

THE BEST BOOK ON LEPROSY *

In 1959 Dr. R. G. Cochrane produced a text book on leprosy which was so well accepted that within three years it was sold out. The second edition is now available, considerably enlarged (659 pages) and with an additional editor Dr. T. F. Davey who has vast experience in Africa. The new book also calls on no less than 43 other experts as contributors including such great names as Paul Brand the Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery in Vellore, Dr. V. R. Khanolkar Professor in Medicine at the Indian Cancer Research Centre Bombay, Professor O.K. Skinsnes of Chicago, Dr. S. G. Browne of the Leprosy Service Research Unit in Nigeria and Dr. A. G. M. Weddell, Reader in Human Anatomy in Oxford. It is obvious that the editors have done their best to accumulate the most authoritative experience possible throughout the world although it must be admitted that the absence of any contributors from South America is a little surprising.

The book consists of 33 chapters and a number of appendixes and attempts to cover the whole of the theory and practice of leprosy. Authoritative chapters to begin with include "The Submicroscopical Structure of the Mycobacterium Leprae," "Recent Investigations into the Sensory and Neurohistological Changes in Leprosy" and "Leprosy and the Schwann Cell *in vivo* and *in vitro*." These are all written by acknowledged experts in their fields while Skinsnes' chapters on Immunology and the one on Genetics are both fine examples of the assistance which an outside discipline can bring to the subject.

It is obvious that the editors gave a wide play to individual authors, for example the article on Pathology would not be accepted in many centres as being completely accurate while Lumsden's contribution on the Schwann cell directly challenges statements made in Weddell's article. Unfortunately chapters on "reactions" and their treatment are by different authors who do not seem to see eye to eye on matters of basic definition and there is an obvious divergence of opinion as to the

diagnosis and even the existence of the Progressive Lepra Reaction. These and other examples of editorial permissiveness must surely make it difficult for the non-specialist who is reading the book to understand fully where the truth is believed to lie and it would probably have been of more use if the editors came out more definitely in favour of one particular view even if this was not completely accepted by all authorities who are studying the disease.

General practitioners and surgeons who have bought the book as an aid to their practical treatment of their patients will heave a sigh of relief when, on page 251, Signs and Symptoms are at last mentioned. Such readers will certainly be full of admiration for the frequent brilliance of the foregoing articles but may perhaps wonder whether a simpler book would not be better for their own purposes. All surgeons working in countries where leprosy is common will admire Paul Brand's article on Deformity but even here phrases like "acute lepromatous reaction" are difficult to interpret from the context and one wonders what other authors would have called this condition. The whole group of articles on surgery and physiotherapy is quite first rate and it would be a pity if any surgeon was deterred from acquiring this book because of lack of interest in the theoretical side of the disease.

The index is occasionally erratic. For example references to the Ziehl-Neelsen's method of staining leprosy bacilli are not of any use at all as aids to staining while the detailed instructions on page 614 are not mentioned in the index. To sum up there is an enormous amount of valuable material in this book which is both heavy and expensive and it is suggested that further editions of the same type would rather defeat their own ends which is surely to promote an up-to-date knowledge of leprosy.

If this book had been published in 3 smaller volumes entitled:—

* Leprosy in Theory and Practice. Editor R. G. Cochrane, assist. by T. F. Davey. 672 pp. 10 x 6½ in. 247 illus. Price £5 15s. 0d. Publisher John Wright & Son Ltd. Bristol.

- (1) Leprosy for the physician
- (2) Leprosy for the surgeon and
- (3) Recent advances in leprosy

it would probably have reached an even wider audience than it will in any case command.

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