Books


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 heathily critical. Not a book for the general reader, but highly recommended to those with a special interest in biliary disease.

L P LE QUESNE


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...
attributed to 'the group at Stanford, where a great deal of this work is currently in progress'!

Looking at the whole, this book represents a good way of catching up on the literature, with some chapters being truly excellent. The price, however, is high, and in the present economic climate there are many other demands on our income.

A L W F EDDLESTON


In 1968, With concluded his 669-page book on bile pigment with the remark: 'In few places is so much biochemistry used with so small results as in liver diagnostics'. More than a decade later Heirwegh and Brown have felt the need to review the still expanding research on bilirubin with emphasis on the importance of methodological advances and their potential for future developments. The book appears in two volumes, the first dealing with the structure, physical chemistry and analytical methods, and the second with bilirubin formation, metabolism, and pathophysiology. The 16 authors of the book are all actively engaged in bilirubin research and have included references up to 1980 in the text. Important advances on the photochemistry of bilirubin, chemical synthesis of bilirubin conjugates, development of new analytical techniques such as HPLC after alkaline methanalysis are lucidly reviewed. Chapters on bilirubin formation, transport, mechanism of biliary excretion and the kinetic analysis of bilirubin metabolism all point to the fact that bilirubin has become a useful model for the general study of hepatic uptake, binding and transport. For clinicians the final chapter of 30 pages is an excellent update on physiology and disorders of human bilirubin metabolism. The first part of the book will primarily appeal to physiologists, biochemists, and other fundamental scientists. The price of the book is too high; hopefully it will not prevent its presence in every medical university library as the most up-to-date reference work on bilirubin.

S W SCHALM


An explosion is caused by a sudden upsurge of hot air which has two main consequences: an alteration in the landscape, and a degree of chaos. The consequences of the scientific explosion which has transformed the previously tranquil, even static, subject of gut motility are well illustrated in these two volumes, which collectively constitute Volume 59 of the Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology. Over many years, millions of gut strips have twitched in thousands of organ baths in response to hundreds of chemicals, generating in terms of data, more heat than light. The transformation has been wrought by neurophysiology, not pharmacology, with the revelation of the complexity of the interacting local and distant nerve networks which control the gut. In this situation, the editor has wisely chosen to emphasise physiology and morphology at the expense of classical pharmacology. The majority of volume 1 is devoted to extensive reviews of the central (Roman) and enteric (Costa and Furness) neurophysiology. The residual chaos is in the topic of the 'gut hormones'; we now know that they are, for the most part, neither hormones nor confined to the gut, and we also know that they play some part in neural control. But what part? Professor Bertaccini has himself tackled this subject in a massive review of peptides, which forms the greater part of volume 2. While this survey of peptides is a useful source of references, it does emphasise, perhaps, the pharmacologist's enduring preference for substances which appear to act directly on smooth muscle. Moreover, it is incomplete, as a review of peptides which omits opioids, somatostatin, and pancreatic polypeptide cannot be said to be comprehensive in 1983. Despite omissions, and an understandable bias towards pharmacology, much of this book is essential reading for scientists in the field.

But what does it offer to the clinician, apart from the possibility of financial bankruptcy? The answer has to be not much. The recent scientific advances have not yet led to significant modifications of clinical practice; this work is essentially an interim report for the workers at the face. The real significance of motilithy research is that the motor apparatus is rapidly responsive to neural control, and modulation of motor activity is a rich source of clues to the nature of the control systems. When these controls are finally elucidated, every gastro-enterologist will need to know how they work, for it will emerge that they integrate all aspects of gut function.

To buy a book at this price for the sake of the first five pages is obviously ludicrous, but they contain Charles Code's lucid and entertaining overview of