

Reviews

ANY QUESTIONS?

Any Questions? A Selection of Questions and Answers published in the *British Medical Journal*. (Second Series.) (Pp. 195. 7s. 6d.) London: British Medical Association. 1952.

The second volume of *Any Questions?* contains an entertaining range of questions and answers. It includes such matters as piercing for ear-rings, the difference in frequency of micturition in the male and female, the survival of fleas, the alleged overheating properties of certain foods, and the radioactive hazards of watching television. The demand for advice on the treatment of common maladies such as petit mal, stomatitis, and urticaria suggests that treatment of these disorders is not always as successful as books and advertisements might suggest. There are now sections on psychological and marital problems. Patients discuss sexual difficulties with their doctors more freely than in the past, and it is perhaps the best way to treat them. When these disturbances persist in spite of simple explanation and reassurance, it does not look as if the expert can do much more for them in the present state of knowledge. Other questions hint at the great range of variation of mankind, both in physical make-up and in behaviour, and the need for caution before dubbing any unusual manifestation as pathological.

The volume of questions shows no sign of diminishing. Indeed, the problems of medical practice remind one of Schweitzer's simile of the tree which bears year after year the same fruit, and yet fruit which is each year new. It is not possible for the individual or the textbook to keep abreast of the whole advancing front of medicine, and for the busy practitioner, at any rate, a reference panel such as *Any Questions?* is a great boon. Moreover, our patients and friends expect us to be familiar with the oddest corners of knowledge, and this little book will certainly leave one in a better state of preparation for the fray. It is in the same format as the first volume, and is a pleasant book for the pocket. It should make a good Christmas present.

L. J. WITTS.

MODERN EPIDEMIOLOGY

The Control of Communicable Diseases. By Hugh Paul, M.D., D.P.H. With foreword by G. S. Wilson, M.D., F.R.C.P., D.P.H. (Pp. 526. £2 15s.) London: Harvey and Blythe. 1952.

In the past quarter century the medical officer of health has been so occupied with administrative matters concerning housing and hospitals that he has perhaps given too little attention to the epidemiology of disease, a knowledge of which is usually an essential precursor to the application of public health measures. Now that he has been relieved of some of these other responsibilities, and has available an efficient Public Health Laboratory Service, he may be expected to devote more time and thought to the study of the aetiological factors in the infectious and other diseases that constitute our modern plagues. Remarkable progress has been made in this field in recent years, but much of the information is scattered in various official reports and medical journals, and it is therefore not easily available to the busy medical officer who has not an up-to-date library at his elbow.

It is fitting that a most praiseworthy effort to bring the epidemiological data together should have come from the gifted pen of Dr. Hugh Paul, Medical Officer of Health of Smethwick. Those who know him and his missionary zeal will expect to find that the relevant information garnered from many sources will be presented in a vivid and often individualistic fashion, and they will not be disappointed. If there are inaccuracies here and there and points of view that immediately arouse the desire for argument, the wide reading

and industry that have gone to the compilation of this volume excite the fullest admiration.

The household fevers—diphtheria, scarlet fever and acute rheumatism, measles, pertussis, and the pneumonias, etc., the food and drink infections (food-poisoning and food hygiene are very fully discussed), the neurotropic infections, the insect foes, and the "epidemic scourges" (over 60 pages are given to smallpox and vaccination, and over 40 pages to tuberculosis)—are all presented individually with accompanying vital statistics and graphs and many illustrative examples. The author pays unstinted tribute to the Public Health Laboratory Service as an important contributor to recent progress, quotes freely from the *Monthly Bulletin* which it inaugurated, and stresses the need in epidemiological work for co-operative effort between the bacteriologist and the public health administrator.

He also interprets epidemiology in its widest sense as meaning the study of disease among the people, and rightly includes epidemiological data about cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and accidents as examples of modern pestilences that have replaced the earlier scourges. As Dr. G. S. Wilson says in his foreword: "Our conception of epidemiology has got to be widened and every new method of study must be tried." The student of epidemiology will find this book a useful and stimulating starting point.

ROBERT CRUICKSHANK.

NEUROSURGERY

Essentials of Neurosurgery. By Leslie C. Oliver, F.R.C.S. (Pp. 198; 50 illustrations. £1 5s.) London: H. K. Lewis and Co. 1952.

This small book (of nearly 200 pages) is well produced and contains a number of good illustrations. By current standards the price is reasonable. The author has condensed much information in it and writes in a pleasant and readable style. He gives a good description of the general methods of operative technique, and emphasizes the importance of careful anaesthesia by including a chapter on the subject. In a book of this size, with its limited aim, the author must of necessity have had difficulty in allotting space to the various sections. For this reason the reviewer would have preferred that less had been given to the operations for the relief of tremor and to the details of cranioplasty. The internal brain herniations at the tentorial hiatus and the foramen magnum might then have been discussed more fully, for their importance deserves more detailed consideration. The diagnosis of brain abscess is condensed into a paragraph of 28 lines, and ought surely to have been larger; this could have been managed by pruning the chapter on trigeminal neuralgia. One surprising omission is of operations for the relief of mental disorders; leucotomy, orbital undercutting, and corticectomy merit inclusion certainly as much as operations for tremor. The author states that the neurosurgeon regards a fracture of the skull as "open" if the dura mater has been penetrated. This is not the usual definition, and it would be a pity if in neurosurgery an open fracture did not mean precisely what it does in fractures of other bones—namely, compound. The potential risks of infection are precisely the same. If there is dural penetration it should be an additional clear statement of fact.

These criticisms are offered in the hope that the next edition—which will surely be necessary, for the book should sell freely—will be even better balanced. It will prove of greater value to the neurosurgeon in training if references are given to the more important articles and monographs.

D. W. C. NORTHFIELD.

FOCAL SEPSIS AND MENTAL DISEASE

New Outlook on Mental Diseases. By F. A. Pickworth, M.B., B.S., B.Sc. (Pp. 296; illustrated. £3.) Bristol: John Wright and Sons. 1952.

This lavishly produced and illustrated book represents the results of a lifetime of research into the pathology of mental illness. The author has been particularly interested in the