

Book Review

Leprosy for Students of Medicine, by A. Bryceson and R. E. Pfaltzfraff. Edinburgh, Churchill Livingstone £1.50, 152 pp.

This book, written by two leprologists of great experience, could well be one which many leprosy workers have been seeking for a long time. Clear, concise, and comprehensive, it compresses into 152 pages the facts which every student of leprosy needs to know. At the same time it presents them with a scientific approach which not only places leprosy in the main stream of general medicine, but brings out its unique interest and importance.

As the authors state in the preface, the book is born of a course in leprosy run at Garkida for medical students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. Students who have teaching of such distinction are fortunate indeed.

While the African setting is evident, the authors have made every effort to present the world wide picture of leprosy. Numerous diagrams, and 43 black and white plates enrich the text. The 15 chapters cover every aspect of leprology, with suggestions for further reading appended to each. Chapters dealing with immunological questions are particularly outstanding, and typical of the whole approach is a welcome chapter on ophthalmology, and also a chapter on experimental leprosy.

The inevitable emphasis on clinical leprosy as seen in Nigeria, and the approach to treatment and control appropriate in that area, does not sometimes take sufficient account of features which may be more apparent, for instance in Asia. I could not find any reference to the heavy involvement of the male external genitalia in lepromatous and borderline leprosy, or to the immunological downgrading associated with puberty in the male, and, more importantly, with parturition in the female. On the practical side too there are one or two points to be made. The suggestions for multiple smears on a single slide on p. 32 are admirable, but if the slide illustrated is the usual 1 in X 3 in size or thereabouts, he would be a remarkable technician who succeeded in making 6 to 8 smears in the area of the lines shown on the diagram. Surely they should be more widely spaced. This is a minor point. A more important one is the omission of the simple technique for testing thermal sensation. It was probably correct to include the pilocarpine test for loss of sweating, though the practical usefulness of this in preference to asking the patient to run for 100 m is debatable.

For the rest, two elements in the pleasure one had in reading this book were the confirmation of cherished points in personal clinical experience on the one side, and fine points about which one would like to argue on the other, as e.g. the placing of pin prick first in the modalities of lost sensation in lepromatous leprosy, and the statement that in tuberculoid lesions a macular phase precedes the raised phase.

These are minor criticisms when set against the tremendous positive value of this book, and can easily be reconsidered in the second edition which it is hoped will be called for. This book should be read and treasured by doctors involved with leprosy in five continents, and at a price of £1.50, should be within the reach of them all.

Frank Davey