There are, however, some real treasures here. The opening quartet of essays relating to gastrointestinal physiology are by Baron, Wold, Davenport, Wingate, and Gregory — surely some of the most beautiful writers ever to have interested themselves in the human gut. Yet each of these is surpassed by Chris Booth whose piece on ‘What has technology done to gastroenterology’ is the finest piece of writing ever to have graced the pages of this journal (Gut 1985; 26: 1088–94). This essay is required reading for those embarking on a career in clinical gastroenterology who may be tempted to the view that skills in fiberoptic endoscopy are some- how the end rather than the means to an end.

If you can live with this book’s misnomer, you will find several further treasures. Find out that both Hippocrates and Aeneas the Cappadocian may have described Crohn’s disease before Christ (let alone Crohn). You can learn how Benevieni (1442–1502) described the features of ilies. He was also a physician to the Borgias so had plenty of time to study acute stomach problems in the many guests who so frequently became fatally ill after a nice family meal. We have to move into the 18th century to learn how our colleagues of former time, Reaumur, Hunter, and Spallanzani worked out that the stomach is a secreted acid. They did, however, have some difficulty in determining the type of acidophoric and lactic were prominent con- tenders before the right answer emerged.

Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of this book is that we are constantly reminded that work in a specialty that is steeped in history and occasionally in antiquity. We spend so much of our time at the frontier between the present and the future, that is to say, between what is known and what is not known, that it is easy to overlook the lessons of the past.

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Fatty acids are the major product of bacterial fermentation of dietary carbohydrates in the gastrointestinal tract, and constitute the route through which energy can be extracted from carbohydrate and fat in the small intestine and absorbed in the small intestine. Research suggests that they may protect against large bowel disease and may also exert a modulators role in the control of blood sugar and cholesterol. This book presents this last decade of research, and the volume has come to expected.

Although every section has been revised to a greater or lesser degree, the advances have been greatest since 1988, for example in hepatitis and transplantation, have seen the most change.

In conclusion, yes, the fifth edition is even better than the fourth. This remains the best and most authoritative manual on the interpreta- tion of liver biopsies, as well as being highly competitively priced. It is a must for anyone involved in liver biopsy diagnosis.

D G WIGHT