsch, M.D. Pp. viii+120. 12s. 6d. net. London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd. 1958.

The author wrote this book to satisfy 'numerous enquiries' about change of sex operations. The regular publicity given sex change in the sensational press is evidence that a widespread public interest in the matter exists. The change of genital sex is always from male to 'female'; the external genitalia are amputated. It is debated among surgeons interested in this matter whether construction of an artificial vagina is ever justified. While it may satisfy the patient psychologically, the cavity constructed, whether lined by skin or intestine, cannot be used for intercourse. Women who seek sex change cannot be offered correspondingly helpful surgery. Some surgeons may remove the uterus and ovaries in male-oriented women, but none claim to be able to provide an adequate penis.

The author becomes less scientific when discussing the more subtle matter of the personality make-up of those persons who seek sex change. Dogmatically he makes the dubious assertion that homosexuality is an aberration of nature and not of conduct, that 'the trouble resides primarily in the union of the chromosomes'. Committed to this narrowly genetic belief, the argument is then advanced that the surgeon, as it were, is a right and proper person to correct 'the unbearable situation for someone who was just born the wrong way'. Three cases of transvestism are sketchily described. There is much lively writing; the size of the posterior of the Empress Elizabeth of Russia is commented upon and the author describes George Sand as vaguely resembling a horse, presumably assuming this to be evidence of her low femininity.

H.W.

#### DENTAL CARIES

*The Problem of Dental Caries and the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies.* By Douw G. Steyn, B.Sc., Dr. Med. Vet., D.V.Sc. Pp. 208. 4 photographs. 45s. Johannesburg: Die Voortrekkerpers, Bpk. 1958.

The view has been held for many years that, among other factors, fluorides are important in the prevention of tooth decay, although there is contrary evidence that fluorine is not absolutely essential in normal teeth (and bone) metabolism and that it is not the only element in drinking water responsible for the resistance of teeth to caries.

The topical application of fluorides to the teeth of children by trained personnel appears to be one way of using fluorine to prevent tooth decay. The fluoridation of public water supplies has been accepted as a safe and effective method for reducing the prevalence of dental caries by the American Public Health Association, the United States Public Health Service, the American Dental Association, and the American Medical Association. There are, however, many dentists, doctors, and other workers who are not in favour of this method of combatting tooth decay.

Professor Steyn, who has for a number of years investigated this problem both in the field and in the laboratory, has performed a useful service in publishing a well-documented and detailed review of the literature dealing with tooth decay. In this work he considers various nutritional aspects and theories and not only the question of fluorine. As far as fluorine is concerned he concludes that, with other measures for the prevention of caries, the topical application of stannous fluoride should be used. He also presents arguments as to why the artificial fluoridation of public water supplies should not be recommended. He stresses the possible danger of the chronic toxicity of fluorine.

N.S.

## HARTNEKROSE

*The Chemical Prevention of Cardiac Necroses.* Deur Hans Selye, M.D., Ph.D., D.Sc. Pp. ix+235. 20 afbeeldings. \$7.50. New York: The Ronald Press Company. 1958.

Selye se uitgangspunt is nog steeds die begrip van 'n algemene aanpassingsindroom teen verskillende stressors en die gevolge van oorwerking van die aanpassingsmeganisme. Deur middel van hierdie werk probeer hy 'n verklaring vind vir die hartnekroses as die eindpatologiese verskynsel van 'n groot aantal uiteenlopende etiologiese faktore, soos dié wat volg op toediening van adrenalien, digitalis, vitamine D, of na inspanning, met lae kalium dieet, non-spesifieke miokarditis, Fiedler se miokarditis en selfs dié wat volg op infeksies, en ook moontlikerwyse die kardiaale infarksie by die mens.

Eksperimenteel word daar tasbare bewyse gelewer vir die ontstaan van nekrose by die rot-hart as gevolg van sensitisering

deur steroïedes, en by uitstek die gemengde gluko-mineralokortikoïedes, en hier word 2a-metiel-9a-chlorokortisol gebruik en daarna die toediening van verskillende soorte natriumsoute. Die mees kragtige hiervan is natriumfosfate, sulfate en perchlorate. Die kation sowel as die anioon is in die opsig van belang.

Van ewe groot betekenis is die verbasende vermoë eksperimenteel gevind vir sekere soute om die gesensitiseerde dier te beskerm teen die nekrotiese verskynsels. Hier is kaliumchloried en magnesiumchloried die aktiefste. Die interessante voorstel word gemaak dat hierdie soute ook moontlikerwyse kan beskerm teen die infarkties en nekrotiserende toestande by siekteverskynsels in die mens.

Die geheel is interessante leesstof. Die beskouings is nuut. 'n Mens voel egter dat te veel aaneengeskakel word, en dat dit onwaarskynlik is dat sulke uiteenlopende toestande net deur een onderliggende gemeenskaplike meganisme sal ontstaan.

A.J.B.