

BOOK REVIEWS

PLASTIC SURGERY IN THE TROPICS: *an introduction for medical students and surgeons.* By J. O. OLUWASANMI, M.D.(London), F.R.C.S.(Ed.). First Edition. Pp. 196 with 104 illustrations. (Macmillan Tropical and Sub-tropical Texts. London. Macmillan 1979.) Price £9.95 Hardback. £4.95 Paperback.

This volume written by a plastic surgeon who is also Head of the Department of Surgery in the University of Ibadan, is designed as an introduction for medical students and general surgeons and is based on the author's personal experience in Nigeria. It is one of a series of medical text books (Macmillan International College Editions) now available at very low cost in developing countries and produced under the general editorship of Dr J. O. Grant of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

This particular volume is profoundly disappointing. The text is uneven in style and content. There is a great deal of "padding" in some chapters (boils, whitlows, abscesses) a very scrappy section on the classification and management of wounds, serious spelling mistakes ("adrexal", "flexeral", "orthopathomogram", "cruifix") and the "tropical" content is surprisingly thin. The section on burns contains much accurate and important information, but it is so badly arranged in the text that its usefulness is seriously compromised. Syndactyly, a very common anomaly is briefly described, but not its treatment. Hypospadias is described in very general terms and a one-stage method of repair is mentioned but not illustrated. Is this not the kind of information that the general surgeons working in the tropics would like to have available?

There is something sadly amiss with the quality of the original photographs and/or their reproduction (Fig. 2.2 or Fig. 5.1). The same is true of the illustrations. Some of them are extremely crude (Figs. 1.1 and 2.6): some are incomprehensible (Figs. 4.11b: 8.1: 8.3b: 8.8). There are also discrepancies between the descriptions in the text and the legends beneath the photographs. For instance, Fig. 2.5 is a face, not the dorsum of the hand: Fig. 2.6 is a rotation flap in the text but a transposition flap in the caption and Fig. 2.7 shows a homograft of a white rabbit ear in a brown rabbit, not a transposition flap. A diagrammatic representation of eyelet wiring would be far more useful than the miserable X-ray reproduced in Fig. 5.2.

There is not a word anywhere in the text about the difficulties of anaesthesia for the routine operations let alone the special problems of surgery for cleft palate, cancrum oris or jaw tumours. Nor is there any mention of the care (and cost) of skin grafting knives. An illustration of an electric/pneumatic dermatome adorns the book jacket of this volume. This may well be a reasonable tool in the Teaching Hospital in Ibadan (though this was not my experience); in a peripheral hospital it would be a luxurious superfluity. I feel rather the same way about this book.

MICHAEL N. TEMPEST

SURGERY OF THE HAND-UNIT IN ADULTS AND CHILDREN. By HOSEIN A. MOTAMED, M.D. First Edition. Pp. 1614, with 528 colour plates and 473 illustrations. Two volumes. (Chicago: H. A. Motamed, Inc., Medical Publishers, 7141 North Kedzie Avenue, 1979). Price \$250.00.

There have been and always will be occasions when scientists, poets, philosophers and doctors wish to publish some of their thoughts and work for private circulation only: indeed, particularly if they are artists, they may well help with the actual printing. But such volumes are usually small in size and number and rarely circulate beyond a fairly close circle of friends.

But here we have something quite different. This massive volume of work, distributed in the USA and 128 other countries, is written by Dr Hosein A. Motamed who is, in his own words, an "Independent Medical Scientist and a practising orthopaedic and hand surgeon". He is also the Founder, President and Editor of the Chicago Publishing Company that bears the same name and which has published his book. The two very heavy volumes, weighing over 6 kilograms, arrived on my desk with a glossy publicity leaflet announcing the publication as "the most comprehensive, scientific, colourful book on 'Hand Surgery' ever published in the history of medicine".

It is only fair to say that these sweeping claims are completely unjustified. The book is repetitive, turgid, tedious to read and tiresome to hold. The text is so full of appalling misprints that one is driven to question the scientific value of much of the writing. On one page alone (p. 182) we read the following strange words: "autografin" (twice); "infectin"; "infection"; "sould"; "supress"; "converge"; "muscle" instead of "must be". On other pages we find pig skin described as a "bilogic" or even a "biologic" dressing. The whole concept of the "hand-unit" is very poorly defined and the constant repetition of this ugly compound word when the simple word hand is so more explicit, has a powerful unsettling effect on the reader's equanimity. Indeed after a few chapters of this text I could well sympathise with the Tailor of Gloucester who in Beatrix Potter's story complains that he is "worn to a ravelling!"

As for the colour photographs, some of them indeed are excellent—but taken collectively they do not compensate for the gross inadequacies and irrelevancies in the text.