Books

Function and dysfunction of the small intestine

Edited by R M Batt and T L J Lawrence. (Pp. 264; illustrated; £22.50.) Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1984.

This volume contains 12 essays prepared for a multidisciplinary, but predominantly veterinary, symposium held in Liverpool in March 1983. There is a strong emphasis on mucosal adaptation and immunology, which is a logical basis for the chapters on immunologically-mediated damage and bacterial and viral invasion in the latter part of the book. A complete balance of topics within the scope of the title is not to be expected within the constraints of the symposium format. Dockray's chapter on peptides as integrators of gastrointestinal function rightly emphasises the importance of these substances within the local and remote nerve networks which control the gut, and Laplace reviews one aspect of physiology – integrated motor activity – where the importance of these control systems is now well-documented. Missing from the book is any consideration of the neural regulation of mucosal function, nor is there any mention of mucosal blood and lymph supply. Even if the authors had chosen to replace 'small intestine' in the title by 'small intestinal mucosa and muscle', these omissions might seem perverse; to treat the small intestine largely as though it is a specialised epithelial layer without significant neural and vascular regulation is to ignore an increasing volume of relevant evidence.

Possibly the defects in the choice of topics reflect the preoccupations of veterinary scientists, but this bias also offers much that is unfamiliar and also important for the clinically orientated scientist. Animal husbandry is backed by powerful economic forces; bigger and stronger litters and improved food to protein conversion have far reaching financial and social implications. Veterinary scientists have carried out much research that is relevant to man, but little known to medical scientists. If this book cannot be recommended as a comprehensive survey of all that is implied by its title, it has, nevertheless, much to offer to enteric physiologists and pathophysiologists. In particular, it gives a new perspective which is backed, in most cases, by comprehensive referencing of unfamiliar work. It deserves to be made available to all those interested in small intestinal function and dysfunction, among whom it should stimulate more

questions than it answers. The price is understandably high, but the editors and publishers have produced a book that is well edited and attractively designed.

DAVID WINGATE

Topics in gastroenterology-11 Edited by D P Jewell and H A Shepherd. (Pp 339; illustrated; £27.50.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications 1983.

This is the 11th year which Truelove's (and now Jewell's) annual Oxford postgraduate gastroenterology course has been published in full. The topics covered in depth this year were: acute upper GI bleeding (diagnosis, management, angiography, endoscopic intervention); liver failure (pathophysiology, encephalopathy, management); hepatitis (natural history, management); tropical gastroenterology (tropical sprue, nutritional cost of diarrhoea, liver, abdominal tuberculosis); carcinoma of the colon (epidemiology, surgery, metastases, cytotoxics, experimental); Crohn's (natural history, assessment of activity, local immune mechanisms, the split ileostomy).

The editors have chosen acknowledged experts who have produced concise and authoritative accounts. Blackwell's have as usual produced an elegant book at a representative price for a hardback, and a gastroenterologist wanting information of these topics can safely find it here.

But do we need this anthology and its 10 predecessors in the series? Or indeed any or all of the many other series? Butterworth's had three *Modern Trends*, and now has a five volumes sequence in its *International Medical Series*. Churchill Livingstone is now up to its fifth *Recent Advances in Gastroenterology*. Saunders' *Clinics in Gastroenterology* comes thrice a year. Wiley's *Current Gastroenterology* is up to (3). By 1980 Karger had six volumes of *Frontiers of Gastrointestinal Research* and is now publishing *Survey of Digestive Diseases* quarterly. In 1981 Elsevier began a *Liver Annual* and last year a *Gastroenterology Annual*.

Clearly there is a demand for such books otherwise the publishers of a free market economy would not produce them. But is there a need? And should editors and authors spend so much of their lives writing and editing these chunks however authoritative? Should they not be spending their time in research and writing papers and monographs?

J H BARON