BOOK REVIEWS

The Social Consequences of Pneumoconiosis Among Coal Miners in South Wales. By P. Hugh-Jones and C. M. Fletcher. 1951. Medical Research Council Memorandum. No. 25. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office. 4 figs., 10 tables, 16 refs. Pp. vi + 54. Price. 1s. 9d.

Until 1933 the yearly number of certificates issued to miners in Britain on account of respiratory dust disease was less than 100. Partly owing to alterations in legislation dealing with workmen's compensation, partly because of a real increase in the incidence, the number of certifications has risen greatly since then, reaching a peak of 5,754 in 1945. Of that number 5,180 were issued to men in the South Wales coalfield. From the beginning of 1931 until the middle of 1948 over 22,000 new cases of pneumoconiosis of miners were certified in the whole country, and of these 19,000 were in South Wales. As the number of coal miners in South Wales is only about a sixth of all British coal miners, the incidence there is about 40 times greater than in the rest of the country. This excessive incidence, still largely unexplained, has led to the development of important sociological problems. These, as well as the purely medical aspects of the disease have been studied by the Pneumoconiosis Research Unit of which the authors are members, Dr. Fletcher being its Director.

It is estimated that the number of certified men alive today in the South Wales area is 16,000 and of these, 5,000 are known to be unemployed. The effects are felt by the individual and by the community. The affected man suffers an impairment in his general health, with consequent curtailment of his ability to work and his freedom to enjoy leisure. The loss of employment means considerable loss of income, and there are often serious psychological effects. The coal mining industry suffers a loss of skilled workers, added to which are the costs of paying compensation, unemployment benefit, and the maintenance of government departments for these and other functions.

The Memorandum contains a chapter giving statistical information, and another containing 12 case histories of patients chosen to represent different facets of the social problem. In addition, there are three useful appendices. The first gives a description of pneumoconiosis, principally for those who do not know much about the disease; the second, entitled "Administrative Aspects of Coalworkers' Pneumoconiosis", deals with the different compensation schemes and their working. Appendix III gives some results of two hitherto unpublished sampling enquiries, one by H.M. Social Survey in 1945, and the other a report by Doig and Hillier to the National Joint Pneumoconiosis Committee in 1947. It includes information about various matters such as

age distribution, degrees of disability, reasons for leaving jobs, and travelling difficulties.

The authors emphasize that the greatest need of these disabled men is suitable work. They quote evidence showing that some 75% of the unemployed pneumoconiosis cases are fit for medium or light work under ordinary conditions of employment, and this figure is even higher if men fit for sedentary work are included. Unfortunately the obstacles in the way of these men finding suitable employment are serious. Until recent years, little alternative work was available, and much of that was unsuitable. Even now that a variety of industries have been introduced into the district, the difficulties are still formidable in view of physical disability, age, the geographical configuration of the district, and other factors such as the reluctance of employers to engage men with a potentially serious disease. Even their sex was a disadvantage to them in the competition for light work against cheaper female labour. Administrative efforts to improve conditions and reduce unemployment are mentioned, with reasons for their partial failure.

The authors expect that eventually there will be a lessening of the incidence of the disease owing to improved methods of dust suppression, and also a decrease in the numbers leaving the industry as men with pneumoconiosis are now permitted, subject to conditions, to continue to work in the mines. For some years, however, the number of unemployed pneumoconiotic miners is likely to remain constant and the social and economic problem will continue to be one of the same magnitude.

Apart from advocating the provision of suitable work, the authors make only one recommendation: that there be instituted an adequate follow-up system for certified men. The report being almost entirely concerned with presenting the facts, one experiences disappointment at not being given some constructive proposals for a solution of the grave problem which is outlined. Rightly or wrongly, the authors do not consider this their responsibility. Nevertheless they are to be congratulated on placing on record their observations of the great social evil that exists in this comparatively circumscribed community.

A. T. DOIG

Chronic Carbon Monoxide Poisoning. By Aage Grut. 1949. Copenhagen: Ejner Munksgaard. Pp. 229. Price. Dan. Cr. 12.

This book contains a mass of data on the subject of chronic carbon monoxide poisoning, and presents the conclusions of a great deal of careful, painstaking work. It begins with a discussion of the definition of chronic carbon monoxide poisoning, and indeed with a summary