historical perspective and to discern the connection with cretinism, his clinical descriptions of which could not be bettered today; he spoke and wrote about it only after his own reading, observation and surveys had provided a sound and thoughtful basis for speculation. His contribution to the field was not large but it exemplified his oft-quoted statement: ‘That man can interrogate as well as observe nature, was a lesson slowly learned in his evolution’.

This article is based on the Oslerian Oration delivered to the Osler Club of London in July 1984.

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Book Review

Advanced Medicine 20. Edited by Anne Ferguson. Pitman Publishing, London, 1984. Price £20.

I enjoyed reading this book. The Advanced Medicine Conferences organised by the College are an important part of its educational activities, particularly so since there is now a tradition of rapid publication in book form. Advanced Medicine 20 contains papers presented at the meeting held in London in February 1984, and has been edited by Dr Anne Ferguson of the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh. The eight sections cover inflammatory bowel disease, general gastroenterology, the prevention of cardiovascular disease, chronic disease in adolescence, clinical immunology, an assessment of four ‘new’ diseases, four papers on cancer management and finally two papers on breast cancer.

In trying to assess the value of this book for the general physician I found myself looking for discussions on controversial or difficult areas of current practice; for articles which encourage ‘lateral thought’ (by discussing a topic in a field outside my own interests but leading me to new thoughts about my own patients); for comprehensible reviews of the ‘state of the art’ in current research fields; and for ‘interface’ articles exploring the fascinating ways in which different fields within medicine interact with each other.

From these standpoints this volume has much to commend it. Clearly, the comments that follow are personal reflections, but I have tried to give a flavour of the contributions.

Of the two sections on gastroenterology, I particularly enjoyed firstly the paper on the varied presentations of coeliac disease which illustrates neatly how textbook descriptions of disease can become out of date, and secondly the chapter on the oesophagus as a cause of chest pain which one might characterise as a new explanation for an old symptom. There is a comprehensive review by Miškiewicz of H2 antagonist treatment for peptic ulceration, and the general points made by Lennard-Jones in his discussion of corticosteroid and immunosuppressant treatment in inflammatory bowel disease are sure to be of interest to physicians in other specialties.

From a total of five papers discussing the epidemiological evidence for the value of preventive measures in cardiovascular disease, one would have hoped that a clear picture would emerge of the pathological processes which it is hoped to prevent, and of the ‘best buys’ from the candidates for programmes. However, this is not the case and one has instead a thought-provoking article about pathogenesis, and two somewhat opposing views about coronary heart disease screening from Professor Oliver and Professor Marmot. I think the article upon mild

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hypertension might have been better deferred until the full results of the MRC study are known.

Adolescence is an example of an interface area where both paediatricians and general physicians might have reason to feel somewhat out of their depth. I found the rather unlikely subject of retarded growth and development in teenagers by Dr Preece an interesting example of how careful simple clinical measurements (in this case height and family history) can lead to important conclusions and diagnoses. In this respect it reminds me of the use of peak expiratory flow rate charts in chest medicine. Margaret Mearns' and Dr Taylor's comments on the psychological difficulties of chronically ill teenagers are surely important reviews for any doctor dealing with such patients.

The section on clinical immunology was clearly intended to summarise research fields and was easily the most difficult to comprehend. There are, however, comprehensive reviews for the erudite, and Professor Kay's overview of the mediator maze in asthma is an example. Professor Lessor's paper on mediators in food intolerance might have been better supported by, for example, a separate discussion of the important difference between food intolerance and food allergy which has recently been highlighted so admirably by the Working Party Report prepared by the College and chaired by him.

Factitious illnesses are surely not 'new' diseases, and one would imagine that Munchausen patients have presented to physicians for centuries. However, Professor Meadow's article rightly fascinates one with his account of parents who fabricate symptoms and illnesses in their children. One remains as baffled as ever to understand the motivation of, for example, parents who deliberately suffocate their children to induce epileptic fits. I also much enjoyed Dr Lacey's description of the hyperphagic syndrome (bulimia) as a counterpoint to the more notorious anorexia nervosa, and the comprehensive account of AIDS by Harris and Weber.

The last two sections concentrate on cancer therapy. Several of these articles are of direct interest to the general physician since most of us now deal with cancer either frequently or rarely, and I found in this respect a discussion of cancer care delivery, the lucid account of breast screening by Dr Chamberlain, and particularly the thought-provoking article by Maguire on the psychological difficulties which patients experience when they undergo cancer chemotherapy, were the most memorable. There is now, perhaps belatedly, intense interest in oncology in the measurement of the quality of life that these patients experience. Dr Maguire once again forces us to remember the importance of the whole patient when we apply treatment, and I thought it an apposite way to end this valuable collection of papers.

MARTIN MUERS