

Book reviews

The Diseases of Occupations, 6th edition. Edited by Donald Hunter. (Pp. 1257; £25.00). Hodder and Stoughton: Sevenoaks.

The publication of the 1st edition of Donald Hunter's book is a vivid memory for many of us. Our reaction was similar to that of Keats on first looking into Chapman's Homer and we saw an ocean that we knew was there but whose full glory we had been unable to imagine. It was an exciting, inspiring and personal book that blended emotion with fact and art with science. In the midst of reams of arid scientific text it stood on its own. It is difficult to comment on something which is so distinctive and which has such a special place but there are two questions that a reviewer has to ask. First, if a doctor reads this journal and has not got a copy of the book, should he buy one; second, if he has already got a copy, should he buy the new edition? My own answers would be, to the first certainly yes and to the second probably no. Everyone should benefit from the wisdom and inspiration in this book, but fast-moving administrative and scientific developments make the attempt to keep parts of it up to date almost certain to be unsuccessful.

In this edition there is some discussion of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, 1974 and in various places there is mention of the Government organisations associated with that Act. Indeed, names of office holders are given and some have been retired for several years. Similarly, there is discussion about safety representatives and regret is expressed that their introduction has been held back, whereas events have caught up with that observation and regulations are now in force.

A rather sweeping statement of the problems associated with vinyl chloride makes one turn to the index and discover that three of the pages mentioned among the five references contain no reference to vinyl chloride at all. There may be a case for not attempting to be too up to date at a time when things move fast and printing not quite so quickly. Perhaps also there is

a case for not entering into some of the more controversial administrative matters, but that self-denial may take away the pleasantly personal feeling of the volume.

One considerable feat has been to restrict the increase in the number of pages to 32 but it may be partly that which leads to some of the difficulties in the updating; perhaps the time has come to consider whether this is really two books. One of these is a classic which will be read for many generations; the other is more ephemeral and requires a slightly different treatment.

K. P. DUNCAN

Occupational Health as Human Ecology. By Stewart Wolf, J. G. Bruhn and H. Goodell. (Pp. 115; \$11.50). Charles C. Thomas: Illinois. 1978.

Ecology, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is that branch of biology dealing with a living organism's habits, and mode of life in relation to its surroundings. It is unfortunate that the authors of this book do not define their terms, but certainly occupational health is a special application of human ecology. One is left somewhat uncertain of the audience for whom this slim volume is intended.

The first three chapters are devoted to a historical account of a statement of the present practice of occupational medicine in the United States of America. There are some glaring errors, including the mis-statement that the British Factory Act first became law in 1883, although it is claimed that a similar Act was passed in Massachusetts in 1836. The first occupational health nurse was appointed in 1878 in England, not in 1895 in Vermont. Chapters IV and V give a brief account of management practice as it affects the health of workers and managers. Unfortunately, such statements of the obvious as 'the purpose of occupational health ... should be to cultivate the attitudes and practice of management ...

so that work will be at once healthful and satisfying ...' add little to our knowledge.

The final chapter on retirement stresses the value of periodic medical examinations throughout working life but apart from a few anecdotes about individual patients, no evidence is presented for or against the value of health screening. There is a list of references at the end of each chapter, but these are almost entirely confined to the American literature.

The book might make interesting reading for a young American manager and it certainly stresses the preventive approach in occupational medicine but I doubt if students of occupational health in Britain would find much of interest. At just over £6 it is expensive.

W. M. DIXON

Asbestos and Disease. By I. J. Selikoff and D. H. K. Lee. (Pp. 549; \$31.50; £20.45.) Academic Press: London. 1978.

This book was written as 'an account that would place the entire problem in perspective and help the various specialists to communicate and cooperate more easily than they may have been able to do in the past'. It is a comprehensive and detailed summary of the literature (there are nearly 850 references) and it has been written over a number of years with the help of 18 collaborators. It is full of excerpts, including detailed tables from published work which is not always quoted in context or fully discussed. Every effort has been made to bring it up to date by adding comments in the text and in the addenda, relating to work published or described in the year of publication. It is not an easy book to read and certainly not a good book for the beginner. It is, however, an excellent source of references and information and as such should be bought by all doctors and other scientists concerned with the prevention, diagnosis and management of asbestos-induced disease.

The chief danger of this book is that it