Books

The biliary tract Clinical surgery international 5. Edited by L H Blumgart. (Pp. 281; illustrated; £15.) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1982.

Because of the impact of new diagnostic techniques such as CT scanning, ultrasound, and various types of cholangiography, of new operative techniques, notably endoscopic sphincterotomy, and of a clearer appreciation of other than purely mechanical factors in obstructive disease of the biliary tract, the past decade has seen major advances in the management of biliary disease. This volume, in the words of the editor, Professor Blumgart, 'attempts to bring together the opinions of some of the world's leading authorities with a critical appraisal of established practice . . . and an up-to-date assessment of new techniques in the diagnosis, management and care of the patient with biliary disease'.

The team of experts that Professor Blumgart has brought together to assist him in this timely task has, in general, served him well. The various chapters cover a wide range of aspects of biliary disease. The opening chapter on the anatomy of the biliary system by Northover and Terblanche, contains an admirable summary of their important studies on the blood supply of the common duct, and this is followed by a lucid, balanced review of the present place of gall stone dissolution by Watts and his colleagues from Melbourne. In the ensuing chapters, each of which like the former two has very adequate, up to date references, the newer diagnostic techniques, the problems of stricture of the common duct, carcinoma of the biliary tract, the consequences of obstruction of the common duct, and the problems of infection in the duct, together with a number of other topics, are all constructively reviewed. Professor Blumgart's own contribution on postcholecystectomy problems contains a valuable appraisal of endoscopic sphincterotomy. The book ends with a fascinating analysis, challenging widely held views, of the economic aspects of gall-stone disease, by Bengmark and his colleagues from Sweden.

A valuable feature of this volume is the breadth of topics reviewed, including biliary disease in paediatric practice and in the tropics. A notable omission, however, is any clear description of the anatomy of the lower end of the common duct

related to the various forms of sphincterotomy discussed (what actually is divided in each of these procedures?), and no adequate consideration of the very topical but poorly understood problems of so-called biliary dyskinesia, and/or stricture of the terminal duct. Furthermore, an essentially conventional account of cholecystectomy and exploration of the common duct, with no critical evaluation of the place of operative cholangiography and choledochoscopy, seems out of place in this volume.

These comments, however, do not detract from the overall value and interest of this book, which is concise, yet packed with information and healthily critical. Not a book for the general reader, but highly recommended to those with a special interest in biliary disease.

L P LE QUESNE

Current hepatology: Vol 2 Edited by Gary L Gitnick. (Pp. 428; illustrated; £40.75.) Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley. 1982.

This volume contains 10 chapters, each of which is a literature review covering a broad area of hepatology. Gary Gitnick in his preface puts his finger on the difficulties facing the contributors who must avoid imposing their individual prejudices while trying to produce an interpreted review of trends rather than a mere collection of abstracts of current research. The results are inevitably mixed. While most authors have effectively included a wide range of the recent literature (perhaps too wide in some chapters), interpretation varies from excellent to very poor. The chapter by Kaplowitz, Eberle, Yamada, and Touloukian on hepatic drug metabolism and drug-induced liver disease is a model of the ideal balance. Sufficient background information is given for most readers to be able to appreciate the relevance of recent work. The literature selected for review is then used to build new concepts or support or weaken existing ones. Most enjoyable reading. It is also hard to fault excellent chapters by two of the 'old masters' (the emphasis on experience rather than age): Harold Conn and John Galambos, the former tackling portal hypertension and the latter cirrhosis (with co-author Stanley Riepe). At the other extreme, I find it difficult, as an immunologist, to assess the opening chapter of this book written about hepatitis and immunology by Dr Koretz, a self-confessed non-immunologist. The literature is all covered but the interpretation, particularly with respect to immunology, is vague and often confusing. It is also somewhat disturbing to find that one of my own contributions to the literature is confidently