Book reviews

Scabies. By KENNETH MELLANBY. 1972. Pp. 81, 10 figs. Classey, Hampton, Middlesex. (£1.25)

Mellanby's 'Scabies', first published in 1943, is a book many of us have referred to, but few have been able to possess. Now we have a reprint of this classic little book which, with only a new preface, reads as though it were published yesterday rather than 30 years ago. Although treatment regimes may have changed, the reader will still find the chapter on treatment well worth reading for the general advice it contains. Most questions one is likely to ask about scabies are answered, and now that the disease is common again the book will surely be as well received as it was in 1943.

P. Rodin

V.D. Explained. By ROY STATHAM. 1972. Pp. 159, figs 11. Priory Press, London (80 p)

What does one look for in a book intended to inform young people about V.D.? The information about the diseases should be accurate and presented with clarity, using simple language. The readers should know what to expect if they ever have to attend a clinic and be reassured that they will be well treated. The book should be inexpensive.

How does this paperback measure up to these requirements? I regret to say, only fairly well.

There are many inaccuracies. A varicocele (page 23) may, if untreated, lead to infertility. Trichomoniasis would appear to be the cause of the vaginitis (page 69) rather than gonorrhoea. The oral lesions of Reiter's disease do not usually produce symptoms (page 80). 'Thrush urethritis' (page 103) is not cured by oral treatment. The gravest misstatement in the book appears on page 62—'Divorce proceedings on the grounds of marital infidelity are not uncommon sequels to gonococcal infection'.

Too often, long or awkward words are used. I would instance only 'misconstrue' on page 29 and 'dispassionate' on page 37, while the allusion to ecclesiastical history on page 139 might well make the young reader stand agape.

The information given in Chapter 4 would be more easily appreciated if the commentary for each graph were on the same page.

Details of contact tracing should be mentioned earlier than page 68 and the fact that female patients

may be interviewed is worthy of inclusion. It may not be good practice for the doctor to interview, in depth, the patient about contacts (page 36). This only makes the contact tracer's subsequent interview with the patient more difficult. The giving of contact cards is not generally considered to be 'one of the most valuable measures' in contact tracing (page 63), nor would one commend the practice of sending letters to contacts whose names and addresses are known (page 64). Arranging a visit should not be 'often time-consuming' (page 64); it is a most important part of a contact tracer's job. It should also be explained to male contacts of patients with trichomoniasis that this disease does not necessarily infer infidelity (page 100).

Many would not be reassured to read that treatment may fail after weeks (page 38), and undue emphasis on the rare complications of gonorrhoea in males (pp. 64-67) may cause anxiety. Mention of cancer as a cause of genital thrush in a book for the young is inappropriate. More definite explanations of the instruments (pp. 79 and 85) and of 'further tests' (page 63) and 'tests' (page 85) might allay fears that the procedures are painful.

It is doubtful whether Dr. Statham has been much helped by his collaborators. Mrs. Barratt's contribution appears to be written for parents and teachers rather than the young people for whom the book is intended. Dr. Mitchell's chapter is disappointing. The introduction lacks relevance and most of the attitudes expressed appear to be a generation out of date. One section (pp. 139-143) might be cited by girls as a typical example of male chauvinism!

One book is listed under further reading; its second edition (1972) is even better value than the first and it costs only 35p compared with the 80p for 'V.D. Explained'.

C. B. S. Schofield

Year Book of Dermatology. Edited by F. D. MALKINSON and R. W. PEARSON. 1973. Pp. 368, 60 figs, 25 pp. of index. Year Book Medical Publishers, Chicago; Lloyd-Luke Medical Books, London. (£7.75)

The latest Year Book of Dermatology, again edited by two Associate Professors of Dermatology in Chicago, follows the pattern of its now well-known predecessors. It commences with an excellent comprehensive review,

this time on immunofluorescence in dermatology, with 96 references by W. Mitchell Sams, and continues under various headings to provide abstracts of papers which are considerably more detailed than the author's published summaries. Although broadly grouped, these may have little connection with those preceding or following, which makes for somewhat jerky reading. To each abstract, in small print, is added a few lines of editorial comment, usually of praise or of constructive criticism; this year these are more conspicuous, being printed on a grey background against the white pages of the normal text.

In previous years, the relative lack of venereology has been commented upon. On this occasion, there is only slight improvement; the 11½ pages devoted to the subject contain ten well done selected abstracts, all on syphilis or false positive serology, and eighteen listed papers recommended for additional reading. Of the 28 concerned, 10 were published in this journal. Gonorrhoea or its manifestations have no mention.

However, scattered through the book are papers relevant to the subject which are interesting and important. Under 'Drug Reactions' are the findings of the Boston Medical Centre indicating that the risk of ampicillin rash is particularly high in patients taking allopurinol and this drug or its underlying hyperuricaemia potentiates its allergenicity. Under 'Viruses and Viral Diseases' is a report of 15 per cent. of isolations of herpes virus Type II from the urethra, prostatic fluid or by superficial foreskin or deeper prostatic, testicular or vas deferens biopsies of 190 males with no history of genital herpes infection. Elsewhere, is described the successful use of the toxic anti-tumour antibiotic bleomycin in giant condylomata acuminatum. Also—reinforcing observations earlier made in North Africa—that an epidemic of acute glomerular nephritis in Trinidad was associated with an epidemic of scabies.

This attractively produced, concise, easy to read and well-illustrated book is a 'must' for dermatologists but, to provide the cover necessary for dermato-venereologists, its use should be supplemented by a subscription to the British Journal of Venereal Diseases. Venereologists already taking the journal can however, glean much valuable collateral information concerned with the companion specialties of dermatology, allergy, and immunology in the wider context of Medicine.

R. R. Willcox

Sexual Freedom and Venereal Disease. By R. S. MORTON. 1971. Pp. 141, 3 figs. Peter Owen London. (£2.75)

It may be considered unfair to an author to review, in the autumn of 1973, a book concerned with the sociological and behavioural background to the sexually-transmitted diseases which was published in 1971.

With regard to the title, the term sexually-transmitted diseases might have been preferred to venereal diseases, as the acquisition of one or other disease occurs purely by chance, while the behaviour, especially when promiscuous, is intentional.

The book opens with a very good historical review of the social background to the sexually-transmitted diseases, followed by a concise chapter about the commoner diseases. In the section on syphilis it can be calculated that, by division every 30 hours, an infecting dose of 1,000 treponemes would become about 131 millions in 3 weeks, rather than the 10 billion quoted on p.29. The chapter entitled 'Today's Social Dynamics' is a critique of the permissive society and most of the aspects are covered in a highly satisfactory manner. Certain points of view expressed are, at the least, debatable. Thus it is dangerous to assume, as the author does on p.74, that medico-social problems would improve if there was a period of economic stasis.

In the chapter entitled 'The Social Consequences of the Contraceptive Pill', Dr. Morton expresses somewhat Calvinistic views on the use of the contraceptive pill by the unmarried. Historically, the incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases was rising before the 'pill' became readily available, and this was certainly so in regard to the rise in the number of women with gonorrhoea in Sweden. As yet not enough women, or their male partners, are using the readily available contraceptive facilities. Until they do so illegitimacy will remain a problem causing more misery than do the sexually-transmitted diseases themselves. Undoubtedly, reliable contraceptive techniques, under the control of women themselves, has given them the same freedom in sex that men have always had. Why should we cavil against this? One cannot agree with the author's statement on p.91 that 'the accumulation of cases of long-term individual misery and venereal disease, as a direct result of its (the pill) use, is more calamitous than anything precipitated by thalidomide'.

Treatment, contact tracing, and education are considered in the chapter entitled 'Control', but no mention is made of the need for improved medical education. On p.97, the omission of the word 'reported' gives a wrong impression of the situation in the United States of America. While 1 in 4 of *reported* cases of gonorrhoea are dealt with privately, overall 70 per cent. of cases are so treated. Similarly, on p.107, the Public Health Advisors only interviewed *reported* cases of syphilis, again only a minority of such cases, and by 1973 it has become apparent that cluster testing had not proved the success it was hoped for.

Dr. Morton seems to favour the use of legal sanctions to 'contain' unco-operative, infectious patients until they are rendered non-infectious (p.106), but surely it stretches the imagination too far to try to link these very few people who refuse examination and possible treatment with the epidemic level of gonorrhoea. Should unco-operative patients prove a problem in any area, then the venereologist would be well advised to review his contact tracing procedures and personnel.

The final chapter, 'Where do we go from here?', is a broad survey of the various forces acting for and against disease control throughout the world. The author sets out the problems to be overcome, the gaps in our knowledge, the attitudes of administrators, universities, and politicians and the apathy of some members of the