Reviews

REVIEWS

NEW BOOKS

Narrative of an Investigation Concerning an Ancient Medicinal Remedy and its Modern Utilities. By C. J. Macalister, M.D., F.R.C.P. London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, Limited. 1936. (2s. 6d. net.)

This is a remarkable book which should be widely read. In the space of sixty short pages the author describes the results of his investigations of the clinical value of comfrey root and its contained allantoin. A perusal of old herbals might give the impression that the comfrey plant is a panacea. In certain parts of the country it is still used by housewives. Thus, Symphytum officinale has been liberally translated “Knitbone” by Lancashire people, and indeed, this synonym—like the botanical name—refers to the healing properties of the comfrey plant.

During the past thirty years numerous papers have appeared describing the physical and chemical properties of allantoin. It is a diureide of glyoxylic acid and it can be isolated from many common food-stuffs (Ackroyd 1911).

Dr. Macalister has suggested that the therapeutic effects of comfrey root might be due to a cell—proliferant action of allantoin. Some striking successes with this preparation in the treatment of intractable ulcers go far to support the possibility.

Not the least interesting and important results concern the production of leucocytosis by the administration of allantoin.

Dr. Macalister is to be congratulated on this publication and especially in making a plea for fuller clinical investigation. If his results are confirmed, the importance of allantoin can hardly be overstated. Furthermore a natural cell-proliferant, so readily available should interest workers in cancer research as well as the therapeutist.

A Manual of Practical Obstetrics. By O'Donel Browne, MB., B.Ch., B.A.O. Bristol: John Wright & Sons, Limited. 1936. (20s. net)

Yet another book on obstetrics has been added to the already long list. It has been written for students and general practitioners, and it can be said at once that it will be helpful to those because of the amount
of practical detail which is given, especially with regard to treatment. The account of the treatment of uterine inertia is excellent. Some surprising statements are made, however, such as, writing of eclampsia — "The Dublin theory is generally accepted as the best explanation to date and will be considered in detail. It postulates that food and toxic products are absorbed from the intestinal tract into the blood stream, of course in altered form, and act as a poison." There is no reference to recent work on the subject and the pathology of the kidney is described quiet inaccurately. In connexion with puerperal sepsis, there is no mention made of the work of either Smith or Colebrook and the author states that virulent organisms may be present in the vagina before delivery, a view which has been disproved. Another startling statement is that where pyrexia in the peurperium has lasted forty-eight hours, cultures should be taken from the uterine cavity, a proceeding which will certainly not be of any benefit and may do much harm to the patient.

The treatment advocated in cases of antepartum haemorrhage is poor. No stress is laid on the necessity for blood transfusion. In cases of retained membranes, packing of the uterus is recommended.

To sum up, the book is not up to date with regard to the all-important complications of pregnancy and the puerperium, namely the toxæmias, antepartum haemorrhage, and puerperal sepsis. This is a great pity, as the author gives much helpful practical advice.

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Evolution and Heredity: Theories and Problems. By Charles Walker, D.Sc. London: A. & C. Black, Limited. 1936. (6s net.)

To all but the expert the subject of evolution and heredity has always presented many difficulties and not the least of them has been the apparently contradictory evidence put forward in support of conflicting views. This book is an attempt to correlate and harmonize many of the observations recorded during the past thirty years that appear to contradict each other. It must be admitted at once that the attempt has been singularly successful, at least as far as the ordinary reader is concerned. Whether those whose views are thus "correlated and harmonized" will agree with his concluding sentence that "Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection is affected by Mendel's discovery only to its advantage" is another matter. The lot of the peacemaker is not always blessed, but in this case it deserves to be by the ordinary layman if not by the biologist. To one reader at any rate this book has cleared away much that hitherto had obscured this difficult subject and he can confidently recommend it as a stimulating and refreshing survey.
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*Bacterial Endocarditis.* By C. Bruce Perry, M.D., M.R.C.P. Bristol: John Wright & Sons, Limited. 1936. (10s. 6d. net.)

This volume is issued by the trustees of the R. L. St. John Harmsworth Memorial Research Fund. The object of this fund is to aid in the investigation of Bacterial Endocarditis; grants are given for this purpose from its resources, and it is provided that the whole of the fund is bestowed on the discoverer of a cure for the disease. Attached to the volume under review, there is an appendix on, “An Experimental Study of Malignant Endocarditis,” by D. M. Lloyd-Jones, M.D., M.R.C.P. This is an investigation into the production of the disease in rabbits by intravenous injections alone, of differing quantities of varying varieties and strains of streptococci. The monograph itself, starts with a careful definition of the condition, and an interesting and full historical survey. There follow complete descriptions from the etiological, clinical, pathological and bacteriological points of view, and finally, sections on prognosis and treatment. The style is very clear, and an added pleasure to what is a very full, and interesting review of the subject.

*Infra-Red Irradiation.* By W. Beaumont, M.R.C.S.(Eng.), L.R.C.P. (Lond.). London: H.K. Lewis & Co., Limited. 1936. (6s.6d. net.)

The value of radiation is becoming increasingly important in therapeutics, and the author is to be congratulated on producing a concise and very practical little handbook. In the opening chapter a lucid account is given of the physical properties of infra-red rays in so far as these are of importance therapeutically. This is followed by a brief description of the physiological effects which are produced by this type of radiation. The chapter which is devoted to apparatus will be found of value to those faced with questions of choice of apparatus, since much useful information is supplied regarding the characteristics and relative merits of the various generators at present on the market. In discussing technique and therapeutic indications the author presents a well-balanced survey of his obviously considerable experience.

This book will be of particular value to the practitioner who includes in his armamentarium, apparatus for the generation of infra-red rays. It should be read by all interested in this subject.