BOOK REVIEWS

Gassing Casualties : A System of Labels for Gassing Casualties Sent to Hospital. 1952. Association of British Chemical Manufacturers, 166, Piccadilly, London, W.1. Pp. 54. Price 3s.

Over a quarter of a century ago the Factory Department of the Home Office (now of the Ministry of Labour and National Service) issued a card outlining the diagnostic points of infections of workers due to the anthrax bacillus. These cards were designed as a means of attempting to ensure accuracy of diagnosis amongst workers in those industries where wool and hides could possibly cause infections either of the skin, of the gastro-intestinal tract, or of the lung. The essential object was that the management of the works should be aware of the dangers of anthrax and should be able to send a man to his own doctor or to hospital with a small card which was in effect a diagnostic *aide mémoire* to those who would be responsible for his treatment. Since that time similar devices have been designed for caisson workers and in the wider field of medicine for those who suffer from diabetes.

This brief account of the historical background focuses properly the efforts of the Works Safety Committee of the Association of British Chemical Manufacturers, which in 1950 appointed a panel composed mainly of industrial medical officers, to investigate the means by which a correct history and diagnosis of cases of gassing accidents occurring in chemical works could be sent with the patient from the works to the hospital. The result, a booklet, "Gassing Casualties," deals with 50 gases and contains 19 labels, which are essentially guidance notes for medical officers. The labels deal with various groups of gases with a similar pathological effect, or with single gases which are unique in their effect, and which require a specific antidote of a particular strength or of an unusual nature, e.g. hydrogen cyanide. Those gases with an acute effect, such as fluorine and hydrofluoric acid, or those with a dangerous latent period between exposure and the development of clinical manifestations, are grouped according to their special pathological action.

During its initial deliberations the Works Safety Committee had some little anxiety lest doctors should resent what amounts to a clinical history being presented not, as is usual, by a professional colleague, but perhaps by a lay member of the works. Though the label would when possible be signed by the industrial medical officer or the industrial nurse, in a great many instances it might perforce be filled in by, for example, the foreman or the works manager, who might be the one man who could give a correct account of the gassing accident. Fears of this nature were dispelled following discussion

with hospitals and medical organizations and by the acceptance of the scheme by the Association of Industrial Medical Officers.

It is well known that the term "gassed" applies to a multitude of various noxious substances, and that the term itself is insufficient for the initiation of correct treatment. The gassing casualty labels are so designed that they give, in addition to the employer's name, and the name and address of the patient, the name and description of the harmful substance to which the worker was exposed, together with details of the degree of exposure. Brief one-line notes are given on the nature of the gas and its pathological effects, and the remainder of the label is divided into a number of sections. These deal with (1) first-aid treatment already given at the works: this section informs the hospital about the action already taken and also acts as a reminder to the first-aiders in the works. (2) Immediate treatment recommended: this section sets out the treatment which may be applied in the works surgery if sufficiently skilled staff is available, or should be given immediately on arrival at the hospital. (3) Subsequent treatment recommended: this section sets out the treatment which may be required when the immediate distress has subsided, and may not need to be applied until some time after the casualty has been admitted to hospital or has reached home.

This attempt to ensure correct diagnosis and the appropriate emergency treatment without delay should be regarded as one of outstanding merit, and the Association of British Chemical Manufacturers and, indeed, the chemical industry, is to be congratulated on introducing a system which should be valuable to all doctors, either in general practice or hospital. It must be stressed that the labels are not intended as instructions to medical staff who are familiar with the action to be taken, but rather to give guidance to a casualty officer faced with the need for immediate action in an unfamiliar type of emergency and one which he could follow with safety pending the arrival of more experienced medical help.

A. J. AMOR

The Human Use of Human Beings. By Norbert Wiener. (Pp. 229 and index.) London: Eyre and Spottiswoode. 1950.

Dr. Wiener's earlier books on "Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine" daunted the non-mathematical by the profusion and the complexity of the mathematical formulae which it contained, and irritated the mathematicians by its errors and omissions. In spite of this, the book has had a tremendous effect and has resulted in many