VII

REVIEW OF BOOK


Messrs. Lewis & Co.

Those who have attempted to read a text-book on dermatology from cover to cover have usually passed through a trying and profitless experience. Indeed, it is probably not too much to say that many have developed a permanent dislike for the subject as the result of this unwise proceeding. Obviously the fault lies often in lack of wisdom on the part of the reader, who would be better advised to use a work of dermatology, especially a large work, as most of them are, for reference only.

However, it is a pleasure to be able to state that here, at any rate, is a book that can be read through with profit and without the least difficulty. Dr. Roxburgh has definitely succeeded in making his subject both interesting and amusing. One of the faults of text-books on medicine in general and dermatology in particular is that symptoms are often described with meticulous accuracy, but without the least attempt at an explanation of their presence. Dr. Roxburgh appears to have appreciated the desire of the ordinary (and presumably grateful) reader for some kind of peg, small and fragile of necessity sometimes, but at others satisfactorily large and solid, on which to hang the obscure sign or symptom. No doubt he has himself found it necessary to cogitate on the various obscurities of dermatology; at any rate, he appears to have done so and to have given the reader the benefit of his thoughts.

The arrangement of the book is simple and satisfactory. To begin with, as the author points out, it does not pretend to be a complete text-book, and deals only with relatively common and important diseases. But there is a very useful index before the opening chapter, in which the main symptoms and lesions are enumerated in alphabetical order, together with a comprehensive list of diseases to which they may belong. Most, if not all, of the recognised dermatoses are brought under review in this way, and for those which are not described in the book reference to larger works is advised.

The first three chapters are devoted to general principles in relation to etiology, pathology, signs, symptoms and treatment. Obviously a great deal of careful thought has been given to the writing of these chapters, which seem to present the reader with an insight into the author’s own method of going about his work, and which will repay a corresponding degree of attention on the part of the reader.

Views on etiology that are open to criticism, or methods of treatment that are not always reliable, are discussed without bias, but never without proper emphasis on their shortcomings. Nebulus generalisa-
REVIEW OF BOOK

tions are happily conspicuous by their absence. In fact, both these and the remaining chapters are distinguished by an admirable candour in which the author is not afraid to admit that he (like his colleagues) is not an inexhaustible fountain of knowledge.

The greater part of the book is devoted to the descriptions of about 120 diseases, which have been selected as most suitable for the purpose at which the book aims. No one will quarrel with the selection, though some may regret that the list was not just a little more comprehensive; no doubt the publishers are to blame for this small deficiency.

About three-quarters of the diseases are divided into etiological groups, while the rest have been grouped, for the sake of clearness or on account of the absence of a known cause, according to their morphological characteristics. Great stress is laid throughout on the importance of careful observation, and the differential diagnosis is always fully discussed.

In these descriptions and discussions the reader is again given an insight into the author's own philosophy, especially in the amusing short digressions with which almost every chapter is embellished.

It only remains to be said that 110 good photographic illustrations and eight coloured plates add enormously to the value of this excellent book.

G. B. D.