Book reviews

PATHOLOGY OF THE AGED By Florence McKeown. (Pp. 361; 196 illustrations. 77s. 6d.) London: Butterworths. 1965.

Patients who die in hospitals are younger than those who die at home. The inescapable element of hospital selection, coupled with the tendency to conduct necropsies on the younger patient with an acute illness, builds up an incomplete picture of the pathology of old age in the minds of most pathologists. The growth of scientific geriatrics and the rapidly aging population make the publication of 'Pathology of the aged' particularly timely and welcome to many pathologists, who only realize how little they know of this subject after they have completed their apprenticeships.

There are formidable difficulties in the description of disease in the aged. We still do not know how much of the process of aging is a physiological involuntal process or how much has a pathological basis, and many of the facts we should like to see stated in this book are not known. The causes of heart failure, confusion or dementia in the aged, and the pattern of malignancy have only been worked out in groups of patients that may not be representative of the population at this time. Even more important is the definition (in years) of old age. How many of us appreciate that of the deaths (Registrar General, 1964) in persons over 70 in England and Wales 48% were over 80 and 7% over 90? Unfortunately, 79% of the subjects of Dr. McKeown's 1,500 necropsies were under 80 with only 1% (16 patients) over 90, and the material that forms the background of her book is not, as one might expect, older than the deaths in the general population. To make progress in the descriptive morphology of the organs of old people, large numbers of necropsies in 80-89 and 90+ age groups need detailed analysis; the misconception, perpetrated by teaching hospitals' selective admissions and less actively perpetuated in most other hospitals, that old age begins at 65, is now outdated. More impact would have been made if Dr. McKeown had studied truly aged patients, and if it were stated if the necropsies were the work of more than one pathologist, whether the brain or bones were examined, and which organs were subjected to microscopy.

A systemic description of the pathology of the organs in the main systems is given within a compact format. This is most successful when it has been possible to show clear features in the aged. Cardiac amyloid in old age is described in detail, but valvular sclerosis and mitral ring calcification are not emphasized. The differing patterns of malignancy in old patients, with a high incidence of carcinoma of the large intestine and stomach and a fall in carcinoma of lung, is described, and the incidence of prostatic carcinoma is stated but not stressed. Adequate references to the work of others are given, mainly without comment, and the author's personal views tend to be guarded, not critical. Photographs are of variable quality, but the tabulated and graphic material is valuable.

The general impression that this book gives of the

pathology of old age is not a very definite one. Scientific caution is proper in view of our lack of detailed knowledge, but facts are emerging and trends are becoming more certain. This book makes a real contribution to a difficult subject, and has been of the greatest interest to the reviewer, who believes that concentration on the diseases of patients over 80, with more stress on the characteristics or differences found at this age, should ensure that the next edition of 'Pathology of the aged' will become a classical reference book to which almost all pathologists will turn.

R. A. B. DRURY

DIAGNOSTIC METHODS IN CLINICAL VIROLOGY By N. R. Grist, C. A. C. Ross, E. J. Bell, and E. J. Stott. (Pp. viii + 129; illustrated. 25s.) Oxford: Blackwoods Scientific Publications. 1966.

This new book on diagnostic methods in clinical virology by Professor Grist and his colleagues is intended for laboratory workers who wish to make use of the numerous virological techniques that have been developed in recent years. For them this small yet compact volume will fill a need that has long existed and will be a welcome addition to the bookshelf in many a laboratory. Clinicians will also find much that is useful here both in making requests for virological tests and in understanding the significance of the results. The authors write with the considerable experience of running a large regional virus laboratory and the book is based on the practical procedures which they have found to be satisfactory and reliable.

The main part of the book is devoted to methods of animal and egg inoculation and to tissue culture techniques. These are extremely well set out and easy to follow. Additional chapters on serological techniques will bring the reader up to date with the techniques and scope of serology. Finally, the application of these methods is discussed in chapters on diseases of the skin, neurological disease, and miscellaneous conditions for which virological tests may be requested.

This book is strongly recommended to clinical pathologists and to anyone interested in the diagnosis of virus infections.

J. A. DUDGEON

THE RED CELL: PRODUCTION, METABOLISM, DESTRUCTION, NORMAL AND ABNORMAL By John W. Harris. (Pp. xix + 482; illustrated. 46s.) London: Harvard University Press. Oxford University Press. 1963.

In his introduction, T. H. Ham says: 'Any student and any faculty member is challenged to learn from the monograph by Harris.' Never was a statement of fact more true. This is an exciting review of the subject succinctly set out in the title, and it is as wide as it is deep. This is an essential book for every haematologist and, although very advanced in much it presents, in time it may well become the student's book it is designed to be.

WILLIAM H. DAVIDSON